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Revisiting Bathsheba and David:
A Recuperative Reading with Julia Kristeva

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband

Jerry Bergsma

my love and my soul-friend,

my best critic and my greatest supporter,

who taught me to ask ‘why’

and then said, ‘why not?’

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My family, with deepest appreciation for unwavering support.

Abbreviations for Frequently Cited Texts

- AML** Fletcher, John and Benjamin, Andrew, eds. (1990) *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, London and New York: Routledge
- EPD** Oliver, Kelly, ed. (1993) *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, New York, London: Routledge
- FS** Clément, Catharine and Kristeva, Julia (1998) trans. Jane Marie Todd (2001) *The Feminine and the Sacred*, New York: Columbia University Press
- ITB** Kristeva, Julia (1985) trans. Arthur Goldhammer (1987) *In the Beginning was Love, Psychoanalysis and Faith*, New York: Columbia University Press
- LM** Lechte, John and Margaroni, Maria (2004) *Julia Kristeva: Live Theory*, London, New York: Continuum
- LU** Kristeva, Julia (1989) trans. Anne Menke (1991) *Language: The Unknown, An Initiation into Linguistics*, New York: Columbia University Press
- MS** Kristeva, Julia (1993) trans. Ross Guberman (1995) *New Maladies of the Soul*, New York, Columbia University Press
- PH** Kristeva, Julia (1980) trans. Leon Roudiez (1982) *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press
- PK** Oliver, Kelly, ed. (2002) *The Portable Kristeva, Updated Edition*, New York: Columbia University Press
- RK** Oliver, Kelly (1993) *Reading Kristeva, Unravelling the Double-bind*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press
- RPL** Kristeva, Julia (1974) trans. Margaret Waller (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York: Columbia University Press
- SNR** Kristeva, Julia (1996) trans. Jeanine Herman (2000) *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Columbia University Press
- SO** Kristeva, Julia (1991) trans. Roudiez, Leon S. (1991) *Strangers to Ourselves*, New York: Columbia University Press
- TL** Kristeva, Julia (1983), trans. Leon S. Roudiez (1987) *Tales of Love*, New York: Columbia University Press
- BR** Olthuis, James H. (2001) *The Beautiful Risk*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan

- HF** Fernhout, Harry (1986) *Promises Broken; Promises Kept*, Toronto: Joy in Learning Curriculum Development and Training Centre
- HU** Olthuis, James H. (1987) *A Hermeneutics of Ultimacy: Peril Or Promise?* Lanham/New York/London: University Press of America
- KO** Olthuis, James H. ed. (1997) *Knowing Other-wise, Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*. New York: Fordham University Press
- NIV** Barker, Kenneth, General Editor (1985) *The NIV Study Bible, New International Version*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House
- TEC** Olthuis, James H. ed. (2000) *Towards an Ethics of Community, Negotiations of Difference in a Pluralistic Society*, Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press
The Modern Library

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Prologue

This prologue seeks to provide the author's context, premises and aims for this philosophical theological thesis which aims to provide an application of the semiotic theory of Julia Kristeva to a revisiting, that is rereading, reexamining, analyzing and reflecting on the biblical story of King David and Bathsheba, and how we may understand our own life-stories, our subjectivity, and our relation to the sacred and to the world. Although the work of Julia Kristeva is well known and the story of David is familiar to readers of the Bible, it is my assertion that a re-reading of this biblical narrative and some of its commentary in view of selected Kristevan philosophical concepts can lead to a multi-layered understanding of this narrative and give us deeper insights into our own stories.

As we seek insights into the biblical narratives and their possible meanings and influences for today, we read, examine and interpret with an awareness of the distinction between critical history and the sacred history of biblical stories. James H. Olthuis explains, "Biblical narratives are neither myth nor general, cultural history, but historical stories both written from and for a specialized certitudinal purpose of engendering and exhorting faith" (HU 43). For Olthuis, certitudinal is a "designation for the kind of text the Scriptures are, a book exhorting its readers about the ultimate certitudes of life" (HU 79). It is this quality of exhorting, of encouraging its readers in faith, which differentiates the Bible from other texts. Olthuis elucidates that, "Only when we do justice to the specialized purpose of the canonic texts are we able to honor them in their received form even as we engage in critical interpretation" (HU 43). Thus in order to examine and interpret our chosen biblical narrative, we need a method which honors the distinctive uniqueness of the sacred text. We need to employ a faith-qualified

hermeneutic with its focus on matters of ultimate concern, in this case how the divine-human relationship works itself out in the story of David and Bathsheba. Thus our focus will not be on the politico-historical, but on the story as a faith odyssey with its message for us today.

It is with this focus on our stories as faith journeys that Kristeva's philosophy can assist us. Her readings of several biblical women and their stories show the power of the language we use, what our lexicon conceals and what it reveals. Language does not just have logical denotative sense, but a 'deep' connotative sense. Kristeva recovers the semiotic in language and calls for revolutions in how we think, speak and live our lives and shows with the philosophers of old that philosophy, as a spiritual exercise, is a way of life. Kristeva notes that these revolutions, these new codes of being are sought after in "marginal communities that dissent from official morality" (TL 7). Those on the margins of our culture, and among them Kristeva includes women and children, are the ones who most experience the need for these revolutions. Kristeva posits a rationale behind her call for revolutions, a purposeful intent in the call, "Until we notice that beneath the multifariousness of history, of stories, tenacious and permanent aspirations lie hidden" (TL 7). Our many and varied stories are filled with hopes and dreams, hopes that flickered but did not die, dreams that were repressed but remained steadfast in their deep and hidden meanings. It is the sacred call of the search for meaning in our stories that beckons us. Kristeva asks: "What if what we call the 'sacred' were the celebration of mystery, the mystery of the emergence of meaning?" (FS 13). What if not only the search for meaning is sacred to those who heed the call, but the very mystery of the emergence of meaning and the celebration of this mystery is sacred? To seek the emergence of meaning in our stories, to recognize the truths of their meaning as a sacred responsibility is not an easy task, for by listening to and telling our stories we become vulnerable as we open ourselves to others,

lowering our protective barriers. Yet we must tell and hear our stories to learn about these hidden tenacious and permanent aspirations to which Kristeva refers, to reveal the sacred mystery of the emergence of meaning in our stories.

Kristeva writes that, “Theologies and literatures, (beyond sin and fiendish characters), invite us to carve out our own territory within love, establish ourselves as *particular*, outdo ourselves in a sublime Other – metaphor or metonymy of the sovereign *Good*” (TL 7 *original emphasis*). Although Kristeva refers to a sublime Other as the sovereign *Good*, I understand the sublime Other as the God of Love as known through Christianity. Learning with Kristeva I see in my life story the development of my faith, the gradual emergence of my hopes and dreams as I carve out my own territory through the process of establishing my particular identity with my own proper place from which to act and speak, with and in love. Yet, in this process of carving out my identity with my proper place, I wondered with Kristeva, “What does ‘proper’ mean?” (PK 173). I think of the many ways a woman has been put in her proper place within religious and patriarchal or traditional contexts. But that has a negative connotation as this is usually done when a woman is considered to have stepped outside the confining boundaries of her restricted designated place by those who have the power to design and limit that place. But Kristeva writes that a proper place for a woman is “That which best fits the specific history of each woman, which expresses her better” (PK 173). Here, in her proper place, ‘woman’ can be sovereign, yet not individual (TL 5). She can be sovereign in community, in an interdependence that embraces each one of us as unique in our similarities and our differences.

To participate in the process of establishing our particular identity we face the Socratic challenge to ‘know yourself’. Kristeva reflects on some of the experiences of her childhood in Bulgaria, and her search for love and the sacred in the process of her be[com]ing a subject. Her

immigrant experiences as a student in Paris influenced her sense of identity as she negotiated her particularity in the precariousness and joy of achieving a sense of belonging and assimilation (Guberman 4). Through her philosophy Kristeva often expresses her experience of the alienation of being a stranger, of being 'other' to the 'other' which is noticed in unspoken mannerisms of different cultures and the difficulties of expressing oneself, and thereby finding oneself, in a new language. This brings the realization that one's identity changes as one begins to find one's place in a new language and a new community. The transition of one language to another, from one culture to another becomes easier as one begins to share a cultural memory with which one can identify.

As Kristeva's immigration experience at age twenty-five influenced her identity, so my immigration experience to Canada from The Netherlands influenced me. From belonging to a close-knit extended family in a village where everybody knew everybody, I became 'other' to 'the other' in a city where I knew nobody, and where nobody knew me. I am now known as Dianne, but that change to a more 'Canadian' name, which was a common practice at that time, reflects the national and cultural changes I experienced as a fifteen year old. The new name represented that through immigration I had become a foreigner in the world, a strange name for a stranger in a strange country with a strange language, and I became estranged from what was left behind. I missed the connection with my grandmother that was always present in the use of my Dutch name, Dirkje, or Dicky as I was called, and I did not feel a connection with my Canadian name until I was honored to share it with two of our granddaughters, Lisa Dianne and Teresa Dianne. Through them I was reconnected and reconciled to my name, from the past to the future, from being connected to my grandmother to being connected as a grandmother. Thus, even as Kristeva's immigration shaped her identity, my immigrant experiences also shaped my

identity as I learned a new language, and gradually made the adjustments from stranger to a sense of belonging in a new 'fatherland' with a new 'mother-tongue'.

We take note in our engagement with Kristeva's work that although she writes theoretically and in the abstract, she also writes from deep experience and from a particular point of view. With her we can question, who am I? What is my identity? The question is not *what* I am, that is, a daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, friend, student, or educator, for there is a danger of losing one's self in 'officialdom', that is, to be 'the daughter', 'the wife', 'the mother', or even 'the professor'. To lose one's self in these various relational roles would be to lose one's ability to be other to the other, to lose one's proper place, for one then becomes 'the official self', a non-authentic self, a figure of power or of powerlessness, a substitute, alienated from one's self. In the narrative of David we will see how he became alienated from his self and from his God and how he needed forgiveness in the sacred encounter of prayer to his God. We then note that to be an authentic self is not a solitary practice, for when David sought and found forgiveness and was thus comforted, he was able to comfort Bathsheba.

The notion of my identity, the who of what I am, also does not depend on what I do, but rather on the question of my particularity. Kristeva is only a few weeks younger than I am, and although our immigrant experiences resonate in some ways with each other, there are also distinct differences. Kristeva came by herself as a student to France at Christmas time, 1965. I emigrated from The Netherlands with my parents and siblings in June, 1956. I met Jerry, who became my husband and we have lived and loved together through many changing years, we have shared each other's gladness and wept and wiped each other's tears. We have gone 'home' to visit in The Netherlands. Kristeva's experiences were more influenced by political circumstances and she came to feel a sense of exile, of not being able to go 'home'. These lived

experiences influenced her work with a heightened and sensitive autobiographical awareness.

John Lechte explains, “After almost a decade in exile in France, the importance for Kristeva of the political realities of Eastern Europe ... is expressed with uncharacteristic personal intensity in her theoretical text on Sollers’ novel *H*” (Lechte 93). He quotes Kristeva, who wrote,

To put it bluntly, I speak in French and about literature because of Yalta. I mean that because of Yalta, I was obliged to marry in order to have a French passport and to work in France; moreover, because of Yalta I wanted to ‘marry’ the violence that has tormented me ever since, has dissolved identity and cells, coveted recognition and haunted my nights and my tranquility, caused hatred to well within what is usually called love, in short, has raked me to death. Consequently, as you may have noticed, I have no “I” any more, no imaginary, if you wish; everything escapes or comes together in theory, or politics, or activism (Lechte 93).

Lechte posits that “while it would be a mistake of some magnitude to see ‘Yalta’ and ‘exile’ reflected or expressed in her theoretical writing, it is reasonably clear that this personal aspect played a part in setting Kristeva’s work on its unique theoretical course” (Lechte 93). Although Lechte does not want us to read Kristeva’s philosophy solely in light of Yalta and exile, it is important that he acknowledges that this personal aspect of Kristeva’s life is evident in her work. We see her obligation to marry, which she experienced as a ‘violence’ that torments her, evident in her work on the stranger. We see the violence that dissolved her identity and cells, that is, her very being, evident in her work on abjection and on be[com]ing a subject. We see evidence of it as she covets recognition for *who* she is rather than *what* she is. We see the power of the law, representative of authority, as a power-over that must be recognized for it haunts her nights and her tranquility. We hear her lament that such violence caused hatred where love should be. Kristeva notes that this violence has raked her to death, not a physical death, but the death of her ‘I’ and her ‘imaginary’. As we discern the psychological importance of the ‘I’ and the ‘imaginary’ in the be[com]ing of the person as a subject, we understand the importance of what Kristeva experienced as violence and as lacks of love. Accordingly we see that Kristeva’s

philosophy is influenced both by her life experiences and by her academic work and that theory, politics, and activism all sustain her and give her insights and understandings.

As Kristeva searches for and finds the sacred in many places, she also connects it with her experiences in her youth with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian religions (Guberman 138, 139). She notes that, “I am persuaded that it is by traversing Christianity that the free subjectivity of men and women flourishes. By traversing, that is, by knowing and analyzing: not by becoming imprisoned within it” (FS 165). Kristeva hereby expresses both the beauty and the danger of navigating Christianity for our *eudaimonia*.

Our search for love and the sacred, for finding the questions that will encourage the emergence of meanings in our stories also repeatedly takes us to the Bible. The trajectory of Bathsheba in the narrative of David is much more than just stories of power, sex, betrayal and violence in the ancient world. At one point in the story we are specifically told that God was displeased with what David had done (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 27). How we understand this is crucial to our understanding of the narrative as it reflects and shapes our perception of God, the relationship between God and humans, and our convictions for everyday life, which Kristeva calls “herethics” (PK 332). Herethics can be understood as ‘her-ethics’ that is an ethics for her, but also as ‘her[etical]ethics’ that is an ethics that is heretical, beyond law in the excess of love.

As we progress through this thesis, Kristeva’s philosophy illuminates the importance of how we witness to our stories, how we hear and tell of the emergence of their meaning in the process of our be[com]ing speaking and loving sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial.

Chapter 1

Revisiting with Kristeva: A Recuperative Reading, Across the Grain.

Julia Kristeva explains her philosophical concepts in many voices, from the formal theoretical of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, to the brief, succinctly written *In the Beginning was Love*, her trilogy of abjection, love, and melancholy in *Powers of Horror*, *Tales of Love*, and *Black Sun*, to the feminist reflective considerations of *About Chinese Women* (Moi 1986), and the interpretive writing of *Stabat Mater* (TL, Moi 1986). In their collaborative work *The Feminine and the Sacred* Catherine Clément writes, “As for me, I liked Julia’s rigor; her precision, the vast store of knowledge judiciously dispensed; I also liked her imagination, her black humor; the musicality of her language, the savagery of her novels” (FS 1).

Kristeva regularly uses the Bible to explicate her philosophical theories, especially in her books *Powers of Horror*, *Tales of Love*, and *The Feminine and the Sacred*. For instance, in writing on the abject, the body, and the law, Kristeva uses examples from the Levitical Purity Laws of the Hebrew Scriptures, also known to Christians as the Old Testament, regarding the imagery of ceremonial purity or ritual cleanliness as if these laws are imbedded in our psyche. Thus an examination of the trajectory of Bathsheba in the ancient biblical narrative of David is well within the realm of Kristeva’s scholarship, and well suited to illumine Kristeva’s philosophical concepts as they bring us to important understandings of the meanings of this story. However, because of our familiarity with the narrative, there is a danger that we read the story with the gloss we remember from Sunday school or as it was taught to us throughout the years in various venues. Working with Kristeva gives us an opportunity to revisit, that is reread, reexamine, analyze and reflect with an enhanced openness for what the story says and how the

story is told, with an awareness of the power of interpretation based on religious and cultural conditioning.

Although many discussions of Kristeva's work continue to take place, and many commentaries are written about the story of David and Bathsheba, the application of Kristevan philosophical concepts as a frame for reading the specific trajectory of Bathsheba is unique. The opportunity to learn from the unique possibilities hereby presented has value because we anticipate that our approach will reveal important aspects of this biblical story. The concepts that will frame our examination of the narrative are discussed in three chapters. In chapter two, *Kristeva's Signifying Process: the Revolutionary Symbolic/Semiotic Double Movement*, we look at Kristeva's philosophy of language as she addresses the symbolic element and recovers the semiotic element for one signifying process. The symbolic is examined because of its importance in analyzing and evaluating the words and their representations in the story and the implications of the lexicon used by its commentators. The semiotic is explored because of its distinct, yet equally important role in language, and in examining the complexities of this story we will look and listen for the how of what is said, the emotional tone, the passionate desire and the drives which are present but unspoken as they colour the words and fill the silences of what is not said.

This frame will facilitate an examination of the language of the translated biblical story. It is important to recognize that any translation from an original language is already a first-order interpretation, for it is primarily as translations into diverse languages that the biblical story of David and Bathsheba has had its most significant impact in the history of interpretation. This being the case, and, since my hermeneutical inquiry is primarily philosophical, focusing on the world-formative power of scripted languages textually and intertextually, the fact that our

examination will be limited to English translations and not to the original biblical language need not take away from the force of our analysis. We will also examine the language used by other commentators of this narrative as they show the power of language and the problematic of their lexicon for one's subjectivity. John Lechte writes of "this space of singularity which is the subject as it appears poetically in language. This space is the 'place' (not localizable) from where we speak, write – in short, *act*; it is the place of practice, Kristeva will argue in *Revolution in Poetic Language*" (Lechte 118). Hence, an understanding of the language of the biblical narrative and its commentaries in light of Kristeva's philosophy of language reveals the subject position, or lack thereof, of the characters in the story.

In chapter three, *The Sacred Crossroads of Love: Between Tyranny and Delirium*, we will look at the sacred crossroads of love that are found between tyranny and delirium and how love is expressed in the symbolic and experienced in the semiotic. To set the stage for her analysis of love, Kristeva allows that she has a "sort-of" philosophy of love (TL 1), yet her texts are rich and dense in her exploration of possible meanings of love. She begins by asking these crucial questions, "Do we speak of the same thing when we speak of love? And of which thing?" (TL 2). Kristeva acknowledges the difficulties of explaining and symbolizing love, its complexity and its power, and yet we need to understand love for she asserts, "The effect of love is one of renewal, our rebirth" (TL 15). Consequently Kristeva argues that with love we must try to "save some territories of freedom ... so that they express themselves as they wish" (JKI 121). Therefore, although it may be difficult to define what love is, we know that love cannot be confining or restricting in order for the subject to experience *eudaimonia*. Kristeva clarifies this when she asserts, "the space of freedom for the individual is love – it is the only place, the only moment in life, where the various precautions, defences, conservatisms break down, and one

tries to go to the limit of one's being; so it is fundamental" (JKI 121). It is in and through love that we have the freedom but also the sacred responsibility to be a subject. Kristeva guides us as we examine love and how we may have to let go of old images and reinvent love. In this process Kristeva explores such different sources as the stories of Narcissus and Don Juan, and she examines self-love as taught by Thomas Aquinas based on the biblical commandment to love God ..., and your neighbour as yourself (NIV *Deuteronomy* 6: 4, 5; *Leviticus* 19:18; *Mark* 12: 30, 31; *Luke* 10: 27; TL 170 -187). Aquinas focused on the source and the basis of the love for one's self that is to be *as* the love for our neighbour. Kristeva also looks at the story of the Shulamite in the biblical book of the *Song of Songs* as an example of a woman who is "sovereign through her love and the discourse that causes it to be" (TL 100).

In chapter four, *Sovereignty of/for the Subject-In-Process/On-Trial*¹, we will look at this sovereignty as a sacred responsibility for the person in be[com]ing a subject with a proper place. We will consider Kristeva's theory of abjection and note that to have our proper place, which may be different at different times as our identity develops, is necessary to understand our discourses in the process of be[com]ing a sovereign speaking and loving subject. The notion of a 'proper' place comes from *proprius*, that is 'one's own' or what is 'special'. One's proper place is thus one's own special place where one experiences *eudaimonia*, that is, where one finds joy and happiness in the process of be[com]ing a sovereign speaking and loving subject, it is where one can stand and flourish.

In chapter five we begin to examine: *The Story of Bathsheba and David: Beauty Objectified and the Abjection of the Objectifier*. The narrative, as told in 2 *Samuel* of the Bible is

¹ It is important to note that in French *procès* means both in process and on trial (Atkins, Beryl T. et al, 1988, Robert·Collins Dictionnaire Français~Anglais Anglais~Français, Nouvelle Édition, Paris)

provocative in its paradoxical understandings. A traditional interpretation of the text generally shows an enigmatic Bathsheba who is portrayed as a beguiling temptress or seductress who snares the unwitting king with her bathing beauty. However, we will see that Bathsheba is so defined and represented in our discourse by a patriarchal or traditional hermeneutic, but reading with a Kristevan frame is what Kelly Oliver calls, “a recuperative reading, across the grain” (RK 17). Reading ‘across the grain’ is not the same as ‘against the grain’. We are not working for an ‘against’ reading, but for an ‘across the grain’ reading, tracing and tracking all the composite ‘grains’ in their textured interplay. In so doing, we are looking for possibilities, angles, twists and turns that other readings may hide, or miss, or skew, recouping, a recuperative reading that leads to healing for the person who gives ethical witness to the story and perhaps finds in it traces of her own story.

In chapter six, we focus on *An Ethical Witness to The Unethical: Toward an Herethics of Love*, as we become ethical witnesses to unethical actions and move toward a herethics. The story is set in the biblical book of 1 *Kings* and focuses on David and four of his sons, Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah, and Solomon, the prophet Nathan, and Bathsheba. While Bathsheba plays a significant speaking role in this narrative of court intrigue, she serves more as a backdrop for the unfolding story that culminates in the brutal competition for, and ruthless consolidation of power in the chaotic time leading to the death of a celebrated king and the uncertain succession to his throne. Here, Kristeva’s notion of the heterogeneous semiotic *chora* connects with the secret and not so secret codes of sex and violence. The codes of war, both political wars in the quest for the Davidic throne and those wars experienced between the sexes, play a profound role in the telling of the story, from Bathsheba’s first appropriation as an object of sexual desire to her

disappearance from the story after the secure establishment of her son Solomon's succession to David's throne.

In the Epilogue we look *Into the Future: a Her(ethics) of Love Between Delirium and Tyranny*, and thereby conclude by reflecting on some of the history of identity formation for women as subjects. We will assess what we have learned from the application of Kristeva's philosophical concepts in examining this biblical story and the importance of its emerging meaning. We will contemplate what this means for an ethical language and the role of herethics in our own stories in the narratives of our culture and society as we search for love and the sacred in our quest to be sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial with a proper place that is also in-process/on-trial.

Kristeva's Method

Kristeva's method of including the personal with the theoretical and of applying philosophical concepts as a frame for analyzing various narrative is beneficial for this thesis. These oscillating strategies make her philosophy both challenging and exciting for finding new ways of reading and examining the biblical narrative of David and Bathsheba.

Having briefly addressed various influences of Kristeva's childhood in the Prologue, we will now look at various influences on her scholarship. John Lechte claims that "What stimulated Kristeva's intellectual development with regard to formalization was, firstly, the fact that she had come from a political environment where the impetus toward transcending existing limits to formalization in literature and the arts was frowned upon" (Lechte 92). Formalism is a structural method of strict adherence to prescribed forms, especially in art and literature, with a tendency to emphasize form over against content. This is for instance notable in the deontology

and ethics of Kant, which posit the principle that acts are in themselves right or wrong regardless of consequences. Any attempt to go beyond this structured formalism was disapproved of in Eastern Europe at that time. Lechte notes how,

the move against so-called formalism in the Eastern bloc countries becomes an indirect and personal reason as to why Kristeva developed, with enthusiasm and vigour, a number of the concepts (e.g. ‘dialogic’, ‘carnivalization’) found in Bahktin’s writing – Bahktin having been originally a member of the Formalist group (Lechte 92).

Because Bahktin had been part of the group of philosophical formalists and had moved beyond formalism, his work appealed to Kristeva. She remembers that she “had the feeling that with his notions of dialogism and carnival we had reached an important point in moving beyond structuralism”² (JKI 189). Kristeva found she could work with Bahktin’s concepts and develop them further. She recalls that she spoke about Bahktin, “when Barthes asked me to give my first oral presentation on the ‘postformalists’ just as people were beginning to explore the limits of formalism” (JKI 5). Kristeva liked Bahktin’s move “toward a dynamic understanding of the literary text that considered every utterance as the result of the intersection within it of a number of voices, as he called them” (JKI 189). Kristeva explains that with these various voices he could honour that a “basic linguistic structure of a text is influenced by historical and societal structures” (JKI 5). Therefore in the mid 1960s Kristeva already perceived the limits of formalism with regard to language and literature and how to go beyond it (Lechte 92, 93).

Lechte argues that, “Kristeva considered certain features of Formalism - especially its later, high-structuralist mode - not only too reductionist (hence, her early attraction to the work of Roland Barthes) and in need of being made more dynamic” (Lechte 119 n.10), but also too tolerant of traditional binary oppositions (Lechte 93). In an interview with Jacques Henri in 1976, in the

² Structuralism will be briefly addressed in our next chapter.

context of her work on Céline, Kristeva is more adamant and says that “It is time for us to strip the academy of any trace of formalism that reigned supreme in the 1930s and even the 1960s; formalism has become a scar of sorts because it is a contrivance aimed at explaining the experience of literature while disregarding both its subject, who lives through a horrible tragedy, and its political and social context” (JKI 230). Because of its rigorous observance of prescribed forms, Kristeva critiqued formalism and called for a revolution of thinking and theorizing as she sought a method that was less rigid, more inclusive and fluid in its boundaries. She proposed a revolution of poetic language, a method that would recognize the subject, and the political and social contexts of the data of human experience in explaining philosophical concepts and applying these concepts to an analysis of the stories of literature. To attain this, she advanced her educational grounding in formalism to develop her own theory of language. This theory includes a symbolic element as well as a recovered semiotic element for one signifying process, and she emphasized that her theory of language is always connected to her theory of the subject, who is also in process. Kristeva hereby developed not only a new theory of language but also a new understanding of how knowledge is constructed, with Bahktin’s notion of how we hear the different voices as we read and understand various texts and how meaning is made.

Leon S. Roudiez, in his Introduction to Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language*, writes that “Textual analysis is indeed a better phrase than ‘literary analysis’ for the activity Kristeva engages in: it relegates aesthetic and formalistic considerations to the background” (RPL 5). Roudiez explains the distinction between literary and textual analysis when he posits that for Kristeva, “The text that is analyzed is actually the effect of the dialectical interplay between semiotic and symbolic dispositions” (RPL 5). For Kristeva, although there is a dichotomy of different functions in language for the symbolic and semiotic elements, there is no binary

opposition between them, rather they interweave and combine to form one signifying system of discontinuous unification where each plays its own specific role in its contribution to the text. In her analysis of the text, Kristeva probes the textures, the many layers and what Bahktin called the voices of a text, and what she calls 'intertextuality' (JKI 189) in order to explore possible meanings of the text. In this regard Kristeva is postmodern in her analysis of the text as she argues against the modernist idea of any one universal meaning and understanding of a text. Instead, her method is the message of deconstruction in that it allows for a text to be read and re-read, and to be interpreted and re-interpreted again and again for a plethora of understandings that illustrate there is not one interpretation of the text and there is not one meaning or one conclusion with 'the' answer to be found in the text.

Kristeva posits that as we articulate our analysis we cannot strip language of our perspectives and worldview. Rather than a state of objectivity stripped of human influence in the defining of our world, Kristeva calls for a revolution not only of thought and theory but also of action. For some scholars the call to action brought them to a feminist perspective, analysis, and practice. Although Kristeva is "very interested in the basic questions they were asking" (JKI 7), she does not align herself with any one form of feminism or a particular group of feminists as such because of their differences. For there is not 'one' feminism but rather many different feminisms and there are numerous notions of what makes one a feminist. Some consider that reading a text 'across the grain', that is with a different perspective and an atypical approach is feminist. Virginia Woolf claimed that, "A feminist is any woman who tells the truth about her life" (Huntington, 103). According to these descriptions, Kristeva's attempt to find meaning 'across the grain' and her mode of telling her story in various settings could be considered feminist. Tina Chanter argues that Kristeva's philosophy opens the possibility of change and

therefore her theories are useful for feminism (EDP 2). Thus even though Kristeva does not accept the label ‘feminist’ for herself, her work is valuable for the work of feminism because the possibility of change is the possibility of a new worldview. Even so, Oliver reports that in “an interview with *psych & po*, Kristeva says that she concentrates on discourses that break down identity because she is a woman” (EPD 1). We understand from Kristeva’s own struggle with her identity (Lechte 93) the importance of this focus in her analysis of identity. Discourses that break down identity are part of deconstructing identity, of analyzing the constructs of identity and the perceived normativity with its descriptive and prescriptive powers of that constructed identity. Because of her emphasis on discourses that break down identity, Kristeva asserts that her work fulfills the demand that is required of ethical study. She argues, “Until we can conceive of a true relation between subject and other, we cannot conceive of ethics. We cannot conceive of obligations to others” (EPD 1). Hence Kristeva’s philosophy is deeply ethical as she explains the need for a new philosophy of language with a new philosophy of the subject, of the ‘other’, and of our obligation to the ‘other’. In this philosophy of the subject, Kristeva seeks “to construct a new model of otherness within the subject” (EPD 2). Kristeva advocates not only an understanding of otherness that is external, the stranger who is ‘out there’, but also a new understanding of an otherness that is internal, the stranger as both child and logic. Pamela Sue Anderson explains that Kristeva, “sought to understand how the shadow of the child remains with the adult’s consciousness as a stranger within” (Ward, 215). This ‘stranger within’ is a recurring theme for Kristeva, and the ‘shadow of the child’ represents ideas, ghosts of thoughts, our habits, our imagination of the relationship of things, a habitual way of interpreting and relating to the world. But habits are fictions of the mind, they are real but they are not eternal and undeviating dictates of how we ‘should’ or ‘ought’ to interact with others. For Kristeva, the

person as a subject is always in-process/on-trial, in a continuous emerging process, in the trial of un-concealing the concealed, a bringing to the light out of the shadows, never a static being but always a becoming. We learn from this how our experiences are woven threads in the fabric of our be[com]ing.

In her psychoanalysis Kristeva argues that there is more than one standardized method, more than one logic that will help us to understand and accept a new model of otherness within us, the other as the stranger within us, “the other logic in me” (FS 163). Having accepted the other in our self we need to go beyond and transcend the notion of its strangeness so that this otherness can become a part of us in the complexity of our being and in our discourses. This ‘other’ within us that has and is its own logic with its strangeness lies safely hidden from the dangers of a standardized surface built of ideologies and worldviews. What can we learn from this other within us, this child and this logic, when we accept their presence with all its strangeness? What is it that we are looking for? Johanna van Wijk-Bos advocates that we “look back to orient ourselves to the present, to prepare ourselves for the future” (van Wijk-Bos 97). However, it is crucial that we know what it is that we are looking for when we look back. The search for an ideal origin or the search for meaning in women’s stories is quite distinctly different. Kristeva writes that “the cult of the ‘origin’ is the religious after effect that feeds modern political fundamentalism on all sides” (FS 163). Kristeva asserts that there is an expressed need in fundamentalist religions today to go back to an *arché*, a genesis, an “unnameable paradise” (FS 163), when and where all things were thought to be better. Kristeva considers it an illusion that there is such a ‘foundation’ to be restored. Yet, she asks, who could criticize such an illusion “without recognizing that it is rooted in a sound intuition: namely, that there are other forms of logic that are, if not deeper, then at least *heterogeneous* to the well-

policed and policing surface of rational and rationalist communication?” (FS 163 *original emphasis*). Thus Kristeva allows for a polylogic, different forms of logic that are not hierarchically placed, but that work together as we examine the stories of human experience. Along with the logic of the symbolic and the logic of conscious and rational thought, there is the logic of the semiotic, the ‘other’ of the symbolic in our signifying system. Thus there is not only an ‘other’ of another person, “but *the other logic in me*” (FS 163 *original emphasis*). This other logic in me is what Kristeva calls “my strangeness, my heterogeneity, the musical scales that dwell within me under the standardized surface of users of technology....” (FS 163). Kristeva thus understands this strangeness to be the shadow of the long-ago child within us, and in this shadow is a “logic of the unconscious, the rhythms and polyphonies of the music underlying the verbal utterances and verbiage: the ‘infrasensical’, as one speaks of the infrasonic” (FS 163). It is as if Kristeva hears a symphony of music in the sounds of our communication, in a polylogic that lies beneath a standardized surface of rational logic and embraces our senses as well as our rational thoughts and words, a shadow of the other logic in us that motivates our spirit and our soul, as well as our mind.

My Approach:

Even though Roudiez notes that Kristeva often “begins with a statement from personal experience and follows it with a critical examination of the psychoanalytic position with respect to the matter at hand” (ITB vii), we will not focus on an explicit psychological analysis and we will only briefly consider how Freud and Lacan infuse Kristevan concepts. Neither will we give an exposition of phenomenology as a method or a discourse, even though we recognize its value. As used by Kristeva, a phenomenological approach looks at the conditions for experience and

this approach is personal rather than abstract as is shown in several of her works, including *In the Beginning was Love*, *Tales of Love*, and with Catherine Clément in *The Feminine and the Sacred*. It is personal for we are witnesses to what is given in our stories, and it is in making one's self vulnerable, in 'baring' one's self that we 'bear' ourselves into be[com]ing.

Although David had a long, varied, and colorful life, our focus is specifically on the trajectory of his relationships with some of the women in his life and the consequences of his actions and inactions on their lives. We will probe to see how women are represented with the implications of an implicit and explicit sexualized and maternal female body as we follow the trajectory of Bathsheba in the narrative of David. We will be tracking subjects-in-process/on-trial as we traverse the murky waters of metaphors of non-speech. We will explore notions of power and power-over, sex and violence, agents and actions, betrayals and conspiracies, consequences and victims. This exploration of the text and of some of its commentaries will show that our lexicon reveals our biases and our agendas, our preconceived notions and foregone conclusions with their ethical consequences that stand to be evaluated. For the words of our lexicon reveal more than what they say, they also reveal what we mean without our meaning to, without our overt intention to do so.

The frame of this thesis will be Kristeva's theories of language, of love and the sacred, and the role of abjection as these concepts interact in the process of the person be[com]ing a subject with a proper place that is also in process. Kristeva's philosophy shows that the frame of our analysis and the perspective of the reader are crucial elements in the process of coming to new insight in our discernment, our discourse, and our praxis. Facing the ideas of our perceptions and prejudices by recognizing the conditions and the causes of our perspective, our being and our acting in a process of cognition or awareness, can take us out of our comfort zone.

Nevertheless, understanding our location and how one does an analysis for new insights and understandings is crucial. Kristeva observes that her correspondence with Clément in their book *The Feminine and the Sacred*, “could stay on the sidelines, the questions unresolved, barely skimming the surface of the abyss of the ‘sacred’” (FS 163). But Kristeva does not stay on the sidelines and neither will we as we examine the questions that are raised in reading our stories. With Elizabeth Grosz we note that, “My analysis makes no claim to objectivity, to being a neutral or disinterested discussion or dispassionate commentary” (Grosz 3). Rather, my aim is to show the passion invested in my analysis while demonstrating the importance of the interplay between understanding Kristeva’s philosophy, understanding the trajectory of Bathsheba, and the development of our identity as subjects.

Kristeva sets the stage of the story with Bathsheba as the wife of a soldier who seduces the king and becomes pregnant, a beautiful woman who continues to seduce us from her bath in the paintings of great artists (FS 99, 100). I set the stage in the palace where David sees, desires, calls, and impregnates the wife of one of his soldiers, a woman whose name and identity he knows. Kristeva’s understanding of Bathsheba challenged me to undertake my own analysis of the story of Bathsheba and David. My approach is to honour both the symbolic and the semiotic of our signifying system as posited by Kristeva. Helen LaKelly Hunt explains that this is like “two ways of knowing. Rational knowing, where you understand something with your mind, and experiential knowing where you have a visceral experience that enables you to feel your understanding on a different level” (Hunt 145). Kristeva’s philosophy thus guides, explicates and elucidates our attempt to learn from the explicit narrative of David and the implicit stories of his connubial relationships with the women of our chosen trajectory, Bathsheba, his ten unnamed concubines, and Abishag, the companion of his old age. We will also examine and learn from

David's paternal relationship with his daughter Tamar, and with his sons Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah and Solomon. An analysis of these connubial and familial relationships of David, and subsequently the women's interconnectedness with David's sons, Tamar and Amnon, the ten concubines and Absalom, Abishag and Adonijah, Bathsheba and Solomon, will reveal ancient actions and consequences with contemporary ethical relevance and value for those who are looking for meaning in the life stories of women, whether ancient biblical stories or our own contemporary stories.

Kristeva's Understanding of Women's Stories in Biblical Narrative:

In order to give a context to our analysis of the biblical narrative of David and Bathsheba with a Kristevan frame, it is important to recognize Kristeva's own relation to the Bible and how she understands the stories of various women in biblical narratives. Although we discussed the general influence of religion in Kristeva's life story, here we note the influences of her grandmother and of her education by Roman Catholic nuns on her development as a scholar. "Within my own family line," Kristeva writes, "I have the advantage of a maternal grandmother who called herself Jacob; legend has it that her community was among the followers of Shabbetai Tzevi, a mystic who proclaimed himself Messiah in the Balkans" (FS 100). She writes,

In that region, at times the melting pot for the three forms of monotheism, these ancestors went over to the side of Christianity, and, as for my father, he did everything that he could to reinforce that latter tendency, but without neglecting to have me learn French from the Dominican women, to better assimilate a culture of doubt and reason, he said, thinking of the Enlightenment (FS 100).

Kristeva is ambivalent in her evaluation of that repositioning in her family of Judaism, Christianity and the Enlightenment, "The height of confusion or of lucidity, tell me that!"

she exclaims (FS 100). Whether it was confusing or clear for Kristeva, it appears that she felt somewhat on the margins, on the borders of the institutional structures of religion and education, and that this became the source of her interests in the nuances of borders and margins. “In short,” Kristeva concludes, “you won’t be surprised if I tell you that my favourites among these biblical matrons are the lovers of borderlines: Ruth the Moabite, naturally, and, of course, the beloved of the *Song of Songs*” (FS 100).

Kristeva notes that she is not a biblical scholar, but the Bible fascinates her and she returns to its stories repeatedly in her work and in her dreams. She explains,

I do not know Hebrew, I read the Bible as a layperson and without proficiency or real assiduity. But literary texts send me back to it endlessly, as well as a number of dreams, and certain moments in my analysis of patients – unbearable or magnificent I detect in it a destiny specific to the feminine to which I cling, in that a transition occurs that turns that “maternal” element – which paganism sanctifies and polytheism cleaves and disseminates – into a highly sophisticated moral edifice (FS 97).

The Bible is important for Kristeva because references in literature repeatedly bring her back to it. As a psychoanalyst, and in her dreams, biblical narratives come into play and in them she senses and clings to a destiny that is particular for the feminine, that is, for women as well as for the principle of the feminine. In her essay *Stabat Mater* (TL; Moi), Kristeva claims that in religion a transition takes place for women as mothers, a movement from the maternal element into a moral construct. She explains how Mariology has moved from Mary as mother of Jesus, to Mary as moral exemplar, thereby creating a paradigm shift in the conceptual structure of woman, of the maternal, and of the feminine.

Before we consider the story of David and Bathsheba, we will follow Kristeva as she considers the stories of several women in biblical narrative. In *The Feminine and the Sacred* Kristeva begins with Sarai, the wife of Abraham, who “becomes Sarah, when Yahweh promises

her a son, Isaac ... at the age of ninety-two” (FS 98). Kristeva understands that because of her “complete adherence to the word of God, Sarah can live to the age of one hundred and twenty seven” (NIV *Genesis* 23:1; FS 98). Kristeva specifically notes Sarah’s faith in the promise of God. For Sarah went so far as to give Abraham a younger woman, Hagar, in order to make it possible that he should have a son, and Abraham goes along with it. But God clarifies to Abraham, by repeating it three times, that his wife Sarah’s son will inherit the promise made to him (NIV *Genesis* 17: 16, 19, 21). Ishmael, Abraham’s first son by Hagar, received his own promise from God (NIV *Genesis* 17: 20). But the emphasis is that even though Abraham had a son, the promise was that Sarah’s son would inherit the covenant.

With the story of Sarah, we are reminded that every translation of the Bible is also an interpretation, for in the original language and other English translations of the New Testament, Sarah is mentioned among the ‘heroes of faith’. In the Revised Standard Version we read, “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised” (*Book of Hebrews* 11:11). In the King James Version we read, “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (*Book of Hebrews* 11:11). However, in the NIV we read, “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise” (*Book of Hebrews* 11:11). In the NIV a footnote to this text reads, “or By faith even Sarah, who was past age, was enabled to bear children because she” (NIV 1872). In the context of our analysis of biblical stories of women and their possible meanings for us today, we note several important things. First, that the translators and editors of the NIV replaced Sarah’s name here with Abraham’s name and

mention Sarah in the third person, focussing on her barrenness in the maternal rather than on her faith in God's promise. As such, they literally took Sarah out of the biblical text and placed her in a footnote, thereby taking away her subject position and her proper place as a 'hero of faith' in the sacred history of the Abrahamic family (NIV *Book of Hebrews* 11:11, 1872). Secondly, according to the Bible, Abraham was the father of Ishmael when God again promised that Sarah would have a son, therefore Abraham was already a father. And thirdly, according to the Bible, Sarah gave birth to one son, Isaac, thus to say she was enabled to bear 'children', instead of 'a child' is not quite correct. We wonder at the bias and the agenda of the translators and editors of this translation that led to this explicit rejection and expulsion of Sarah in an erroneous and invalid translation, especially in light of the fact that the newer version of this NIV translation was corrected and restored Sarah to her rightful place as a hero of faith in the biblical text.

Moving on to Sarah's daughter-in-law, the wife of Isaac, Kristeva notes that "Rebekah is beautiful and virginal," and of Rebekah's daughters-in-law, the wives of Jacob, Kristeva writes that Rachel is beautiful "but she is also sterile and jealous of the fertile Leah" (FS 98). Kristeva refers to the women's beauty and fertility as attributes of their identity. To emphasize this point Kristeva notes that the fertile Leah gave Jacob six sons. However, Kristeva does not mention that Leah also gave Jacob a daughter, Dinah. Kristeva does note the jealousy of Rachel as it represents the struggle of the two sisters Leah and Rachel in the pursuit of their husband's love and a subject position with a proper place. For at that time to be a mother of sons was the *telos*, the goal of a woman's being, it was her proper place from which she could flourish. In this struggle Leah and Rachel gave their servants Zilpah and Bilha to their husband Jacob in order to have more sons through surrogate motherhood (NIV *Genesis* 30). The children of Zilpah and

Bilha epitomize the jealousy, the warring, and the grief of the two sisters Leah and Rachel.

Kristeva refers to these mothers of the Abrahamic family, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel as,

the famous four ‘mothers of Genesis’ and their supernatural power: beautiful, rebellious warriors, they were as sterile as they were gifted with longevity – as if to ward off the natural pagan fertility through a completely different destiny, stemming from the Other, but to which they did not adhere any less, body and soul (FS 98).

Although the stories of these four mothers of *Genesis*, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel are well known, the biblical narrative does not refer to them having supernatural power. However, Sarah gave birth when she was old and Rebekah and Rachel were sterile until, as the author of their biblical story tells us, God opened their womb, so this could be translated as ‘supernatural’ power for the women. And with their actions these women did powerfully affect the history of the Abrahamic family. Were these four mothers rebellious warriors? Kristeva refers to the portrayal of the Maternal, where a “commonality of the sexes is set up, beyond and in spite of their glaring incompatibility and permanent warfare” (TL 236). Even though Kristeva claims a commonality of the sexes, her focus here is more on warfare between the sexes. Did these biblical women experience the permanent warfare of the sexes in their familial relationships? There are many moments of relational tension in their stories, but specifically if Kristeva considers fighting for the rights of their favourite son warfare, then Sarah and Rebekah qualify. If sharing a husband with its consequent jealousy and strife is warfare, then Sarah, Leah and Rachel qualify.

From the four mothers as warriors, Kristeva moves to other women warriors and notes that, “As far as women warriors go, I prefer Judith” (FS 98) who saved her people. Kristeva also prefers “Esther, the wife of Ahasuerus, and Deborah, who impels the men to vanquish Sisera, as well as Jael, Susanna, and a few others who are no less heroic or less historical” (FS 99). The

warfare of these women was not in familial relationships, as with the Abrahamic mothers, but in political interactions. It is noteworthy for this thesis that in the *Song of Deborah*, after Jael has killed Sisera and the battle has been won, Deborah considers Sisera's mother. Deborah imagines the worried mother waiting for her son to return from war, "she keeps saying to herself, are they not finding and dividing the spoils: a girl or two for each man, ..." (NIV *Judges* 5: 29, 30). The notion that girls and women are 'spoils of war' will be further developed in our examination of the story of Absalom in the narrative of David.

For Kristeva then, these women are active agents and we know their names and their actions because they "accelerate history rather than abandoning themselves to nature" (FS 99). Kristeva makes a distinction here between two kinds of women, those who as speaking and acting agents participate in both the personal and the political of their culture in its various forms and whose names are known in the annals of history, and those women who abandon their self, or whose self is taken away from them through cultural dictates and are thus abandoned to nature to be the individually unnamed fecund maternal. Yet in an oscillation Kristeva allows that this dichotomy between the either/or possibilities for a woman's life is not necessary or inevitable for women when she formulates a connection between the maternal and the political. She explains, "I very much like Deborah the priestess, that 'bee' who 'arose a mother in Israel' to whom 'the children of Israel came up ... for judgment.' Although more discreet, she does not cede in the slightest to the male word of the other prophets, ..." (FS 99). Rather than a dichotomy of women who make history in the political, that is in the public realm, as opposed to women who do not in the maternal, that is, the private realm, in the person of Deborah Kristeva recognizes and respects both the maternal and the political. As a judge in the political public realm, Deborah was nevertheless the metaphorical mother of Israel, with the ability to respect and

honour her own word against the other, male, prophets who spoke out against her. Kristeva notes specifically that although Deborah was respected as a judge, as a prophet, and as a leader of the people, as a woman she faced pressure to yield to the word of her fellow, male prophets. Therefore, even though Deborah is honoured as a judge and a leader, and is named a mother in Israel, this metaphorical maternal reference shows that she remained part of the struggle of be[com]ing a subject with a proper place which is always contested and must continuously be fought for.

Thus Kristeva does not limit the field of warfare for women to the family or even to the political, but to the much wider, comprehensive and “permanent warfare of the sexes” (TL 236). Deborah represents those women who are able to deal with this warfare by successfully combining the maternal and the political and thereby wins Kristeva’s admiration. We hereby see a distinction between the stories of the biblical women whose subjectivity and proper place were created by being mothers of sons, and the stories of the biblical women who are known to have participated both in the maternal and the political. We can still see this difference for contemporary women in our understanding of a woman’s role, her proper place, in life. Women today can become nameless when they leave the workforce, the political, even temporarily in order to focus on being mothers at home. They can lose a sense of self as they focus on the responsibilities and joys of the maternal. This ‘loss of self’ is often experienced in conversation with participants of ‘officialdom’ when a woman is dismissed as ‘the wife of’ or ‘the mother of’ who is a ‘stay-at-home-Mom’. This is perhaps difficult to comprehend for those who have never experienced this subtle rejection, but it is an ‘ah-ha’ moment for every woman who experiences it.

Having addressed the placing of women as mothers and as warriors in biblical narratives, Kristeva then turns to queens. She writes how, “Esther, a sublime beauty whom Ahasuerus married, saved the Jewish people from the first ‘pogrom,’ the massacre ordered by her husband, the Persian king” (FS 99).³ Kristeva establishes Queen Esther as a subject with agency, a speaking and acting subject. But, “Jezebel, the mother of Athaliah, was, in contrast, violently pagan and idolatrous, to the point of erecting a temple to Baal ... ” (FS 99). And “Athaliah, ... exterminates everyone to keep herself on the throne ... ” (FS 99).⁴ Here we have a daughter, Athaliah, who learns too well the violent ways of her mother Jezebel, who Kristeva calls “that dirty woman,” who was thrown to the dogs, “as abjection requires” (FS 99).⁵ It is in the context of these biblical stories that Kristeva writes about Bathsheba and joins her with these “not always sympathetic” but “subversive, nonconformist” queens (FS 100). Kristeva notes,

There was Bathsheba, the seductive wife of one of David’s officers, whom the king married even while killing her husband despite the reproaches of the prophet Nathan, and who became the mother of Solomon, and, subsequently, has continued to seduce us from her bath in the paintings of Raphael, Cranach, and Rembrandt. These Queens are not always sympathetic, I grant you that, but all are subversive, nonconformists Strangeness, or, let us say, the female power, insinuates itself into the social order, threatens it, is sometimes integrated into it, even while remaining rebellious, desirable, never passive or docile (FS 99, 100).

Kristeva here aligns strangeness with female power and how this strangeness of female power ingratiates itself into the social order, thereby endangering and jeopardizing it, for female power is foreign in this social order which is called patriarchy. Kristeva’s comparison of Bathsheba with Jezebel and Athaliah as queens overshadows any comparison of the beauty of Bathsheba

³ The story of Esther is found in the *Book of Esther*.

⁴ The story of Jezebel is told in 1 *Kings* 16 -19, her death in 2 *Kings* 9. The story of Athaliah is told in 2 *Kings* 8, 11, and 2 *Chronicles* 22, 23.

⁵ Kristeva’s concept of abjection will be discussed in chapter 4 and in chapter 6 as it applies to David.

with Queen Esther as a “sublime beauty” (FS 99), and the noted beauty of Rebekah and Rachel. Yet, it was Bathsheba’s beauty that caught David’s eye and that continues to haunt commentators and artists who reflect on her story. Therefore, although Kristeva refers to Bathsheba as ‘seductive’, implying an active agency, we will discover that another understanding of Bathsheba and her story is distinctly possible.

Kristeva then examines the story of Ruth the Moabite and the importance of Ruth’s role as a foremother of David. Ruth the Moabite is one of Kristeva’s “favourites among these biblical matrons” (FS 100). She specifically mentions, “The charm of the Moabite’s discreet but firm independence” (SO 73). Although Kristeva writes about Ruth’s story in *Strangers to Ourselves* (SO 69-76), and again in *The Feminine and the Sacred* (FS 101-103), we will limit our examination of the way Kristeva understands Ruth by focusing only on those aspects of her story that relate to our analysis of the narrative of David and Bathsheba.

Ruth had made a commitment of faithfulness to her mother-in-law Naomi and to the God Yahweh, and in her loyalty to them she had left home and family (NIV *Ruth* 1:16, 17). Kristeva notes that even so, Ruth was considered a stranger from an unworthy line for she was a Moabite (FS 102). Yet the biblical story notes that Boaz, Ruth’s future husband tells her “I will do whatever you ask, for the people of Bethlehem know your worth” (SO 73). The NIV translates this sentence as: “All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character” (NIV *Ruth* 3:11). Therefore, although it appears to be a paradox that Ruth is a stranger from an unworthy line and that the people of Bethlehem know her and her worth, we understand that it is the Moabite line, because of its origin and its history, which was considered unworthy but that Ruth herself, as an active agent, was indeed worthy for she was a woman of noble character.

Thus we keep in mind the distinction between Ruth's nationality and Ruth's personal character when Kristeva examines Ruth's influence as a Moabite on the story of David. Kristeva posits that, "If David is *also* Ruth, if the sovereign is *also* a Moabite, peace of mind will then never be his lot, but a constant quest for welcoming and going beyond the other in oneself" (SO 76 *original emphasis*). Years later Kristeva herself refers to this quote when she notes, "If David is also Ruth, if the sovereign is also the Moabite, then that means that his royal destiny will never be quietude, but a permanent quest for the acceptance and the transcendence of the other in oneself" (FS 103). The words are slightly changed, and she uses no italics in the second quote, but the emphasis on the philosophical concept of the 'other in oneself' and of the 'stranger within', shows that this concept remains an important element for Kristeva in her theory of the development of the person as a subject. Kristeva does not consider this permanent quest for the acceptance and the transcendence of the other in oneself a burden, but, as she notes herself, "Ruth was praised, I praised her in *Strangers to Ourselves*, for opening the sovereignty of David to an ineffaceable strangeness: it is she, in fact, who opens royal security to a permanent inquietude and spurs the dynamic of its drive for perfection" (FS 102). Kristeva hereby refers to the challenges David faced both as a royal sovereign king and as a sovereign subject, and she places Ruth at the beginning of the 'inquietude', the uneasiness and anxieties that David experienced in his sovereign reign and in his personal life as a sovereign subject.⁶ Kristeva thus posits that the tensions of David's house and its royal destiny as experienced by him and his sons as his heirs are rooted in the strangeness, the shadows of the otherness of their foremother Ruth. We must not understand the strangeness of this otherness and the angst that it brings in a negative manner however, for Kristeva understands the angst of this strangeness to be a positive

⁶ Kristeva's concept of being a sovereign subject will be discussed in chapter 4.

incentive to work with the shadows of this otherness in the quest for the highest excellence and achievement. She allows that, “this interpretation of Judaism is not everyone’s but it is mine, and I know others share it; that’s already something...” (FS 103). Kristeva hereby explicitly acknowledges that there are different understandings of Judaism and of the stories of its scriptures, and she is comforted by the fact that some people share her interpretations.

Transposing this to our analysis of the story of David and Bathsheba, we anticipate that others may share or critique our insights and understandings in the hope of a continuously developing discourse.

Kristeva builds on the notion that Ruth continues to represent, generations later, the estrangement between the Moabites and the Israelites. But there is also a promise here, for Kristeva understands that the child of Ruth and her husband Boaz, a child of the Moabites and the Hebrews, is a mediator between these two people as he combines them in the Davidic family lineage. Kristeva notes that Ruth appears to have become one of the nameless women in the maternal because her “name is never again mentioned”, that “only the family line counts, and here, it is saved by the birth of an heir, hence exit the woman – exit the foreign ‘bearing mother’” (FS 102). However, although Ruth’s name is not again mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the Christian New Testament her name is listed among the four foreign mothers in the Davidic lineage of Jesus, along with Tamar, Rahab, and Uriah’s wife (NIV *Matthew* 1: 3, 5, 6). The mothers Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth are mentioned by name, which gives them their particular identity in history as each is recognized as a speaking and acting subject in her own unique story.⁷ It is noteworthy for our analysis of the narrative of David and Bathsheba that the fourth mother is not named, but is identified as the mother who “had been Uriah’s wife” (NIV *Matthew*

⁷ The story of Tamar is told in *Genesis* 38.

The story of Rahab is told in *Joshua* 6 and she is also mentioned among the ‘heroes of faith’ in *Hebrews* 11: 31.

The story of Ruth is told in the *Book of Ruth*.

1: 6). This introduction of a nameless woman as ‘wife of’ indicates the loss of her subjectivity. She is identified by her husband’s name who is not the father of the child whose lineage is described. She has not been made anonymous, not quite unknown as other foremothers of the lineage, this mother is yet made ‘other’ to the three mothers whose names are given. Her importance is accepted even if only as the unnamed mother in the named maternal lineage of David and Jesus. Why would the author of *Matthew* make this distinction between the mothers? Did he hereby want to acknowledge the difference in the stories of the first three mothers, Tamar, Rahab and Ruth, and the story of the fourth mother? Does he hereby emphasize the difference between the three mothers as speaking and acting subjects with a name and a proper place and the ‘other’ mother who has lost her subjectivity, her name and her identity? Does he hereby ever so subtly raise the question of how this unnamed mother, the wife of a man other than David, fits into the Davidic lineage of Jesus? Does the mention of an important ‘other’ incite more interest and curiosity than a name? Certainly the author of *Matthew* shows how language can suggest, even insinuate, replete with implied intimations of an identification loaded with implicit messages and questions about possible histories, reputations and moral behaviour. This mother is not given her own name and as such she is rejected from the particular into the general of the maternal of the Davidic genealogy given by *Matthew*. Yet she is mentioned because she is crucial to the personal and political development of the story of David and the Davidic lineage. And so the lineage of David and Jesus brings us to the story of Bathsheba, the unnamed mother in *Matthew*.

We note that in considering the stories of these biblical women, Kristeva does not focus on what these women did *per se*, there is no summary of their stories, but rather she focuses on their subversion, their strangeness, an elusive strangeness of perceived female power that seems

to captivate men. Kristeva explains, “Strangeness, or, let us say, the female power, insinuates itself into the social order, threatens it, is sometimes integrated into it, even while rebellious, desirable, never passive or docile” (FS 100). This subversive power is more than just sexual power, it is also social power because it wants to belong in the social order but it also wants to change that social order. In our own wanting to belong to the social order of our culture and yet in wanting to change it, we note the value of examining the biblical story for contemporary insight and understanding.

Gathering Threads

Helen LaKelly Hunt, in her book *Faith and Feminism, a Holy Alliance* writes that, “We all have stories to tell, some of us epic tales” (Hunt 101). But not all stories are alike, and not all women can tell their story. Some experiences are deeply hidden and Maya Angelou warns that “There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you” (Hunt 103). Kristeva tells her story through her various writings and we recognize that telling our story like she does takes courage for it exposes us to analysis and to critique of our stories. But by understanding the biblical stories of women, by learning about the meanings and truths of their lives, we can come to better insights of the meanings and truths of our own life stories. In examining our stories, ancient and contemporary, the problems are not so much factual as conceptual, that is, not how the events and the people are described, but how this is perceived and how this is understood. Alice Ogden Bellis notes that stories of women in the Bible are especially powerful and “have profoundly affected women’s self-understanding and men’s perception of women” (Ogden Bellis 3). For how these biblical stories are understood reflects our cultural and scholarly discourse on and about women as well as how language is used to describe their subjectivity and their

experiences of love or “lacks” thereof (TL 7). Manipulations of various trajectories in biblical stories have elevated some trajectories in our tradition and silenced others and because of that some trajectories are implicit stories in explicit narratives, stories of forgetting and remembering, as the presence of the past relates to us ancient deeds with contemporary consequences. By examining the story of David and Bathsheba we are cognizant of the importance of the words we choose to describe and define just what we mean for, as we noted before, our lexicon reflects more than mere words of our symbolic system, they reveal our thinking, our ideology and our worldview, they expose our souls.

We ended the Prologue with a reference to Kristeva’s herethics and how it can be understood as ‘her-ethics’ that is an ethics for her, but also as ‘her[etical]ethics’ that is an ethics that is heretical, beyond and in excess of the demands of law and dogma. Reading and examining this biblical story with a frame of Kristevan philosophical concepts will show the importance of an ethics of excess for the language we use, the worth of the love we express, the value of our encounters with the sacred, and for understanding the process and the trial of what it means to be a sovereign subject with a proper place.

It is my conviction that to examine the stories of women in the narrative of David with a frame of Kristevan concepts is important because the understandings of biblical stories are used for edification and are applied to support ideologies and worldviews. We hear, we listen, and we internalize as we “absorbed the feelings” (van Wijk-Bos 14) of what we were taught to believe. Absorbing the feelings is like being inscribed or to have something imprinted on our deepest self in such a manner that it becomes absorbed in our psyche. Having absorbed the feelings of our inscription, we accepted the ideologies that had been imprinted upon us. We learned to accept what our religion and our culture demanded us to be, with its policies of ‘ought and ought not’

and ‘should and should not’ in the process of finding our identity. But in the process of our be[com]ing we are learning a reading and a listening to our stories that is across the grain, a reading that is ‘other-wise’, that is a reading that is wise to the ‘other’. For, as James H. Olthuis writes in his book *Knowing Other-wise, Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, “we have an invitation to meet and sojourn together in the wild spaces of love as alternatives both to modernist distancing or domination and to postmodern fluidity and fusion. Connection rather than control is the dominant metaphor” (KO 248). Let us therefore continue on our academic and faith journey together in a way that “may be mutually enriching” (KO 248).

Chapter 2

Kristeva's Signifying Process: The Revolutionary Symbolic/Semiotic Double Movement.

Kristeva has created a philosophy of language that fully accounts for the fact that we are embodied knowers, respecting both the senses and the thinking and discerning processes of our language. Her new theory of language maintains the symbolic element even as it maintains the semiotic as an all-important element in the signifying process. Although we will focus only on some aspects of Kristeva's philosophy of language, an understanding of these two elements of language is crucial as a frame for re-reading and understanding the biblical narrative of David and Bathsheba and the lexicon employed by some of its commentators, especially Harry Fernhout, J. Robert Vannoy, and Jonathan Kirsch.

Kristeva's Philosophy of Language

Kristeva's philosophy of language goes beyond structuralism into a post-structuralism. Structuralism is a theory that separates language from the person who uses language. By emphasizing the symbolic element of language with its focus on the norm of theoretical objectivity, structuralism makes distinctions, separates, and although it recognizes the semiotic, does not include it. Thus, Ann Gary notes that, "emotional tone is declared irrelevant to logical analysis: Frege's term was the "Farbung," or colouring that had to be stripped off words to exhibit logical form" (Gary and Pearsall 246). Hence, in structuralist theories of language the semiotic is rejected as having no significance in a perceived logical analysis that claims to be objective. "This is the distinction that defines the subject matter of structural linguistics as laid down by its founder Ferdinand Saussure ... linguistics casts out of the province of its study the

personal, passionate, and intentional sources of linguistic expression” (Gary and Pearsall 247).

Kristeva critiques structuralist theories of language because they are not representational of their contemporary culture, and they dismiss the personal and the passionate of the lived realities of persons as embodied speaking subjects. With a post-structural approach to her philosophy of language Kristeva opens the neat and closed theoretical structures that have built language and transgresses its orderly and clearly demarcated ways. By recovering, that is by her renewed use and inclusion of the notion of the semiotic, in a symbolic/semiotic double movement, she creates a new, continuously emergent system of language for meaning above and beyond the generally accepted meaning spoken of in structuralism.

Kristeva begins the exposition of her philosophy of language in the ‘Prolegomenon’ to *Revolution in Poetic Language* where she argues that structuralist philosophies of language are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs (RPL 13). Noëlle McAfee elucidates, “In other words, most non-poststructuralist theories of language treat language as a dead artefact, something that can be catalogued, archived, entombed – a formal object of study” (McAfee 14). Kristeva argues that language theories of structuralism also take a fragment of a thought or an expression and treat that fragment as if it represents the whole of what is possible to know about a people who produced this language. Kristeva notes that these fragmented codes of language are not only present and able to be analyzed in ancient stories, including biblical narratives, but are also found and studied in contemporary discourse concerning the empirical data of human existence. Our own stories are set in the context of our time and our place with its idiolects that are so familiar to us that we do not recognize them as fragments of esoteric language. Kristeva argues that, “The archivistic, archaeological, and necrophilic methods on which the scientific imperative was founded – the building of arguments

on the basis of empirical evidence, a systematizable given, and an observable object – in this case, language – are an embarrassment when applied to modern or contemporary phenomena” (RPL 13). Kristeva posits that these old methods of understanding language and communication now create unease when they are used for prescriptive rather than descriptive purposes outside of their time and place; that is when, instead of describing life stories that may engage the individual reader in a learning process of meanings and emerging truths, they are used to dictate the direction of contemporary life.

Thus, “Where structuralism looked at systems synchronically (in snapshots of time), post-structuralism looked at systems diachronically, through time, as events or processes” (McAfee 6). Whereas in these snapshots or moments of time we can gather fragments of communicative efforts, it is through the experiences of events and processes of time that we can see connections as they develop. Kristeva includes the articulation of lived experiences in the events of time as they unfold, and her philosophy of language is therefore not an abstract theory, but it involves the lived realities of the speaking subject. McAfee concludes that therefore, “This makes it impossible to study her theory of language apart from her theory of subjectivity” (McAfee 9). Kristeva’s theories of language and of the person as a subject are intricately interwoven, and McAfee makes it clear that, “Kristeva’s post-structuralism is focused on speaking subjects – human beings who signify and are constituted through their signifying practices” (McAfee 9). We note that for Kristeva speaking subjects are constituted through language, that is, they are in a process of be[com]ing subjects through the signifying practices of language. Thus she considers that structuralism is a theory that is rigidly structured and that, in the strictness of its inflexibility, limits itself to the boundaries of a symbolic system of language, thereby not making allowances for the fluidity of a process. Kristeva reckons that it is with such

a rigidly structured language theory that we see ancient, “fragmented codes in the discourse of our contemporaries, and think that by codifying them we can possess them” (RPL 13). She thus argues that by codifying fragments of language some people think that these fragments can be owned or possessed as totally understood, that they can ‘master’ a text so that they can discern ‘the’ meaning of the text. Life stories may also be considered fragments for we can know only what the narrator of the story tells us. Nevertheless these stories, as fragments of records of the lives of people, whether contemporary or people of antiquity such as those in the biblical story of David and Bathsheba, are then used as empirical evidence of a whole which is only part of a process, and which is only partly known through the symbolic system of language. Consequently, this empirical evidence given in a fragmented text only leads to partial knowledge of a partial process. Yet, there is no acknowledgment that the linguistic records of this process are fragmentary and that any knowledge built on these records, presented in the codified system and systematic arguments of discourse, discloses only fragmented truths.

With this focus on the symbolic in language, Kristeva argues that structuralism misses what is considered ‘other’ in language, that is, what the words of symbolic language cannot convey, and that therefore it is not representational of the lived experiences of those who use language as speaking subjects. It is from this perspective that Kristeva addresses language theories when she writes:

The representations and theories of language ... approach through the name “language” an object that is noticeably different each time. By shedding light on it from various points of view, by making it known in different ways, these theories testify especially to a type of knowledge that is specific to a society or a historical period (LU 325).

This understanding makes Kristeva’s philosophy of language such a good frame for both discerning and understanding the trajectory of our chosen biblical story. It means approaching

the story, an object, noticeably differently depending on the time and the location of the reader. It permits the light of various views in our examination process so that we may come to know it in different ways and thus make a story that is specific to a society and a historical period relevant for us today.

Kristeva acknowledges this influence of language on culture and of culture on language in an intersection of representation and meaning through our Symbolic order. Kristeva explains that the Symbolic order is the order of signification of the social realm. For the purpose of signification, Kristeva has two distinct elements in her theory, the semiotic and the symbolic in one Symbolic order of language (RK 10). We have seen how the symbolic, the representational dimension of language is used in language theories but, because of the importance of the semiotic in her language theory, we will first examine the concept of the semiotic element as used by Kristeva.

Semiotic Chora in a Heterogeneous Language Philosophy

Kristeva's move to post-structuralism creates a new language theory in which she develops the semiotic as a different but equally necessary element as the symbolic for the Symbolic order. It is thus necessary to examine the source of the semiotic for Kristeva and its connections to *chora* of ancient Greek philosophy. In applying her concept of the semiotic, Kristeva borrows "the term *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus* to denote an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (RPL 25). It is difficult to describe that which has no words and no place, but *chora* is understood as a primordial non-place where the subject is generated

and negated, where there is no symbolic unity, identity, deity, or community of the regulating process of the symbolic. Kristeva gives a historic perspective that places *chora*

at the very beginning of philosophy, before thought was constricted by the notion that language must reflect ideas, Plato, recalling the work of the atomists, spoke in the *Timaeus* of the *chora*, an ancient, mobile, unstable receptacle, prior to the One, to the father, and even to the syllable, metaphorically suggesting something nourishing and maternal (ITB 5).

It is here with Plato, at the beginning of philosophy that Kristeva finds her source of inspiration for *chora*. Kristeva interprets the Platonic notion of the semiotic *chora* as "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (RPL 92). For Kristeva then, *chora* is an unnameable semiotic receptacle, a place that is not a place, but an ancient, mobile, unstable receptacle of emotions, desires, and drives, of nourishment, with an elusive lexicon, with no language or words to express that which we feel and experience. The very presence of the semiotic as *chora* opposes the symbolic representation that would deny or disregard the semiotic in language.

Kelly Oliver explains that, "Kristeva defines the semiotic *chora* as 'a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated'" (RK 46). Although full of movement, the semiotic *chora* is not chaos, it is not disorder, but it has a different regulatory process than the symbolic, an order that gives its own unity, identity and community on a discontinuous basis that must continuously be repeated. Semiotic *chora* is a "rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position" (RPL 26), which resists intelligibility and signification, it is organized through an ordering, a regulating process, which is not according to symbolic law. Yet, semiotic *chora* is a necessary element or modality of the Symbolic order of language in the tension of the possible/impossible dialectic between the semiotic code and the symbolic

system. *Chora* depends on the dialectic, yet refuses it, for although Kristeva speaks of ‘the’ *chora*, *chora* cannot be posited and cannot be contained or given a certain and specific place. Semiotic *chora* reveals an archaic dimension that is pre-verbal, a pre-discussion of rhythm, tone and colour that is always traversing a language that is disruptive to the symbolic. Oliver claims that Kristeva “tries to fill the *chora* with words even while she attempts to bring it into words. Hers is a struggle that takes place within language ...” (RK 144). Semiotic *chora*, in its searching for an understanding and a knowing beyond the words of the symbolic system of language creates a dilemma, for how to explain with the words of the symbolic the meaning structure within the semiotic experience? How to hear and understand our stories and the consequent theoretical and ideological discussions based on that analysis, discussions that not only stimulate philosophical discourse, but also deeply affect us in our spiritual and psychological being? How do we express the experience of a semiotic motility that says, ‘I know it, but I do not have the words to tell it,’ and another person responds, ‘I know what you mean’? Empathy and compassion do not necessarily require words of the symbolic to convey and understand deep felt emotions, and the difficulty to represent the non-representational of the semiotic order in symbolic language is often experienced with a body language of tears, laughter, and sighs at times too deep for words. The semiotic *chora* as part of language can therefore be understood as a modality of non-speech that imprints our psyche through our experiences. We are inscribed in our psyche before we can speak and this inscription continues after we have attained the symbolic words of language by the traces of experiences that we may not even remember, but which mark us nevertheless. Although the semiotic is a modality before and beyond symbolic language, this psychic

imprint is a process of life that becomes reflected in and through language. Infants have memory traces of being loved and they thrive when held and suffer when they are left in isolation. An infant can recognize gentle speech as well as the angry shouts it may hear even though it does not understand the words. Adults remain sensitive to how something is said as much as to what is being said, and we become more cognizant of the explicit and implicit use of our language, the overt and the implied in communication. It is this semiotic *chora* that communicates in our psychic being in waves rather than words, in movements that have the power to energize or depress as we try to articulate what we experience.

However, to articulate what we experience, to convey the significance of the semiotic, takes us out of the semiotic realm for as soon as we speak of this significance and try to express it with words we have entered the world of symbolic language. It is therefore a paradox that the semiotic can only be explained with the words of the symbolic. Nevertheless, Tina Chanter explains that, “The semiotic/ symbolic distinction is not offered as a mutually exclusive one. Semiotic meaning can only emerge retroactively, and can only be expressed within the terms of the symbolic” (EPD 184). We can only articulate through symbolic language the meaning of what we have learned in the semiotic after it has happened, after we experienced it.

Accordingly, we must use the words of the symbolic system to express the logic and the meaning of the semiotic experience. This revolution in language is possible because “both the semiotic and the symbolic are processes, not static entities” (Moi 1986, 12). Thus we strive to connect the semiotic element and its ambiance and ambiguity, with the symbolic and its rational and objective element of language. Kristeva claims that without the combination of the symbolic and the semiotic functions there is no meaning, no signification, because “signification, the Symbolic

order, is always heterogeneous” (RK 10). Kristeva thus posits that the Symbolic order contains the heterogeneity of both the symbolic element of signification with words that build upon words to form sentences that communicate and give meaning, and the semiotic element as the representation of affects (ITB 4), which stands for what is rejected in the Symbolic order of structuralism. Kristeva asserts there can be no signification in the homogeneity of a symbolic that rejects the semiotic. Therefore, in acknowledging the influences of the oscillation of the different modalities of representational language, Kristeva places the semiotic as representations of affects with the labile, that is, the unstable that is liable to change, and the psychic, the sacred, intuitive and perceptive traces, in conjunction with the lexicon of symbolic representation in the Symbolic order of language. Thus the heterogeneity of the symbolic system and semiotic order function in a double movement, a dialectical oscillation in one Symbolic system of language. Oliver explains, “Words are made up of two heterogeneous levels. While on the symbolic level they signify, on the semiotic level they act and activate. This double movement between the symbolic and the semiotic, this necessary oscillation, is nevertheless revolutionary” (RK 97). This oscillation, this movement of signification that elicits and accommodates a revolution in poetic language also advocates revolutionary action in and through language.

We thus see that Kristeva emphasizes the semiotic as ‘other’ to the symbolic element, an ‘other’ that can subvert the central structures of traditional language theories, and open them up to infinite possibilities represented in and through poetic language. Consequently, Kristeva’s language theory of a Symbolic order that consists of symbolic and semiotic elements is at once structured and heterogeneous. For Kristeva, “the point is to go beyond the theatre of linguistic representations to make room for pre- or translinguistic modalities of psychic inscription, which we call semiotic in view of the root meaning of the Greek *semion*, trace, distinctive mark,

distinguished feature” (RPL 25). Kristeva is recognizing that the lingual dimension of reality (for her the Symbolic order) in its unique particularity does not only have an intricate and inextricable interface with the logico-rational (the specifically symbolic moment in the Symbolic order) but also with the psychic modality as it inscribes the lingual. This she calls the semiotic. In going beyond the theatre of linguistic representations of the symbolic and including the semiotic, Kristeva makes room in her language philosophy for other communicative modalities. Kristeva argues that an understanding of the semiotic has revolutionary power because it introduces drives into language; it is the repository of drives in language, the rhythm and music that express drives (RK 96). When the semiotic is recovered and included in language, Oliver explains that, “It is not that language represents the drive, which is impossible. Rather, language, specifically poetic and avant-garde language can *reactivate* drives” (RK 96). Bodily drives are other than language but they become visible as the semiotic in *signifiante*, indeed this is the interweaving of the bio-psychic and the lingual mentioned above. This semiotic of the signifying process is the reflection, therefore not so much the representation as the repository of bodily drives in language. Language that reflects that we are embodied speaking subjects allows us to recognize that we live not only rationally but also relationally. It illustrates that communication, understanding, and knowledge are generated not only through language, thought, discernment and judgments, but by our whole being. Therefore, in Kristeva’s philosophy of language, the inclusion of the semiotic element with the symbolic element in the Symbolic order of language represents a heterogeneous and oscillating practice.

The semiotic *chora* is thus an unnameable semiotic place of emotions, desires, and drives, a metaphor of nourishment, and with an elusive lexicon, with no language or words to express that which we feel and experience. It is a powerful notion that this revolutionary concept

of the semiotic in poetic language, graceful, flowing, sensitive and profound, and avant-garde language, forward-looking, innovative, and advocate of change, can reactivate the drives that have been repressed in an objective theory of language. With Kristeva the semiotic, which was once repressed in symbolic language, has become recognized through a heterogeneous and revolutionary theory of language as ‘other’ logics come alive through its reactivation. She therefore speaks out against the theorists who “persist in seeking the truth of language by formalizing utterances that hang in midair” (RPL 13), which are not grounded and connected in a manner that is conducive to communication. She posits that one cannot find the truth of and in language by separating the person, the speaking subject, from the words that are spoken to create understanding. When we attempt to separate the person from language, it is then that we leave words hanging in midair and we make these fragments and utterances of language do what they cannot do, that is, be pinned down in a symbolic system of language without reference or connection to the person who spoke the words.

The Symbolic with the Semiotic Element in the Signifying Process of Language

Thus for Kristeva “the term ‘semiotic’ in its Greek sense” ... means “distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration” (RPL 25). It has a “‘*distinctiveness*’ that allows us to connect it to a precise modality in the signifying process” (RPL 25). As we now focus on the symbolic element of Kristeva’s Symbolic order, we note her use of lower case ‘s’ and upper case ‘S’ to indicate the distinction between the symbolic element and the Symbolic order. Oliver clarifies that, “Kristeva uses the symbolic in two senses to refer not only to the Symbolic order but also to a specifically symbolic element within the Symbolic order that she opposes to the semiotic element” (RK 10). In the Symbolic order “the

symbolic is heterogeneous to the semiotic” and the semiotic creates a “dialectical tension that keeps society going” (RK 10). It keeps society going because the symbolic and the semiotic elements or moments each make their own contributions to the Symbolic order, and the tension between these two elements is central for representation and for signification. For even though the symbolic element represents language of the word, of the name, and of the law, the “Symbolic order is not just the order of Law ... it is also the order of resistance to Law,” and “change, even revolution, can take place within representation, while acknowledging that all is representation” (RK 10). Thus we see the tension between the symbolic and semiotic elements in the Symbolic order of language as they oscillate, working with and against each other to both represent the Law and to resist the Law, as representative of accepted rules and regulations of our social system and cultural structures.

However, “the operation of the semiotic within signification opens up the possibility of explaining cultural change” as it “continually proliferates cultural possibilities” (RK 10). Oliver notes that, “For Kristeva, it is the recovery of the semiotic disposition in language that calls signifying practice to its crisis; the semiotic in language is revolutionary” (RK 96). The crisis that this revolutionary inclusion of the semiotic generates occurs as we articulate changes in our understanding of language as representation of our time and culture. Important for this signifying process then is the placing of the semiotic within signification to open the possibility of examining life stories to discover their overt and covert meanings, and through this analytic process come to an understanding of culture and of generating possible cultural changes. Thus the semiotic element in language is necessary to examine the characters as subjects in both ancient and contemporary stories and to understand the impact of our lexicon, what our words reveal about us and what the ethical consequences are of the language that we use.

Insider language codes that are esoteric to the ‘other’ as an outsider, what Kristeva also calls the stranger, are the codes we use to convey what we want and need to say without actually articulating it. These codes allow the functioning of a culture within a culture and within a society; they allow a mode of articulation without an explicit expression. Thus the esoteric language codes of our particular culture, our perceptions and discernments, are implicitly reflected in the lexicon of our rhetoric, and this reveals our bias in a language that conveys without saying, that implies complicity and guilt without explicit expression. We will see examples of these codes in our examination of the commentaries on the story of David and Bathsheba. Hence the importance of our lexicon that not only signifies and communicates what we want to say, but also conveys what it performs on us as we read life stories, in other words, our lexicon shows a variability and fluidity of interpretations, discussions, and understandings in our discourse. These linguistic and cultural codes make the system possible. Kristeva, in her many calls for revolution, asserts that therefore our philosophies of language must also address the practical and ethical consequences of our language use; it must affect our praxis, that is, our customary mode of behaviour, acknowledging the various points of view of our different locations.

This attention to cultural possibilities in the representation and signification of our language is important because “social problems always have their core in representation” and when we change the representation of the culture in which we live, we can change the way we live, making it possible for the social structure of our culture to change and for our lives to change (RK 7, 11). Therefore, the examination of the lexicon used in the telling of the story of David and Bathsheba and the choice of language used by its commentators, inexorably lead to an exploration of the influences of our biases and prejudices on an

understanding of the story. This exploration and understanding then include an awareness of the importance of our language for the social structure of our culture and possible social and cultural changes. Lechte argues that the development of Kristeva's revolutionary theory of language, of representation and signification shows "her concern to provide a counterbalance against a culture out of balance" (RK 11). As language represents our culture, and symbolic language without the semiotic is out of balance, so the representation of our culture through symbolic language, without the recognition of the semiotic in language, is out of balance. Therefore, to create a balance, Kristeva provides an oscillation of the semiotic and the symbolic for one signifying practice as the process of the speaking subject (RK 10). For the speaking subject to find new meanings in and through language we must rethink our cultural conditioning of language and of meaning, we must re-read our canons and re-interpret our stories.

We noted that for Kristeva speaking subjects are "human beings who signify and are constituted through their signifying practices" (McAfee 9). But who are these human beings that are Kristeva's speaking subjects? Andrea Nye explains how 'French feminists'⁸ "propose to break into the rigid symbolic order that supports male dominance and make a place for women" (Gary and Pearsall 233). It is argued that women have been the absent, the silenced, and that now we must make a place for women both in language and in culture, for "What needs to be spoken is what has been repressed within patriarchal culture and patriarchal theory" (RK 188). Patriarchal culture is a hegemonic and homogeneous structure in which women have been repressed as the 'other' and its language has repressed the concept of an 'other' of the symbolic element, what Kristeva calls the semiotic element of the Symbolic order of our signifying

⁸ 'French feminists' is an identification coined by Anglo-American feminists for a group of philosophers that includes Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Sixous and Catharine Clément.

system. But Kristeva emphasizes that the Symbolic order of language is for women as well as for men, for “the Symbolic order is the domain of speaking beings” (RK 158). Hence, Kristeva calls for all of us, women and men, to be speaking beings, that is, speaking subjects. However, Kristeva notes that there is a gendered distinction in language and, rather than doing away with the Symbolic order and advocating a ‘feminine language’ or ‘feminine writing’, she argues that women should place themselves within the Symbolic order without being mastered or co-opted by the dominant hegemonic discourse (RK 158). Thus, on the one hand Kristeva urges women to be speaking subjects, to take up their rightful place within the Symbolic order and to claim it as their own and, on the other hand, she adds the caveat that women are not to be mastered by this dominant discourse, that is, we are not to succumb to the explicit and implicit ideologies it represents. Rather, we are to challenge it, to find a non-dominant language within the symbolic system for what is then considered our rightful place as speaking subjects within the Symbolic order. To claim this rightful place in language can be problematic when the words are stripped of the personal. Margaret Waller, translator of Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language* notes that, “the personal dissolves into the impersonal through the exclusive use of a democratic yet royal ‘we’ (more common in French than in English) that paradoxically calls attention to its own self-effacement” (RPL ix). In this self-effacing manner, ‘woman’ is often absented by this language system. Waller, facing the challenges of translation writes that,

‘*Le sujet*’ (the speaking/thinking agent) is of ‘masculine’ gender but is usually rendered in English as ‘it’. Unfortunately, using the impersonal pronoun in this instance would merely compound the already considerable difficulties of ambiguous antecedents. On the other hand, ‘s/he’ and ‘his/her’ would overly concretize what remains for Kristeva a highly abstract concept (RPL ix).

In light of these difficulties, Waller explains that in her translation she chose to “use the masculine ‘he’ and ‘his’ with their standard connotations of universality” (RPL ix).

Waller adds that for Kristeva this did not seem to be a problem, for “Kristeva explained in a note to me that ‘the subject’ in this book is so abstract or universal that it concerns both sexes. We can therefore keep the ‘he’ In reality, feminine ‘subjectivity’ is a different question but it does not elude the general realm of *subjecthood* [*subjectivité*] or of subjectification” (RPL 235, n 8). Hence, even with the acknowledgement that feminine subjectivity is a different question, that it is ‘other’, the limits of our language result in the fact that also here in Kristeva’s language theory, as in our language use, ‘woman’ is absented in the assumed universality of the masculine in our symbolic system. With an awareness of the presence of this absence in our Symbolic order, in academic writing and in the representation language of our conversations, there is a significant attempt to include women by the use of an inclusive language. Consequently, although the absented woman as the feminine subject remains as a presence of absence, this is not an overt problematic for Kristeva, although she allows that it is a problem in women’s lived reality as represented in their life stories. She asserts that, “Women must take the Symbolic order very seriously in order to challenge it” (RK 111). This confirms Kristeva’s claim that in order for women to have their rightful place in language and culture they are to ‘master’, that is to be eminently skillful in using the dominant discourse of the Symbolic order but are not to be ‘mastered’, that is controlled or dominated by it. We will therefore take the Symbolic order of language very seriously in order to challenge the symbolic lexicon used by commentators of the story of David and Bathsheba. Because both women and men are represented in language and using the Symbolic order as speaking subjects, we acknowledge that the symbolic element is more than a lexicon, more than words in a system. The symbolic element provides the

possibility for women and men to be speaking subjects who can articulate what is being thought and experienced. Speaking subjects can make judgments and take positions and thus this element of signification can make of a speaking subject an active agent. This is why the absenting and silencing of a person, or of a group of people, has such an impact on their identity as speaking subjects with a proper place. This is also why our lexicon as representative of our worldview, of discernments and judgments, are so important in the examination and understanding of our stories. As we saw above, Kristeva therefore argues that we are not to accept a patriarchal symbolic system that excludes women yet defines us in a hegemonic and dominant discourse, but we are to challenge this exclusive discourse. With Kristeva we can argue that one cannot exclude women from our dominant discourse just as one cannot exclude the semiotic element from our Symbolic order.

This inclusion of the semiotic ‘other’ with the symbolic element as a heterogeneous and oscillating practice in her system of language Kristeva calls *signifiance* (McAfee 38). “Signifiance,” writes Leon Roudiez, “refers to the work performed in language (through the heterogeneous articulation of semiotic and symbolic dispositions) that enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say” (McAfee 38). The tension of *signifiance* that is created by the dispositions of the symbolic and the semiotic elements in language is missing when the semiotic is absent. But this absence, this repression of the semiotic disposition, affects the meaning making process of language, whereas the inclusion of the semiotic for *signifiance* shows a transformation that leads to revolutionary changes in language, in representation, understanding, and existential reality. McAfee notes that, “*Signifiance* is the meaning produced by the semiotic in conjunction with the symbolic” (McAfee 38). With this

Roudiez and McAfee explain how Kristeva's symbolic system and semiotic order are both needed to operate together in one heterogeneous signifying system to give *signifiante*, that is, to give meaning in and through language. *Signifiante* indicates the unlimiting and unbounded generating process of poetic language, a de-structuring and structuring practice, a passage, a process which leads to the outer boundaries of language, of the subject, and of society. A limited and bounded system of language, as represented by structuralism, creates a withdrawn body, that is, a body that is "withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience" (RPL 13). The imbrications, that is, the overlapping of social and cultural historical influences on these experiences, are then disregarded. *Signifiante* produces instead a living language and a speaking subject. The inclusion of the semiotic for *signifiante* is the recognition of the 'other' that evokes images, emotions and sensations, a beauty of nuances and meanings in our linguistic expressions of symbolic representation.

Kristeva posits that this opening of language through its unlimited and unbounded generating process of *signifiante* takes us far from the realm of discourse and art and into the realm of practice, from product to process, a process which she compares to a revolution that takes place in the individual person as a subject. Recognizing both the symbolic and the semiotic elements in the process of *signifiante* is indicative of an awareness of the openness and process of poetic language that frees the speaking subject to be open and in process as a subject. Kristeva argues that in this heterogeneous, generating process of *signifiante* the subject is not withdrawn and separated from direct experience but is hereby connected to the imbrications of her socio-historical location. Thus to read and examine, to rethink and reinterpret our stories, Kristeva advocates an open and heterogeneous system of language for *signifiante*, because the use of language as a closed system, as a structure of "static thoughts, products of a leisurely

cogitation removed from historical turmoil” (RPL 13), that is using words as a code or idiolect, or as a text without movement, removes a fragmentary text from the complexities of its historical and cultural context. Hence, as a text is then no longer grounded in its context, so its truths are disconnected from the direct experience of the process that produced the text.

Moreover, the words of language, as the embodiments or avatars of hegemonic dominant ideology, have in this way been used as a tool to repress the process of discovery and the unfolding of an understanding of the, as yet, hidden truths in our stories. Dominant ideology is, “the whole system of myths and prejudices that gives our view of society and of our place in it a specific orientation” (RPL 8). In this dominant social construct of our culture and language the repression of a heterogeneity of ‘otherness’ is noted in the construction of identity where ‘man’ is considered the norm and ‘woman’ is thought to be ‘other’. As an example of an articulated social construct of the concept of woman with an identity as ‘other’ we note the biblical story of Dinah, daughter of Leah of the family of Jacob. The NIV (81) shows an explanatory family tree with the names of the sons of Jacob, but Dinah is referred to as Jacob’s ‘other child’ rather than as his ‘daughter’. This overtly expresses a conceptual worldview that reduces Dinah to someone who is ‘other’ in the family, ‘other’ to the sons, instead of showing a conceptual worldview that acknowledges Dinah as the daughter of Jacob and a sister to the sons with its connotation of her belonging in this family relationship. Thus we note the power of the chosen lexicon in the cultural conditioning of a dominant ideology with its specific orientation in this family tree.

Kristeva argues that we must transgress the cultural conditioning of a dominant hegemonic ideology of language and meaning which is based on fragments of non-contextual words. For, she explains, some methods of language have changed a communicative language into an insider language that divides us “into self-contained, isolated islands – heteroclit spaces

existing in different temporal modes (as relics or projections) and oblivious of one another” (RPL 13, 14). For a person to be located as a self-contained, isolated island, with a heteroclit space, that is, a space that is an exception to the rule, keeps this person outside the realm of communication, often through language codes that include and exclude, that create insiders and outsiders. Roudiez explains the danger of these insider language codes because, “It includes all those things we take for granted, that we do not question because we assume they are true – not realizing that instead of being truths they are elaborate constructions that serve whatever group, class, or party is holding power” (RPL 8). This knowledge of the power of ideology emphasizes the need to be aware of our use of language and lexicon, to deconstruct the constructs and to recognize when they are used to maintain the hegemonic dominant ideology of a culture. Consequently, Kristeva advocates a post-structural theory that with the symbolic system of words includes the semiotic order, the senses, the personal, the emotional, the passionate, and the intentional sources of what we say and how we say it. Kristeva’s focus is therefore on a language for speaking subjects, not self-contained and isolated islands, as she weaves subjectivity and language into one area of inquiry (McAfee 14). Kristeva argues that a theory of language cannot be set apart from the beings that use this language, for there is not a speaking being to consider unless this being is speaking or using language in some way (McAfee 14). Thus, for Kristeva, “any theory of language is a theory of the subject” (McAfee 14). We therefore emphasize that Kristeva’s theory of language and her theory of the subject are not separate theories that can be categorized in carefully constructed individual boxes, but there is fluidity in her thinking and in the connections between these theories.

The Transgression and Infinite Possibilities of Poetic Language

In order for us to participate in Kristeva's revolution in poetic language, we need to transgress the boundaries and limits of language. Transgression, as represented in the symbolic system of language, can be understood to mean an infraction or a sin, or as violating a rule or breaking a law. This form of transgression has a negative connotation. However, in considering symbolic language and its cognitive powers, transgression can also be understood in a positive light, in the sense that through transgression we become aware of boundaries. Through transgression boundaries are illuminated, but not necessarily destroyed. Transgression lets us know the boundaries as we suddenly see them like a flash of light in the darkness. Transgression reifies, that is, it treats abstractions like boundaries as substantially existing, as concrete material objects. Although boundaries appear solid, the Canadian poet Leonard Cohen notes in his song *Anthem* that, "there's a crack, a crack in ev'rything, that's how the light gets in". Boundaries may reinforce restraints, but it is in the transgression of these boundaries, in facing and overcoming the constraints by finding the cracks in its armour that we see an opening of space, an expansion of boundaries. As the light comes in, we have a wider and deeper vision of what can be, a new or enhanced worldview, a space where questions may be articulated, where learning can take place, where revolutionary positive change becomes not only possible but where it is welcomed. Kristeva calls this transgression of static language, looking for the cracks in its system and the transformation into a living relationship with a text, "productive violence" (RPL 16). Productive violence is like the necessary dying of a seed in order for it to sprout forth and grow into a new plant. This transgression with its productive violence is the opening of language as a closed system, and in the cracks of this opening we see the light come in, an opening out of our boundaries.

Kristeva thus developed a theory of language that generated a new signifying process which she introduced as a *Revolution in Poetic Language*. For Kristeva the expression of signification in this signifying process, which “in literature implies the possibility of denotation” (RPL 57) is part of the symbolic system of language with its grammatical structures. But, Kristeva notes, “poetic language – especially modern poetic language – transgresses grammatical rules,” and in so doing “the *positing* of the symbolic (...) finds itself subverted, not only in its possibilities of *Bedeutung* or denotation (...), but also as a possessor of *meaning* (which is always grammatical, indeed more precisely, syntactic)” (RPL 57 *original emphasis*). By destabilizing language through the transgression of its limiting symbolic, poetic language subverts the power of positing the symbolic as ‘the’ possessor and expresser of meaning. Poetic language thus both imitates “the constitution of the symbolic as *meaning*”, and dissolves “not only the denotative function but also the specifically thetic function of *positing* the subject” (RPL 57, 58 *original emphasis*). Hence poetic language is important for not only understanding how meaning is represented in and through language, but also for how we understand the subject as represented in and through language. In effect, Kristeva’s poetic language “stands for the infinite possibilities of language” with “all other language acts” as “merely partial realizations of the possibilities inherent in ‘poetic language’” (RPL 2). Poetic language shows that a revolution in language can take place in all its possibilities. Participating in the “exploration and discovery of the possibilities of language” can free the subject from “a number of linguistic, psychic, and social networks” as we study the “*becoming* of the significations of signs” (RPL 2, 3 *original emphasis*). Consequently, poetic language is of the highest importance for Kristeva because it “puts the subject in process/on trial through a network of marks and semiotic facilitations” (RPL 57). As language becomes alive in us and for us, as it goes beyond symbolic representation and

opens to the semiotic, another system emerges from it. Kristeva considers this emerging system of language an open system which overrides universal meaning. This is a continuously emergent system, growing, developing, in-process. McAfee notes that, "All our attempts to use language neatly, clearly, and in an orderly way are handmaidens of our attempts to be neat, clearly demarcated, orderly subjects. But such attempts are continuously disrupted by certain elements of our signifying practise" (McAfee13). This disruption is the revolutionary symbolic/semiotic double movement of language in a process that opens horizons of possibilities in the search for meaning for subjects-in-process.

The Murky Water of Metaphors of Non-Speech

We have seen how Kristeva interprets the Platonic notion of *chora* as "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (RPL 25). Having thus examined the importance for understanding *chora* from the perspective of the semiotic in language, we will now approach the concept of *chora* for an understanding of its role in the use of metaphors and metaphorical language. Plato also refers to *chora* as metaphorically nourishing and Kristeva connects it to the principle of a metaphorical maternal (TL 5). She writes,

Let us call 'maternal' the ambivalent principle that is bound to the species, on the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable that one imagines as femininity, non-language or body (Moi 1986, 161).

Thus we note that although Kristeva refers to *chora* as a metaphorical maternal, thereby suggesting something nourishing, she also refers to the maternal as an ambivalent principle, an ordering principle, which does not suggest nourishment. Rather Kristeva calls the maternal *chora* an ancient, mobile, unstable receptacle. Kristeva hereby enters the murky waters of

metaphors of non-speech to explain the semiotic *chora* as a maternal element in language and the symbolic as the paternal element in language. Oliver explains: “She argues that language is heterogeneous. It is composed of both maternal semiotic elements and paternal symbolic elements” (RK 157). Kristeva posits the metaphorical maternal semiotic element prior to the metaphorical paternal symbolic element and thus prior to language. Therefore, in its heterogeneity there is a dichotomy between the metaphorical maternal semiotic, that is, the world of non-speech, of emotions, desires and drives, as both nourishing and as a principle, and the metaphorical paternal symbolic, that is the world of language, word and law, each with its own power. Moreover, although it would appear that the power of the metaphorical father would be stronger than the power of the metaphorical maternal because of the power of language and law, Kristeva claims that this maternal of the semiotic has the power to topple the apparent stronger one into the unnameable one, into semiotic *chora*, because *chora* is “necessarily enclosed in every questionable, interpretable, enigmatic object” (Moi 1986, 310). Thus the unnameable *chora* can topple the metaphorical paternal element as representative of law and order, because of the all pervasive presence of the semiotic *chora* in our life story, that ‘enigmatic object’ which gives the semiotic its power to question and to interpret, and thus to endanger the established and accepted law and order of the symbolic of the metaphorical father.

Kristeva thus analyzes the symbolic system of language with the metaphor of a paternal signifying element and the semiotic *chora* with the metaphor of a maternal signifying element and she locates the subject as the mediator between these two signifiers. However, in spite of Kristeva’s care in using paternal and maternal metaphors in language, Oliver warns us against interpreting essentialism in her philosophy, and writes, “Kristeva has been careful to separate the maternal element in language from either the feminine or woman.” (RK 157). Although

Kristeva reflects on stories of women, and we will focus on the stories of women in the trajectory of Bathsheba in the narrative of David, this is not done in order to connect the maternal element of language with the stories of women as if the two are solely interconnected. Rather in telling and examining our stories we are aware that both the maternal element and the paternal element of language are required to give meaning. Oliver elucidates that Kristeva, “argues that language is heterogeneous. It is composed of both maternal semiotic elements and paternal symbolic elements. But this has nothing to do with men and women. Both men and women use language” (RK 157). Therefore in telling and reading our stories both women and men use the maternal and paternal elements of language. Oliver clarifies, “The semiotic elements are not inherently the reserve of women while the symbolic elements are the reserve of men. On the contrary, Kristeva argues that men risk less by playing with the semiotic elements in language. This is because of their relationship to the maternal function in Western culture” (RK 157). Therefore, it is not so much Kristeva’s metaphorical use of the semiotic as a maternal function and the symbolic as a paternal function in language that can create a problem but rather our understanding of what we consider the maternal or paternal function in our culture. Oliver further explains that, “If men and women have a different relation to language, for Kristeva, this is because of the *representations* of the maternal (and paternal) functions in the West” (RK 157 *original emphasis*). Kristeva therefore advocates one Symbolic order of language containing the symbolic and the semiotic as metaphorical maternal and paternal elements and rejects the idea of a separate language for women and for men.

Kristeva’s use of maternal and paternal metaphors in language is deeply rooted in psychoanalytical language and theory. As Kristeva found Plato helpful for explaining the semiotic as *chora*, so the language of psychoanalysis is helpful in explaining her use of maternal

and paternal metaphors in language. She connects psychoanalytical theories of the “drives” which “are always already ambiguous,” to the “semiotized body” and notes that the drives are “structured around the mother’s body” (RPL 27). Linking the semiotized body with the mother’s body, Kristeva explains that, “the mother’s body is the not-yet-one that the believing and desiring subject will imagine as a ‘receptacle’” (RPL 241, n 21). Hence Kristeva connects the semiotized and maternal body to Plato’s *chora* as receptacle. She concludes that, “The mother’s body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, ...” (RPL 27). We thus see how Kristeva uses the metaphors of paternal and maternal elements of the symbolic and semiotic elements in language because of the importance of their linguistic representations as ordering principles, of the metaphorical ‘father’ of the Name, the world of word and law and of the metaphorical ‘mother’ with the conceptual place and value of the maternal and semiotic body in culture.

Lechte gives an analysis of Kristeva’s metaphors in the context of their relation to psychoanalysis and notes that, “Kristeva’s debt to psychoanalysis begins to become more evident with the ‘feminine’ coming to disrupt the Name-of-the-Father as the embodiment of the paternal function ... , and thus the Symbolic as the order of language and signification” (Lechte 5). He elucidates the use of the metaphorical ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ as elements of language when he explains that, “the feminine element as *chora* (a receptacle, as well as a distinctive mark) corresponds with the ‘poetic’ in language. For the feminine would be located in language’s unrepresentable materiality – its indeterminate and almost ephemeral aspect – the aspect which places in question all modes of formalization traditionally associated with ‘nationality’ (masculinity)” (Lechte 5, 6). The notion of the female as unrepresentable, as materiality and as indeterminate is already found in the Pythagorean table of opposites – and has in that context a

sexist meaning. Therefore we need to be aware of possible philosophical histories and extrapolations of our metaphors. For, although Oliver emphasizes that the metaphors of maternal and paternal elements in language are not an issue, that they have ‘nothing’ to do with men and women because both men and women use language (RK 157), our choice of metaphors can influence other possible metaphors. For instance, with a maternal metaphor we could describe the notion that the semiotic is ‘pregnant’ with possibilities of meanings and its inclusion in a theory of language ‘gives birth’ to new understanding. Even though this brings us further into the murky waters of metaphors, it indicates that choosing metaphors to convey meaning is important for what they represent and for what they, imbued with the values and ideologies of our culture, mean for us.

Gathering Threads

We have seen how with Kristeva’s revolution in poetic language we can examine anew our Symbolic system with the inclusion of the metaphors and principles of the paternal and the maternal, of both the symbolic and semiotic elements of language. Kristeva’s revolution in poetic language entails not only reaching the far ends of our language boundaries and of transgressing these boundaries, but also of reaching and displacing the boundaries and limits of a socially established signifying practice. Kristeva’s new approach to language and linguistic codes and boundaries is revolutionary because she works with the symbolic/semiotic double movement, and in the process of deconstructing constructs it constantly reconstructs.

We have seen the need to scrutinize the words that are used to describe philosophies, concepts, beliefs, and worldviews and the implications and consequences of how we use symbolic language and the meanings of our explicit and implicit lexicon. With Kristeva we can

explore how known and repressed semiotic traces inscribed on our psyche are revealed in the examination of ancient and contemporary stories, and how this influences us as we seek knowledge and understanding and listen for and hear a new logic that must be spoken for a new reality for the subject. Kristeva envisions that those who participate in this open and revolutionary process of language and subjectivity will also participate in *jouissance*, that is, the full joy of the many aspects of our being which this revolution will bring. We will consider the symbolic with its power of representation and the semiotic with its power to question in our examination of the story of David and Bathsheba. But before we do that we will discuss in our next chapter the role of the sacred and of love at the crossroad of the symbolic and the semiotic in the development of the speaking subject.

Chapter 3

The Sacred Crossroads of Love: Between Tyranny and Delirium

Kristeva's philosophical reflections on love and the sacred are a complex interweaving of concepts relating identity and space, subjectivity and one's proper place in culture and religion. In our previous chapters we learned that one's proper place is one's own special place, a psychic rather than a physical space that is necessary for one's development as a speaking and loving subject. We have seen in Kristeva's language theory that the semiotic and the symbolic elements in one Symbolic order are fundamental to her understanding of what it means to be a speaking subject in the world. We have become aware of how our lexicon reveals more than our analysis and interpretations, for it also expresses our worldviews, our religions, and our cultures. In this chapter we will focus on the sacred crossroads of love where the semiotic and symbolic meet and how this pertains to our understanding of the person as a subject who is in process with a developing proper place. In our next chapter we will focus on the role of abjection and how this is experienced in the be[com]ing of a self as a speaking subject with a proper place from which she can act with sovereignty. Kristeva's theories of love and the sacred, and the role of abjection will be examined in light of their contribution to the frame for our rereading and examination of the biblical narrative of David and Bathsheba.

To Experience Love and To Encounter the Sacred

For Kristeva the sacred crossroads of love are crucial for the development of the person as a speaking and loving subject. But what do we mean when we speak of love and of the sacred? Kristeva asks, "Do we speak of the same thing when we speak of love? And of which

thing?” (TL 2). And what do we mean by the sacred? With Kristeva we ask, “Indeed, what are we talking about?” (TL 2). Kristeva begins her *Tales of Love* by explaining that “no matter how far back my love memories go, I find it difficult to talk about them” (TL 1). Her memories of love “relate to an exaltation beyond eroticism that is as much inordinate happiness as it is pure suffering; both turn words into passion” (TL 1). Kristeva makes here an implicit reference to the symbolic and the semiotic elements of our language, the words and the passions. In the context of Plato and the discussion of love at the Symposium, she places “our loves – at the crossroads” (TL 75). It is here at the crossroads of love where happiness, suffering and love are best described with metaphors because, “the language of love is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be most straightforward; it is a flight of metaphors – it is literature” (TL 1). Kristeva notes Freud’s aphorism: “There is a joke saying that ‘Love is homesickness’” (SO 185). But if this maxim reveals a truth about loss or alienation, a loneliness with a longing for a ‘home’ in the sense of a place where we belong, a proper place where we can flourish, then we could also argue that love can be a ‘homecoming’ in the sense that in and through love, in the non-articulated relations of sharing and belonging, we may find a ‘home’ with our proper place. We then see how the semiotic of Kristeva’s theory of language expresses an experience and knowledge of love that reaches beyond the symbolic system.

Although in the English language we have only one word for ‘love’, the Greeks subdivided ‘love’ into *philia* as brotherly love and *eros* as passionate sexual love, and the Latin has *caritas* as a caring, nurturing love. Judaism has *hesed* or *Ahav*, with its loving steadfastness, and Christianity has the spiritual love of *agape* (TL 139). Each one is a different concept of what we know and understand as ‘love.’ Kristeva posits that “a true revolution took place, doubtless dependent on the waning Hellenistic world, but above all on a new, unprecedented,

scandalous, insane attitude, which transformed Greek *Eros* and biblical *Ahav* into *Agape* - Christian love” (TL 139). With *agape* love, “the Christian is assured of being loved, independently of his merits” and, because it is not based on our deserving, this “Christian love is definitely a *disinterested gift*” (TL 139). Kristeva elucidates that this *agape* love is a “theocentric love, as opposed to human deserved love” (TL 139). This theocentric love is a sacred love, as it reflects the holy. It is out of the understanding of this theocentric, sacred love that the author of the biblical letter of John teaches that “God is Love” (NIV 1 *John* 4: 8; TL 139, 141, 394 n. 10). As Kristeva contemplates John’s teaching she considers that “John’s ‘God is love,’ doubtless leaves us cold, but empty, too” (TL 381). There is a sense of desolation that the words can leave us cold if the discourse of love remains empty of felt experience. For although John posits the avowal that ‘God is love’, Kristeva laments that “we have no love discourse” that is grounded in this God of love, a God who is love, a discourse that can take us beyond ourselves, and so we are left with the alarming feeling that “love is edged with emptiness” (TL 381). When Kristeva then relates ‘God is love’ with Nietzsche’s hypothesis that ‘God is dead’, we understand why Kristeva laments the lack of a love discourse that “reveals our inability to respond to narcissism” (TL 381). Kristeva speaks of her own experiences of God and posits that we can experience *agape* as the gift of a sacred, undeserved theocentric love. In her quest for the sacred, Kristeva is looking for the semiotic in the symbolic words ‘God is love’. She searches for the sacred crossroads of love, the meeting place of the words of love and the elusive emotive sense of the words.

In the process of examining her own religious history and her relation to God, Kristeva’s ambivalence is evident. She writes that in her experiences as an analyst, “I rarely hear people talk about God, and, when it happens, as you can imagine, my ‘free-floating attention’ momentarily fastens, even crystallizes, on that word. I experience a hint of shame at the idea of

that curiosity; might it prove that God has not completely abandoned me, as I have a tendency to believe ordinarily?” (FS 23). Kristeva’s search for love and the sacred includes dealing with the double-bind of having once abandoned her religion and yet having a continued interest in God. With this interest she expresses hope, granted a hope she describes as a ‘curiosity’ with ‘a hint of shame’, that perhaps God did not abandon her when she discontinued the faith and practices of her religion. Thus Kristeva struggles with feeling a discontinuation of love for and from God, with feeling that God has abandoned her. Kristeva calls this feeling of abandonment, this “state of being cast away” abjection (TL 49), a concept which we shall discuss further in our following chapters in relation to the abjection experienced by David when he felt abandoned by God.

Kristeva considers that this feeling of abandonment is part of an underlying and universal ill, a sense of loss. It is a feeling that we have lost something essential to our well-being. Kristeva posits that this feeling of abandonment is part of the “crises of love”, a sign of the “lacks of love” which emphasize that “our times are sorely in want of love” and the necessity for “new codes of love” (TL 7, vii, 7). Thus here too the search for love and the search for the sacred are intertwined in an endeavour that is personal as well as “a philosophical and theological one” (TL vii). Hence Kristeva’s objective is not a search to understand abstract concepts of love and of the sacred, but rather an exploration of how we understand our personal experiences of love and our encounters with the sacred, how we meet love and the sacred in the between of our relationships, and how this is incarnated in our attitudes and behaviours. Although in this exploration Kristeva analyzes several dimensions of love and of the sacred, she concludes that love and the sacred are a mystery and in this mystery, “the sacred is love” (FS 105). By positing that the ‘sacred is love’ rather than ‘God is love’ she avoids a possible

theological discussion of what or who we understand by 'God' but instead focuses on the concept of the sacred, that is, on that which we hold holy.

Having made several references to the sacred, we have not yet discussed the possible definitions of the sacred. Kristeva mentions "the peculiar lucidity that the word *sacred* conveys for me, at the intersection of the same and the other, nature and culture, drive and language, at the origins of the human ..." (FS 136 *original emphasis*). She notes that "a saying of Goethe's comes to mind: 'What is the sacred?' he asks in a distich. 'What unites souls,' he replies" (FS 137). Kristeva elucidates that "The sacred is what, beginning from the experience of the incompatible, makes a connection. Between souls, if you like" (FS 137). It is the sacred, this connection, that can be encountered and experienced at various intersections or crossroads as listed above. This is thus one way the sacred can be defined and understood and we will address other aspects of it later. In considering the concept of the sacred for Kristeva it is important to understand that although she writes from the perspective of the Christian religion, she explains that for her, "the sacred may not be the same as the religious", and she makes a distinction "between belief and religion, on the one hand, and the sacred, on the other" (FS 26). For Kristeva belief and religion are constructions which vary from the imaginary as found in psychoanalysis to the ideological beliefs of atheistic communism to a belief in the omnipotence of science, but what they have in common is that "all these constructions deny sexual jouissance and the immature child's narcissistic dependency on its parents, but also our dependency on nature, biology, genetics" (FS 26). Rather than these constructions being helpful in leading us to an understanding of the complexity of the sacred and that the sacred is love, Kristeva considers that Freud was right when he wrote of "these illusory constructions" that "propose figures of consolation and of healing omnipotence" (FS 26). Freud considered that those who place

themselves, in all humility, under these illusory constructions, those who do not react against these constructions, instead of being “profoundly religious” are “irreligious in the truest sense of the word” (FS 26). They are irreligious because they seek their comfort and solace, their psychic and physical healing outside of themselves and outside of this world. They deny the connection of a sacredness of love experienced in interdependent relationships of sexual human beings who are at home in this world. Kristeva considers that loving, relational, interdependent beings can meet this sacred as a semiotic experience, that is, they can “encounter it, or not” (FS 16). The addition of ‘or not’ emphasizes that there are no guarantees for what may happen but if we remain in open systems of love, we leave ourselves, as loving subjects, amenable to possible encounters with the sacred, a sacred connection in and of love.

What is needed for us to be loving subjects is an understanding of love that regards both the human and the divine aspects, and that takes into account excess. This excess is expressed in Kristeva’s philosophy of love which provides a neologic that sees love as wild, immeasurable, fiery, a love that is a “madness capable of sweeping away all the dams of reason” (TL 4). This new logic shows that love cannot be rationalized for “love is an affliction, and by the same token it is a word or a letter” (TL 6). Therefore to speak and write of love inevitably involves the use of metaphor. Kristeva goes beyond the symbolic system of language to the ‘force’ of the words, to a subconscious force which works in us at the level of feeling and attitude in a semiotic *chora*. We have seen that for Kristeva love is an open system, open because it is a system that cannot be neatly theorized into one definition or categorized into one framework. This open system of love is thus structurally open to the semiotic and to the sacred, to interaction with others at the crossroads of love and the sacred in experience and encounter. In this interaction between speaking and loving subjects, of being open to the other, love is part of being a subject and can

lead to fulfillment, to an identity with a proper place, to *eudaimonia*, that is happiness or human flourishing, and to *jouissance*. Jane Marie Todd, translator of *The Feminine and the Sacred*, explains that for Kristeva, “*Jouissance*, a term with a very weighty past in French psychoanalytic and feminist theory, signifies extreme pleasure, including sexual pleasure and even orgasm, to the point of losing control or consciousness” (FS 15 n. 4). *Jouissance* is thus an encompassing joy, an excess like the wild, immeasurable, fiery love that is experienced in the depth of one’s being.

Because of her focus on experience, Kristeva is convinced that in order to be authentic, anyone who speaks or writes of love must do so in the first person, as I, that is, in our attitude, feeling, and preference as well as with the words and letters of our definitions and descriptions of love we must own what we theorize. For, Kristeva notes, “love never dwells in us without burning us” and to speak of love “is probably possible only on the basis of that burning” (TL 4). We must therefore theorize love from the heart of the experience of both its burning and its *jouissance*. It is with this experience that, “love is the time and space in which ‘I’ assumes the right to be extraordinary” (TL 5). To be in the time and place of love is to experience that which takes us beyond our self into the realm of the other, where love creates *jouissance* to make our self, our I, ‘extraordinary’, above and beyond the ordinary that we were before. She explains that “within love, a risk that might otherwise be tragic is accepted, normalized, made fully reassuring” (TL 4). The tragic would be the loss of one’s self into otherness, allowing one’s self “to become lost in the other, for the other” (TL 4). But in the beautiful risk of love, of being open to the other, there is not so much a loss as recognition “that in love ‘I’ has been an *other*” (TL 4). The I of a loving subject has then an awareness of being other to the other and Kristeva calls this a miraculous experience, “the experience of having been able to exist for, through, with

another in mind” (TL 4). To keep another in mind is not “a hymn to total giving to the other, such a love is also, and almost as explicitly, a hymn to the narcissistic power to which I may even sacrifice *it*, sacrifice *myself*” (TL 1, 2 *original emphasis*). We would sacrifice love if we were to sacrifice our self, for in the fusion of becoming lost or absorbed in the other we lose being other to the other. Instead, we are to be conscious of the relational so that in everything we are and do, it is with the other in mind. We are to respect the other and the self in the relational for “what is really at stake *between*” (TL 3 *original emphasis*). It is in the between that the meeting of the self and the other takes place. It is in the between that love can grow and that we can encounter the sacred. It is in the between that we meet as subjects. “The *meeting*, then, mixing pleasure and promise or hopes, remains in a sort of future perfect” (TL 6 *original emphasis*), it is the possibility of love for the other and for the self as other. This experience of meeting in the between is the time and space for the self to be wonderfully exceptional in and through love. It is where the subject is “Sovereign yet not individual” (TL 5). Yet many subjects who now find joy in this sovereignty remember the experience of the psychic as well as the physical pain of it being a “reconquered sovereignty” (TL 4). Nevertheless, Kristeva posits that this sovereign subject, this singular ‘I’, can now be in a relation of interdependence with full agency in the connection of love with other sovereign subjects.

Love is thus relational; a relation that allows the subjectivity of each person and that allows one’s unique and personal identity with one’s own proper place. To emphasize that in love the I as a subject is not lost but becomes extraordinary, Kristeva cries out, “I am, in love, at the zenith of subjectivity” (TL 5). Kristeva writes with the ‘I’ because she owns what she theorizes, she writes her philosophy as a woman. It is in that spirit that she engages in a discourse on *The Feminine and the Sacred* with Catherine Clément to “find a particular

resonance within every woman, within everyone” (FS 3). The feminine in this context does not represent women *per se* or women only, but rather it is a principle that resonates within everyone, it is an “awakening civilization, the future” for women that will affect men as well (FS 2). Kristeva sees the necessity for the awakening to a new future for, she questions “what place is there for women in that history dating from the birth of Jesus, what chance for them two thousand years after him?” (FS 1, 2). What is the proper place for a woman in our civilization? Where is the proper place for a woman as a subject? Clément considers Kristeva a “visionary” because of her belief that we will awaken in this new millennium and her reflections on what the profound meaning of that awakening, of that new civilization, can be (FS 2). This awakening civilization, this birthing of a new future, is where love and “the sacred among women may express an instantaneous revolt that passes through the body and cries out” (FS 10). This awakening will not come about through theoretical and abstract or non-representational discourse but rather through the cries of revolt expressed by the love and the sacred in us and among us, it will be a revolution of a new subjectivity. With this revolution we will each find our proper place as sovereign speaking and loving subjects. As Clément and Kristeva develop the theme of the feminine and the sacred in their correspondence, they look to their religious and cultural pasts and examine their present to expound on this vision of a woman’s proper place. They reflect on the meaning of the feminine and the sacred in the awakening of a new civilization with a new subjectivity and how, with this new subjectivity, we will experience love and we may encounter the sacred.

The Feminine and the Sacred

Kristeva asserts that the sacred has “always preoccupied us, visible in our trajectories as

intellectuals and novelists, on the edge of the unconscious and of the social tie” (FS 1). Even today in secular societies and in artistic and academic discourses, the complexity of what we understand to be the sacred continues to be of interest for study, reflection, and discussion. Clément describes their individual locations in relation to the sacred when she writes to Kristeva, “You are a Christian atheist and I a Jewish atheist; we are both ‘bound’ by our history. Obviously, getting away from it is out of the question. Well, then. Let’s remain within it” (FS 105). Although both Kristeva and Clément had rejected their faith at one time, they could not reject their history and continue to struggle with the various aspects of the sacred in their history. Kristeva notes the importance and relevance of the sacred, “not religion or its opposite, atheistic negation, but the experience that beliefs both shelter and exploit, at the crossroads of sexuality and thought, body and meaning, which women feel intensely but without being preoccupied by it and about which there remains much for them - for us - to say” (FS 1). Thus, even as the sacred is at the crossroads of the semiotic and the symbolic, the feelings and words of love, and is something we may encounter, this experience of the sacred is both protected and utilized by what we believe. For the sacred is that which we hold holy, what we revere, what we bless and are blessed by at the core of our being. The sacred is at a crossroad because we need to examine the semiotic in the words of the symbolic to understand our beliefs, often expressed through rituals, customs, and cultural expectations. Kristeva thus has a broad sense of what she means by the sacred, of the experience of an encounter that is wider and deeper than the sacred that is expounded by religion and critiqued by atheism.

Kristeva’s correspondence with Clément is personal as she considers from her own experience that the crossroads of love and the sacred may be especially relevant for women, for that which we hold sacred influences us in all areas of our life, whether consciously or

subconsciously. She writes, “Women, *perhaps*, stand at that intersection in a more dramatic, more symptomatic manner, in a more unknown manner in the future that is upon us. I say ‘perhaps’ because there is always the surprise – and often even a happy surprise – of the ‘feminine’ in men as well” (FS 178 *original emphasis*). Kristeva elucidates that what we understand and describe in our culture as the principle of the ‘feminine’ in a person is often considered to be the gentler side of humanity, a nurturing and caring quality, an attribute that can be present in men as well as in women. Thus an emphasis on the feminine in a person is not to suggest that all women are naturally endowed with the feminine principle. Neither is it meant to make men ‘effeminate’ or to emasculate men, to deprive them of masculine strength or vigour by showing an ‘unmanly weakness’. Rather it is beyond a dichotomy of women and men and when we experience this ‘feminine’ attribute as a nurturing and caring quality in either a man or a woman, it is an experience of the sacred in and for both women and men. This sacred feminine also has qualities for religious ritual and men as well as women can yearn and pray for the power of a sacred feminine ritual. An example of this can be seen in the story of David and Bathsheba, when David prays to God for forgiveness for his sins but finding no consolation in the words of the symbolic system, he turned to his religion’s sacred ritual of a woman’s *mikva*. In this sacred ritual a woman’s body is thoughtfully cleansed of her menstrual flow while remembering the promise of life and of meaning in religion and society. In his plea to God, David placed himself at that intersection of the feminine and the sacred as he cried to be metaphorically washed with hyssop, the herb that was used in ceremonial purification rituals (NIV *Numbers* 19), to be cleansed of his blood-guilt and his violation of a woman through a woman’s sacred ritual (NIV *Psalms* 51). The meaning of this sacred feminine ritual was well known by the man who needed more than words of the symbolic system in prayer and supplication as he sought the semiotic of

an inner cleansing experience of a sacred feminine ritual.

Kristeva emphasizes that “the sacred is, of course, experienced in private” (FS 178). This private encounter with the sacred is “what gives meaning to the most intimate of singularities, at the intersection of the body and thought, biology and memory, life and meaning – among men and women” (FS 178). It is in our privacy that we see and experience the immanent meaning of the sacred. The sacred needs to be private for when it becomes public, “it totalizes and turns into totalitarian horror, ... in a nod to the various ‘revolutions’ and forms of fundamentalism” (FS 178). Too often when the private experience of the sacred becomes public it is co-opted by religion, economy, and politics which destroy the very sacredness of the private experience. Nevertheless, although the sacred gives meaning to singularities, this private experience is not something secretive or solitary, for “it is in the sharing of it that the sacred unveils its risks as much as its vitality” (FS 178). David’s yearning for a feminine sacred ritual was a private prayer that became a public *Psalms* (51), an individual act with a singular purpose that showed the vitality of the ritual as he experienced the forgiveness he sought.

By this brief look at David’s need for the cleansing power of a feminine sacred ritual we see how Kristeva’s philosophy effectively frames an analysis of the biblical narrative of David and Bathsheba, as we seek to make connections at the crossroads of love and the sacred in our search for meaning. Kristeva specifies that she is “speaking of the meaning of life – of a life that has meaning” (FS 13). Yet, for us to find a life that has meaning, to make connections that are open to the sacred, to share the sacred together presents a risk because an encounter with the sacred may cause a change, and while change may give a renewing energy to our life, it may also change what is important to us. It is a risk because this sharing of the sacred and of finding new connections to the sacred may result in the continued expression of our religious heritage but, as

Kristeva experienced, it may also precipitate a discontinuation and create a counterpoint that will form a transformation in and of our life.

Yet, Kristeva notes, in our need for meaning and transformation we risk the danger, and “men and women today are aspiring for new connections permeable to the sacred, as a continuation or a counterpoint to ancestral religions” (FS 178). These new connections with the sacred may either be experienced as a process in our religious tradition or they could bring us to forge new understandings of and encounters with the sacred. Kristeva admits that, “... many of us ... have chosen, against the religion of our fathers, another ‘religion’: that of communist atheism, as a counterweight to their childhood debts and ideals” (FS 25). She is not making a generalized observation here but rather writes that she speaks only for herself, “I am speaking of the personal, of the microcosm” (FS 25). In expressing the empirical data of her own experience of turning away from her ancestral religion, she notes the weight of debt she feels at the rejection of her childhood religion and its values, how she became disillusioned with communist atheism and its values, and how she continues her search for the sacred and its values in order to have a life that has meaning.

Kristeva’s emphasis is thus not on a theoretical concept of meaning to be found in life but rather on a life that has meaning. She is concerned that in our attempts to “manage” life, there is “the threat of destroying life after having devalued the question of its meaning” (FS 13). Devaluing the question of the value and meaning of life creates a new danger “that, after the famous ‘loss of values,’ erects life as the ‘supreme value,’ but life for itself, life without question...” (FS 14). In giving supreme value to life as *zōō*, that is as biological life only, without any question, we are in danger of losing the value of life as *bios*, that is of a life filled with questions, a life that has meaning and thus, “the life to be told, capable of being written ...”

(FS 13). Hence the examination of our told and written stories, whether ancient, biblical, or contemporary stories, our experiences of love and our encounters with the sacred remain of the utmost importance as we question our values about a life that has meaning. Kristeva notes that for analyzing life stories, that is, stories that can be told and written of a life that has meaning, the process of psychoanalysis is fundamental.

Psychoanalysis and Love

Therefore, Kristeva looks to psychoanalysis to understand the experiences of love and the sacred. Reflecting on the relationship between the analyst and the analysand in analysis, she writes, “The more fortunate analysand terminates with the renewed desire to question all truths; as in the time of Heraclitus, he becomes capable once again of acting like a child, of playing” (TL xi). To create a life that is valuable for its meaning is to question all perceived truths and the ancient philosophers already knew the importance of being child-like, that is to have a questioning curiosity for learning that is like playing. This questioning is thus not a burdensome activity through dogmatic rhetoric for learned experts only, neither does ‘child-like’ mean in a ‘childish’ manner, but rather it is a questioning that joyfully celebrates a life of learning with the curious, sincere manner of a child who wants to learn the truths of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of ‘what’. Kristeva advocates that we love, protect, and nurture that psychic child within us with the tenderness and love shown by parents for their child. She posits that, “love between the sexes and the tenderness of both parents, male and female, will continue to be a shelter to the child’s psychic life – its life period – to the life of the eternal child we all are” (FS 13). This type of love and tenderness protects and nurtures the infant-child into becoming a mature subject. As adults we each become responsible to love the psychic child within us because, as Pamela Sue

Anderson explains, for Kristeva “the shadow of the child remains with the adult’s consciousness as a stranger within” (Ward 215). Therefore we may not dismiss or neglect the concept of an ‘inner child’ and its shadows of ideas, thoughts, imaginations, and habitual ways of interpreting and relating to the world. But we are to be responsible for nurturing and encouraging our inner child to ask questions, and to value those questions for our own well-being as we relate to the other in community as loving and speaking subjects. Thus Kristeva establishes the need for love in order to have a life of meaning. She repeatedly returns to her basic premise, that is, her belief in the sacredness of love as the rudimentary necessity in the development of the person as a sovereign subject with a proper place. She asserts, “Do not human beings, young and not so young, have an imperious need for love?” (FS 164). But as we avow with Kristeva the need for love, we are aware of the necessity to understand some of the complexities of our concept of love, especially as it relates to the development of the subject. Kristeva’s philosophy guides us in an examination of various theories of the concept of love to gain a better understanding of a love of self that makes possible a love of the self as other and of love for the other as other.

Kristeva notes that “analysis love is what Freud called a *Transference*” (TL 13 *original emphasis*). Transference love “is particular, in the sense that it is destined for a ‘subject who is supposed to know’ (Lacan) but this in no way means that it is something other than just love” (TL 8, 9). Transference love is for a subject to become a knowing subject, a subject that knows her self. This transference love experienced in psychoanalysis is what places us in a process, “a true process of self-organization” (TL 14, 381). Kristeva notes that Freud “was the first to turn love into a cure” through the process of transference love in psychoanalysis, for “transference, like love, is a true process of self-organization, comparable to what contemporary logical and biological theories call ‘open systems’” (TL 381). We have previously discussed the notion of

‘open systems’ in relation to love that is structurally open to the semiotic and the sacred in our interactions with others, and here the concept of ‘open systems’ is connected to transference love as understood in analysis. Kristeva elucidates, “*transference* is the Freudian self-organization, because the psychic functioning of transference is fundamentally dependent on the intercourse between the living-symbolic organism (the analysand) and the *other*” (TL 14 *original emphasis*). It is through being open to the other that persons who are in the process of this self-organization can learn to find “their own proper self” as a subject, and the analyst can help them “to speak and write themselves in unstable, open, undecidable spaces” (TL 380). The process is open but not free from anguish because the process places us on-trial, and the process is unstable because we can only tell and write the story of our be[com]ing as we live it and name it in the spaces where our “emptiness” and our “out-of-placeness” become “essential elements, indispensable ‘characters’ if you will, of a *work in progress*” (TL 380 *original emphasis*). That is why this work-in-progress is “comparable to what contemporary logical and biological theories call ‘open systems’” (TL 381). It is open because the process is not completed, it is not predetermined, the path is not neatly laid out for us, and we must deal with our emptiness and seek our proper place in the undecidable spaces as speaking and loving subjects. Thus, Freud’s concept of love in our self-organization becomes the cure for our emptiness, to “provoke a rebirth,” a process that “makes us good as new, temporarily and eternally” (TL 381). Kristeva emphasizes that in provoking this rebirth of our self-organization, to find healing for the gap of our emptiness and the homesickness of our out-of-placeness, we participate in the open systems of work-in-process. This process makes us ‘good as new’ temporarily because of the continuous discontinuity of the process, the gains and failures of the “advent-and-loss of the subject” (TL 28), and eternally because the process will always continue. We have no deadline in order to ‘master’ the work of

the process, we will not, and do not need to, ‘arrive’ or ‘achieve’ but will always participate in the open systems of work-in-process as subjects-in-process.

From this perspective Kristeva notes that “to emphasize transference, the love that founds the analytic process, implies that one hears the discourse that is performed there starting with that limit of advent-and-loss of the subject – which is *Einfühlung*” (TL 28). *Einfühlung* is “the assimilation of other people’s feelings” (TL 24). It is to have empathy with, in a semiotic drive of non-words with the words of the symbolic. It expresses our need to belong, to ‘be like’, to ‘feel’ what they think is right. Thus the *Einfühlung*, that is the identification of the subject, is based on love as it moves from a primary narcissistic love to a transference love to a healthy and sacred love of the self in relation to the other in the analytic process. Transference love in psychoanalysis is therefore but a temporary means for the analyst to direct and respond to the love of the analysand because love, rather than be narcissistic, must always be relational. Although the mode of transference love in the relation of the analyst and analysand is “a perpetuation of illusion”, it “finds itself rehabilitated, neutralized, normalized, at the bosom of my loving reality” (TL 21). This illusion that is rehabilitated and renewed through the guidance of the psychoanalyst thus plays a positive role in healing the brokenness of the infant child’s psychic structuring and developing. Also in psychoanalysis the emptiness of narcissism can be changed through a process of transference love from the analysand for the analyst, and promotes and accommodates the move from transference love to the reality of relational love.

Through psychoanalysis a renewal of the subject can take place as she deals with love and the sacred in her relations. Kristeva notes that psychoanalysis “asserts the end of codes but also the permanence of love as builder of spoken spaces” (TL 381, 382). But although psychoanalysis claims the end of codes, it also sees love as the builder of spoken spaces for the

loving and speaking subject, and for Kristeva “there will be new codes of love” (TL 7). The old codes are replaced by the new codes of open systems that allow for a subject-in-process/on-trial to build spoken spaces that will fill our emptiness with our stories, where we experience love and encounter the sacred, and so build our own proper place, that place which fits the particular history of each one of us and thus expresses our identity best.

Narcissism and Beyond

Even though we thus understand that love is crucial for the development and renewal of the person as a subject in the context of relational love, we ask again with Kristeva just what it is we are talking about when we speak of love. Therefore, in order to elucidate the importance of a healthy love for our self in the be[com]ing of a subject in relation to others, we will address with Kristeva the challenge of narcissism and its account of self-love and then the biblical view of love of our self as explained by Thomas Aquinas, that is a love for our self and for the other as other that recognizes the self as other to the other.

Kristeva begins her analysis of narcissism by briefly recounting the tale as told by Ovid of the youth Narcissus “whose beauty is as dazzling as he is scornful” (TL 103). I will quote Kristeva’s telling of the tale of Narcissus generously to show the beauty of the language she uses to reveal the meaning of his story. His spurned lovers ask Nemesis, the goddess of Rhamnus that Narcissus “love one day, so, himself, and not win over the creature whom he loves” (TL 103, 104). One day when Narcissus bends over a spring to drink he sees a facial image in the pool, “and fell in love with that unbodied hope, and found a substance in what was only shadow” (TL 104). Narcissus saw and fell in love with a mirage, a reflection of himself that had no substance. He saw an elusive image, a shadow of an ephemeral reflection, and Kristeva elucidates that the

devastating consequences experienced by “the one in love with his fleeting reflection is in fact someone deprived of his own proper space” (TL 376). As Narcissus is deprived of his own proper place he is also deprived of being a subject, thus instead of being a loving subject, he “loves nothing because he is nothing” (TL 376). Referring to the story of Narcissus as told by Plotinus, Kristeva notes that “the error lies, therefore, in failing to see that the reflection is of none but the self; Narcissus after all is guilty of being unaware of himself as source of the reflection” (TL 107). Narcissus is “guilty of not knowing himself: he who loves a reflection without knowing that it is his own does not, in fact, know who he is” (TL 107). Narcissus failed to heed the Socratic maxim to know your self, and because he has no knowledge of himself, he has only an illusion of self-love for he does not know his self. His love is of a mirage, an illusion with no reality, and so he is nothing and thus loves nothing. But Plotinus takes a different focus on the story. Plotinus reacts to Narcissus’ love of his own image by condemning “the veneration of all images, beginning with his own” to the point that he refuses to have a portrait of himself drawn, calling it an “image of an image” (TL 108). But the error is not so much in creating an image, perhaps not even in honoring or respecting an image, but rather the error is in falling in love with an image without realizing that it is an image, especially without knowing it as an image of oneself. For then the image becomes an illusory vision that remains a mirage, “only shadow, only reflection, lacking substance. It comes with you, it stays with you, it goes away with you, if you can go away” (TL 104). Narcissus has fallen in love with a distorted, watery image of himself and, having seen it, he reaches for it with “impossible embraces, missed kisses, deluded contacts” (TL 104). Eventually, and with devastating clarity, “Narcissus gathers that he is actually in a world of ‘signs’: ‘You nod and beckon when I do; your lips, it seems, answer when I am talking though what you say I cannot hear’” (TL 104). With these responsive signs

Narcissus comes to understand that the mirage is an image of himself, he comes to self-knowledge, and with this knowledge comes, what Kristeva calls, “the crux of the drama” when he asks “What shall I do? ... What I want is with me, my riches make me poor. If I could only escape from my own body” (TL 104). His plaintive cry reveals his awareness that he has no internality but the image that is with him, there is a richness of poverty as he has no substance in him that can deal with his reality, he would escape from his body but there is no other that he loves that he could turn to and who could love him through the trauma. And so Narcissus dies by the pool at the edge of the mirage, an empty being in love with his own image. Narcissus, who with his beauty and scorn rejected the love of an other, developed a selfish love that had no room and no love for an other, an unhealthy love of his self based on an image, a shadowy reflection of himself.

The story of Narcissus lives on in what we call narcissism and its definition includes seeing and loving our own reflection in the other. Narcissus saw an image of himself reflected in the water, so in narcissism a mirroring takes place as one sees and loves oneself in the other, rather than loving the other as other, that is, when we look into the eyes of the other it is as if we look in a mirror and see our own image: we love ourselves in the other, and the other is absorbed into the ‘me’ of narcissism. This absorption of the other into the ‘me’ of my projection of myself takes away the subject position of the other as other, and negates the proper place of the self of that other. Kristeva explains that in narcissism there is on the one hand the lure of the “rapture at the sight of a nonobject”, that is to see the mirage of a shadowy reflection, and on the other hand, “there is the power of the image” even though that image has no substance (TL 104). The danger of narcissism is that the sight of the mirage lures us and the image calls to us and we look but what we are looking for is nowhere.

In psychoanalysis it is argued that narcissism “reveals itself as a screen over emptiness” (TL 23). Narcissism is then a tool with which we deal with our own emptiness, an “emptiness, which is at the root of the human psyche” (TL 23). It is an emptiness, what Lacan calls a “gaping hole” at the beginning of the development of the human psyche, a lack that creates an inability to see and to love the other as other, hence there is “solidarity between emptiness and narcissism, ... the one upholding the other” (TL 23, 24). The semiotic flux of emptiness is an “absolute necessity of the so-called narcissistic structures” which relate to the symbolic (TL 24). These narcissistic structures involve an interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic, an interstreaming that must be balanced. Therefore at the sacred crossroads of love where the interchange of the symbolic and the semiotic takes place we are warned of the need for a healthy balance in order to avoid the double dangers of tyranny and delirium in the experience and expression of love. On the one hand, if we have an imbalance with a surfeit of the symbolic, that is, if we overdo the symbolic, it becomes tyrannical, it depersonalizes because of its “inability to love” (TL 33). On the other hand, if we have an imbalance with a surplus of the semiotic, if we drown in the semiotic, it becomes delirium, a hysteria in which we cannot experience love. Hence the need for a precarious juggling-act between the symbolic and the semiotic, a blending of the words and the emotions of love at the sacred crossroads where beyond narcissism is an economy of relations as an intercoursing of love, in this beyond the gift of love is experienced and shared.

Thus in the beginning of the process of be[com]ing a subject, when a primary narcissism takes place for the infant-child, for it only knows itself, this narcissism needs to be developed beyond narcissism into a teeter-totter balance of the semiotic and the symbolic in a love for the self and for the other. Moi explains that for Kristeva, love needs to be present at “the moment of

structuring which intervenes in the imaginary chaos, an organizing force” in the very first months of a child’s life (Moi 1986, 15). Kristeva calls this moment of structuring a “narcissistic structuration” that appears “to be the earliest structure (chronologically and logically) whose spoors we might detect in the unconscious” (TL 44). However, if something was awry, that is, if love was missing in this process of structural exchange of the semiotic and the symbolic, “the very concrete and specific structuration required by psychicism within that very elementary disposition” (TL 45), then psychoanalysis may be a process with which to return to the beginning of structuration. Kristeva explains that in psychoanalysis there is a beneficial aspect of narcissistic love, if only temporarily, as the analyst can use narcissism as a tool for comforting and authenticating the analysand. Thus with the proper guidance from the analyst a temporary use of narcissism can be changed into a love that can create meaning and healing for the analysand. This temporary narcissism through analysis is therefore beneficial as it is used to develop a sense of love by the analysand not only for her adult self but also for her inner, psychic child in a healing process. But, although this beneficial aspect is part of the transferring process in a developing personality, narcissistic love is not a place or mode in which to stay, but it is a step in the opening up of the self to the other. Kristeva explains that the “psyche is one open system connected to another, and only under those conditions is it renewable. If it lives, your psyche is in love. If it is not in love, it is dead” (TL 15). This need of the psyche to love and to be loved in order to not be in a gaping hole of emptiness comparable to death brings us back to the need for a transference love in the analytical process. According to Kristeva, “Transference love, in short, would be the optimum form of interrelation germane to any stabilizing-destabilizing amorous experience” (TL 15). Hence the importance of the process that connects transference love to the be[com]ing of a subject who can interrelate in loving relations with other

subjects. Moi reiterates that, “it is, then, this transference love which allows the patient tentatively to erect some kind of subjectivity, to become a subject-in-process in the symbolic order” (Moi 1986, 15). The focus here is therefore on the importance of love, for if love is the only thing that can save us, and if lack of love can lead to death (TL 15), we need a revolution of, in, and through love. We need to go beyond narcissism, rehabilitate it (TL 60) into a healthy love of self in order to be able to experience a love for and from the other that is sacred, neither imprisoned in the tyranny of too much symbolic, nor lost in the delirium of too much semiotic.

Rehabilitating Narcissism through a Biblical and Sacred Self-Love

In order to go beyond narcissism to a biblical love of self in the process of be[com]ing a loving subject, Kristeva posits that “by strongly rehabilitating narcissism, theology, notably Thomist theology, made of *amor sui* the linchpin of salvation – love, thus reinforcing the reconciliation of Western soul with itself for two thousand years” (TL 60). Love is the core of Christian theology, a love that reconnects the alienated self with its self; it reconciles the self that cannot love its self by itself through salvation-love. Kristeva notes that “Christianity was to develop, out of the Gospels and in its theologies, not the furnishings of Eros but those of an *Agape* always already ensured by the Father who loves us before we are to love him” (TL 60). That we are loved before we love is the beginning of *agape* love, a sacred love to which human beings can respond and that leads to a self-love in relation to the Father as the holy One, the sacred, as opposed to a narcissistic response to the self.

By addressing Christian theology and *agape*, Kristeva looks at different aspects and ways for humans to be subjects who are open to love and to possible encounters with the sacred. She writes, “When theology withdraws in the face of philosophy that grounds *being* on knowledge

rather than on affection, rhetoric – as it does when love is first experienced – steps in to gather the passion and enthusiasm of lovers” (TL 61 *original emphasis*). But rather than have theology withdraw from the discussion of *being* and let a rhetoric of *knowing* take its place, Kristeva notes the importance of love and the sacred, of our soul in the development of our discourse of love. She posits the importance of “the soul becoming the necessary space, the receptacle for amorous passion,” and she does not limit the discussion of the necessary space of the soul in a discourse of love but asserts that “not only in mythology but at the very base of philosophical discourse love and soul cannot be dissociated” (TL 61). In *agape* love, the soul of the human being is actively engaged in its amorous passion.

This leads Kristeva to ask, “does contemporary love find the delightful proportion of spleen and highmindedness, of flash and quiet, that it needs in order to exist?” (TL 61). Kristeva notes the multifaceted aspects of love and is willing to work with the assumption that a ‘delightful’ proportion exists in our relational encounters of love as she questions, “and if so, what is the new proportion?” (TL 61). Thus the question is not so much about whether such a proportion exists but about the contents of this new proportion. To have a new proportion in contemporary love does not mean that it will be less delightful, but it does mean that we need to assure “a new space for love” in this new proportion (TL 61). We need a new understanding of the space and the discourse of love as this relates to the understanding of the human subject as a self with a proper place in a triadic relation to God, to its self and to others.

Kristeva therefore examines the place and discourse of love in the lives of several people as it relates to their subjectivity. For instance, we can think of Descartes’ subject as a thinking being, based on his famous *cogito ergo sum* (TL 297). Kristeva explains the importance of the Cartesian subject because it is “constituted by his reference to God explicitly identified with love”, and yet,

“the dethronement of faith by reason is accompanied by a mutation of love, which slips away into knowledge” (TL 297). The story of Don Juan, although able to be interpreted in several ways, shows him to be a seductive conqueror whose sexual partners were merely markers, “stages of his own construction” (TL 193). But, although there is sexual desire and a need for physical conquest, there is not a whisper of love and not a glimpse of the sacred in his construction, hence he is “anxious to conquer because incapable of keeping” (TL 193). After the conquest of a sexual seduction he is incapable of forming a lasting relationship because he has nothing to give, there is no substance to his being, he “has no internality but, as his roamings, his flights, his many as well as unbearable residences show him to be, he is a multiplicity, a polyphony” (TL 193, 197). In his multiplicity he can be whatever he needs to be to accomplish a successful seduction. One is tempted to do a superficial ‘play on words’ with polyphony and suggest that therefore he was a ‘manifold phoney’. But Kristeva notes that Don Juan’s story is set to beautiful music by Mozart in “the 1787 Prague production of his *Opera Buffa, Don Giovanni*” (TL 193), and in the language of music polyphony refers to a multiplicity of sounds, or a combination of a number of individual but harmonizing melodies. In this light we see Don Juan as a lover who will play any melody as required for each sexual conquest, and the seductions are various moments of an artistic but empty being with seductive melodies that may harmonize but that are not relational.

It is with her analysis of Thomas Aquinas that Kristeva shows the sacred and love to be inseparable in the development of a loving subject and a proper place. Although Descartes found certitude of his being as a thinking thing, Aquinas had an ontology of being as a loved and loving subject, “*I am to the extent that I am loved, therefore I love in order to be*: that, for the medieval thinker, would be an implicit definition of the subject’s being, if he could express a subject’s thought” (TL 171 *original emphasis*). Aquinas sees God in the loving subject who is the

connection between love and the sacred. Kristeva posits that “it is doubtless a Cartesian conditioning that prompts us to dream of such a pre-Cartesian loving subject” (TL 171). For although we are habituated, or conditioned in the value of the Cartesian thinking subject of the modern era, and we are taught disdain for Don Juan’s seductive subject, we dream of being a pre-Cartesian, that is a pre-modern loving subject as described by the medieval thinker Aquinas.

Kristeva explains that for Aquinas everything that has being is good and, as a human being, we discover ourselves first, therefore we get to know ourselves first and so we are closest to ourselves. Aquinas posits that we discover ourselves through the proximity of our goodness, by the very nearness of our own goodness as the ego, which is the self, lives with itself. Kristeva writes, “The notion of self-love thus holds a pivotal place in Thomistic ontology and causes the *esse suum* and the *bonum proprium* to flow into one another” (TL 174). That is, the notion of self-love is important for Thomistic ontology because it brings our existence and our particular goodness together. Although Kristeva sees love as part of ethics, she explains that Aquinas sees this comprehensiveness of love and the good as ontology, not as ethics of love or of the good. Kristeva explains that this could be thought of as “narcissism in an ontology of love,” as in, “I am, which means I am good, therefore I love myself” (TL 174). But it goes much deeper than that because the love with which we love our self in this ontology is based on the good we recognize not only in our self, it is thus not self-focused to the exclusion of all else as in narcissism, but it is part of the process of be[com]ing a self that recognizes the good in one self as in others in loving relations. Kristeva understands that thus “a desiring subjectivity is in the process of being established, and nevertheless, conversely, the ontological immanence of each being to itself is at the heart of this theology” (TL 175). How we understand and love ourselves and the other influences and is influenced by how we understand God, and this understanding of

God influences the development of our identity as a subject who is in-process. Kristeva further posits the necessity that ontologies of love postulate that the “speaking subject is a loving subject” (TL 170). For love is crucial to the be[com]ing of a subject as a speaking and loving being.

According to Thomistic ontology then, the first object in time that I know is I, that is, my self and this self I love. God and other beings I know after myself and love after myself; God I will love most, more than myself, because God is more than I am. The emphasis here is not on loving my self regardless of the kind of person I allow myself to become or in spite of any actions that may be dishonourable, but the emphasis is on recognizing and loving the good that is in my self as part of the ontological good. Kristeva notes that Aquinas “clarifies the hierarchy between the three kinds of love. Our own proper good is found, according to the Angelic Doctor, in God as to its *cause*, in ourselves as to its *effect*, in our neighbor as in a *similitude*” (TL 172 *original emphasis*). Thus God loves and is the cause of our proper good, and the effect of that proper good is that we can respond in love to God and the similitude is that we can recognize the proper good in our neighbor and love our neighbor as other even as we recognize our own proper good and love our self. Kristeva argues that this love of goodness in the self is part of the preservation of the human species. She notes, “The created being loves, as it partakes of the species: it is *preserved* through love, and because it is ‘of God’” (TL 174 *original emphasis*). Kristeva elucidates that, “If I am, I partake of being; if I have being, I can only love it as my own, and by preserving it I preserve myself” (TL 174). We are preserved through our participation in being, as we recognize and love the goodness of our self and of others. For without access to our own good, there can be no access to the good in our neighbor and no access to God. As a species, as a society, and as individuals we must love our self in order to be

subjects who know the ontological good within us, for out of that love comes our moral base, our integrity, and our recognition and love of the good in our neighbor, that is the other to our self.

As well as the many references to love, honour and praise to God, the Bible gives the commandment to love our neighbour as our self (NIV *Leviticus* 19:18, *Matthew* 19:19, *Mark* 12:31). Therefore the notion to love our self is not new, but in connection with the biblical mandate to love our neighbour it has been understood in various ways. It has been taught that one should love one's neighbour, that is the other, more than oneself or that the self and self-love should be sacrificed in love for the other, making one self-less in service. But when one becomes self-less, that is when one's self is lost, then one's subjectivity is lost, and with it one's proper place, for they depend on each other, and then how does the person without a self, with a lost self, love and flourish? This is not a call for the person to be selfish instead of selfless, but rather that it is imperative to know our self and to love our self not more than and not in place of but in relation to God and our neighbour. The notion that we should love the other more than our self to the point of sacrificing our self is fraught with misrepresentation and distortion of the biblical commandment.

Kristeva notes that sacrifice is often involved in rituals and actions that are considered sacred. But she questions our understanding of love in the relationship between sacrifice and the sacred when she asks: "... supposing that a non-sacrificial sacred exists, might not the *imaginary* be one of its possible variants?" (FS 137 *original emphasis*). That is, instead of requiring a sacrifice of the self, can we think of a sacred imaginary that nourishes a love in and for the emerging self? She notes, "The imaginary as eternal return, which opens the mind and body to an inquietude without end, and makes it possible to stand straight and lithe in the world?" (FS 137). Kristeva does not refer to a Nietzschean eternal return but rather she reflects on the

meaning of an imaginary that always returns with a restlessness that makes it possible for us to stand straight yet flexible in the world. She plays with a memory as she recalls that her father used to say: “Stand up straight!” (FS 140). She explains: “My father, the foremost being of uprightness - of an exceptional uprightness - that I ever had occasion to meet” (FS 140). It is also reminiscent of Marcus Aurelius who advocated that in all our actions, “to stand up straight – not straightened” (Aurelius 30). The idea of physically standing straight represents a moral uprightness, an ethics that goes deep, that anchors us, gives us strength within, and enables us to stand up straight morally and ethically. There is a hint of a threat here, an acknowledgement of reality that if we do not stand up straight ourselves, we will be straightened by others, for our religions, our culture, and our laws require it of us. Kristeva does not pretend that this is easy for, although she counts her father as a role model for his moral fortitude, she then describes the struggle and that, “People cannot imagine how unnatural it is to stand up straight. Especially if one is a woman, ...” with family and work responsibilities, and the list of these responsibilities is infinite (FS 140). It is so easy for the self to get lost in all these endless responsibilities.

Kristeva then repeats the claim as if to emphasize the difficulty for a woman, especially a woman who is different, one who has a husband, a child, or a profession unlike the others. Yet each one of us is “unlike the others” and she argues that each woman has her own plumb lines, her own guides “unlike the others” that function to make her rectitude possible and visible (FS 141).

While Kristeva uses the hyperbolic exclamation that people ‘cannot imagine’ the difficulty of standing up straight, she acknowledges its necessity, and returns to the need for the sacred and love in the be[com]ing of the infant child into a person with subjectivity and a proper place, that is, a psychic space in which to stand up straight, literally and figuratively. Hence, instead of

being self-less a person needs a self who can stand up straight and love the other as her self while remaining other to the other.

But loving others as our self does not mean giving everyone equal love, but rather responding to a person individually, giving value in recognizing the good in the other and respecting their proper place. Loving the other then becomes an act of virtue, for it is a virtue not only to know and love the good within ourselves but also to know and love it in the other. In recognizing the individual uniqueness of each person as a subject, we love each in a way that is relevant to their and our own realities. On this sharing of the good we can build a community in and of love. Kristeva explains that here too, a judgment call is at work. One must be able to recognize, to know the goodness in the other person, the virtue and the honour, in order to build a relationship with that person. It is our recognition and knowledge of their goodness which will enable us to love our neighbour, in the same way as our self-love is based on the recognition and knowledge of our own intrinsic good. Being able to identify with the goodness in the other allows us to love the other as ourselves. Consequently, we then understand that the word ‘as’ does not mean ‘equally’ but ‘similarly’, in a similitude (TL 172). This creates the effect that we then can love the other ‘as’ ourselves by recognizing and knowing the good in the other and by wanting only the good for the other as one only wants the good for oneself. The sacred in this context is that which continues to nourish a love in and of the self in order for this self to be able to love the other, instead of requiring a sacrifice of the self, even in the name of service to the other. The commandment to love is our sacred calling to love our self as we love the other, not more than or less than, but ‘as’ in similitude. Love is then expressed and experienced as a sacred privilege rather than a sacrifice, a privilege which leaves both the self and the other as subjects-in-process, each with their own developing proper place.

Kristeva understands that the importance of love and self-love experienced by the person begins already with the process of be[com]ing a subject for an infant-child, where love is required for the separation of the infant-child from the mother in order to become a subject with a proper place in the world of the father, the symbolic. As in language Kristeva posits the need for the elements of the maternal semiotic and the paternal symbolic for one signifying system, so also in the process of the separation of the infant-child in be[com]ing a subject Kristeva shows the importance of the metaphorical maternal and paternal elements. She notes that Freud “introduces the Third Party as a condition of psychic life, to the extent that it is a loving life” (TL 34). The Third is thus called the paternal element, represented in Kristeva’s philosophy as the “father in individual pre-history” (TL 60). The Third as father in individual pre-history is to negotiate a balance in the separation of the mother and the infant-child, to break the dyad of the mother-child relationship, so that the metaphorical father may enter as a third and psychic health can come from their loving relationship. The mother-child love is experienced in the semiotic and thus the third, represented by the metaphorical father, is needed to separate this love to enable the child to enter the symbolic and then beyond so that the mother and child can come back together again in a different love, a love that recognizes that there are others in the world and in their lives. Hence the Third is to create a triadic balance in a social political practice with the father for the dyadic mother and infant-child relation. This triad thus makes our individuality possible and it is the uniqueness of our individuality that gives us our distinct identity as subjects.

Therefore, even though the recognition of the good that is in all of us makes the differences between us less, it does not erase these differences. We are created individually, with our own individual good as part of the ontological good and, according to Aquinas, if we did not

recognize God as the creator of this goodness, we would “eliminate the foundation of the good” (TL 183). The identification of the self with the good thus situates the self as a participant in God’s goodness, in a universal good, through our love. Kristeva elucidates that this participation “implied a normalization of narcissism, by removing guilt, thanks to an idealizing adjustment” (TL 184). Aquinas rehabilitates narcissism into a self-love based on the good that also sees the good in others and that relates to the ultimate good of God. Kristeva explains that this self-love, instead of focusing on the inward seeking self of narcissism, leads us beyond a myopic focus on the self to a loving relationship with the other and to the ‘third party’ as the metaphorical father and “that absolute Third Party”, also described as the Father of individual prehistory, who is God, which may lead us to salvation and to *jouissance* (TL 184).

Kristeva posits that Aquinas thus considers God, as the creator of all goodness, as the Third Party, the necessary balance for a healthy love for the self and for the other, and because of this Creator God, all created beings share in his goodness, hence being is the good and all being is good, true and knowable. This ontology, this knowledge of being, brings through love a recognition of the good within that being, and love is the way of finding the unique in all of us, as speaking subjects, as loving subjects with our own identity. Kristeva reasons that “If we reread Aquinas we shall again discover that the thinking subject is a subject thinking the other, and as such it is analogous to the subject loving the other” (TL 182). With Aquinas, Kristeva understands the subject in relation to the other, for the subject is never alone in the world, but the subject is thinking and loving the other, the thinking and loving subject is ‘other-wise’, it is wise in thinking and loving the other.

This love, based on our knowledge and recognition of the good in ourselves and in others, creating subjectivity out of *agape* and a healthy love for oneself and for the other then

becomes more than a biblical commandment, it is a sacred task for the speaking and loving subject. “Once more,” Kristeva writes, “the presence of a *good* that is ‘appetabilis’ successfully performs that miraculous operation by lessening the difference between lovers” (TL 182 *original emphasis*). If we can love according to how much we know the good in ourselves and thereby can recognize the good in the other, it then becomes our responsibility to know as much as possible about ourselves and the other so that we can love as much as possible and hereby lessen the difference between us. The ability to act in and through love, to know and recognize the good in others and to treat them with respect comes from being generously loved and respected oneself by oneself and by the source of all goodness, who is God. That is why it becomes a sacred task to search out and to know the good in ourselves and in the other. Although some consider this task a duty, to know and love one’s self in order to know and love the other in relation to God as the Other is a sacred privilege which is granted to the self who experiences this self-love, making it a sacred love.

Important for Kristeva is that the sacred in the context of love can be understood in many ways and that, “the imaginary is like a new version of the sacred” (LM 146). It is in the imaginary stage, at the beginning of the development of the infant-child into a subject, that love needs to be present and this love and this process is sacred. Kristeva notes how this love can be experienced and expressed without the symbolic with a semiotic that is sacred. Finding and understanding the presence of the sacred in the pre-symbolic stage of human development are important to Kristeva. Here too, she connects the sacred with the mystery of be[com]ing a subject with a proper place and the mystery of the emergence of meaning. This emergence of meaning could be the meaning of love in the mystery of the emerging subject and its proper place, but also in an emerging of meaning in the mystery of the development of our lives. The

development, that is the process of our subjectivity and proper place comes from an assurance that we are loved, a love not articulated but experienced, however elusive, intangible or ethereal, from the beginning of our development. In writing about ET, that extraterrestrial being, Kristeva notes that perhaps this is why ET suffers for want of love, because it knows what it is missing but cannot articulate it (TL 372-383).

Therefore, Kristeva posits that love can be expressed and experienced before an articulation of the symbolic with a semiotic that conveys its own meaning. Hence, although primary narcissism is necessary in the development of the infant-child, it must learn love not in a myopic way but in a process of a loving relation with itself and with others, thereby be[com]ing a loving subject. In this process the self-love of narcissism is rehabilitated in a relational love of self and of the other and, in living and speaking our love, life itself becomes sacred. Kristeva expresses her conviction that, “I will cling to life as the ultimate visage of the sacred” (FS 12). Hence through an *agape* love, a love of self and love for and from the other and in the telling of our stories of love, Kristeva sees the qualities and the character of the sacred in life, she sees life itself in all its mystery as the best expression of the sacred.

The Shulamite at the Crossroads

Kristeva returns to the Bible for an example of a story of love experienced and expressed by a loving, speaking subject in the *Song of Songs*. Kristeva considers this biblical story of the Shulamite woman “a crossroads text” (TL 98). It is a crossroads text because of the interweaving of lawful marriage and carnal union, neither Platonic nor mystical orgiastic love, in other words, again, neither tyranny nor delirium. It is a crossroads text where one will find the influences of Judaism, paganism, and “the premonitory signs of an incarnate religion” (TL 98).

Although the *Song of Songs* has been interpreted and understood in many different ways, including allegorically, metaphorically, and as a description of marital love, for Kristeva, “whatever the symbols might be, it is a woman who is the source and center of the invocation” (FS 104). That is the main element in this amorous discourse for Kristeva: it is a woman who is the active agent as she invokes love as a speaking and loving subject. Especially when seen in the context of biblical narratives where the woman is often silent, as for instance Bathsheba was not given a voice by the narrator of her story, the notion of agency, of speaking and loving as elements of expressing her subjectivity is of utmost significance. It is the Shulamite who speaks of love as both lover and beloved and thereby establishes herself as a sovereign subject. Kristeva writes,

The novelty of the biblical text appears indisputable to me: the woman who speaks in the Song of Songs is an independent and free *individual*, a sovereign person, and not a cosmic diffusion, be it fascinating or abject. This is the first time that, in the love literature of the world, an *autonomous* subject appears who can name her desires – their strengths, their goals, their obstacles – and this subject is a woman in love (FS 103, 104 *original emphasis*).

Kristeva thus understands the Shulamite as an independent person, a free individual, a woman who is an active agent who speaks on her own behalf of her love and her desires. Woman’s sovereignty, her particularity, and her ability to love and to speak of her love, is to be sought and fought for in the linguistic modes of a society that is just beginning to recognize woman as a subject. Kristeva thus asserts that woman is individual or autonomous not in the sense of being on her own, but the experience of love is free and individual in the sense of it being particular and distinctive and autonomous rather than collective. In other words, in claiming sovereignty for a woman, Kristeva does not see woman as a solitary individual, but rather as a unique, a free individual, as a subject in relationships where she is neither dependent nor independent but interdependent in relations that assure her own self-governance. In the *Song of Songs* the

Shulamite seeks and finds her own governance in the pursuit of her love, and this makes her a subject who not only loves, but who speaks of her love, of being both lover and beloved, an agent in an amorous discourse that is still admired today.

The importance of a woman as a loving and speaking subject becomes more evident again when Kristeva connects language, love, and the sacred in the discussion of the feminine and the body of a woman. Yet Kristeva notes that “there is woman, and then there is woman” (FS 16), by which she means that she is not speaking about ‘woman’ in any universal sense, but rather about the particular singular, as the sacred may be encountered and experienced by a woman. Thus Kristeva explains that while she does not deny that woman is part of a category as woman *qua* woman, she writes here about the particular singular rather than the general universal, about *a* woman, as she links the sacred to love and connects them to, “the sacred body of a woman, sacred because at the crossroads of love” (FS 104). This sacred body of a woman is neither exalted in its fecundancy of the maternal nor diminished to a sexual object, but the female body that in its symbolic, semiotic, and somatic expressions of love is celebrated as sacred. The Shulamite speaks of her longing for the love of her beloved, of her desire to be both lover and beloved. It is in the sanctity of her love, in the semiotic of her passion to give and to receive love with the symbolic articulation of her love that a woman’s body is sacred. These are the crossroads, the intersections and connections of love, the semiotic of being lover and beloved, where the love and sacredness of a woman’s body are definitive for her subjectivity and her proper place. The sacredness of a woman’s body in and through love becomes a sacred feast, and the woman tells how “he brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love” (FS 105). Kristeva pictures a sensuousness and erotic passion as the woman “eats and drinks greedily because she maintains the connection beyond separation: she loves” (FS 104).

The semiotic of the female sexual body can be expressed without words from the symbolic. The crossroads of love, the sacred and the sensual, the sacred sensual longings for fulfilment, are played out in the context of a woman's body as Kristeva describes her as being "sick of love" (FS 105). The NIV translation is that the Shulamite is "faint with love" (*Song of Songs* 5: 8). In their book *The Song of Songs* Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch explain that in this context 'faint' means that she is "faint from the intensity of erotic yearning" (Bloch 151). They also draw on the translation that the Shulamite is in "a fever of love" (Bloch 85). This is a word choice which perhaps better represents the intensity of passionate yearning of her erotic love. We will revisit the notion of being love-sick or 'sick from love' from a different perspective later in the story of Amnon, son of David.

Kristeva notes that the Shulamite "on account of her love, becomes the first Subject in the modern sense of the term. Divided. Sick and yet sovereign" (TL 100). Love places the Shulamite at the crossroads of the semiotic and the symbolic when she is 'sick' but not delirious in the semiotic realm, sovereign but not tyrannical in her articulation in the symbolic system. The fever of love that makes her long for her beloved is her semiotic response to the beauty and the passionate power of the love she so eloquently expresses in poetic language.

Kristeva notes that the Shulamite's expressed love and longing contrasts with the love of "someone who, like David, utters a loving discourse that is only gesture and voice – sound, cry, music, afloat on primal repression, incantation of primary narcissism" (TL 84). We will concentrate on David and his family in later chapters, however here we note that David's words of love are but an empty discourse of sounds of love that have no depth or value, and that Amnon's empty words of love cover an abyss of horror. But the discourse of the Shulamite's love is not an empty invocation of narcissism, instead, her loving discourse is at the crossroads of

sexuality and thought, of semiotic delirium and symbolic tyranny. Her discourse is expressed in poetic language and experienced in the semiotic of her desire and passion that shows the sacredness of a woman's body and of her love. This sacred love gives her agency as a speaking and loving subject. Kristeva emphasizes, "Whatever the symbol might be, it is a woman who is the source and center of the invocation" (FS 104). It is a woman who makes the call to love, it "is truly *she* who speaks, it is *she* we hear, it is *she* who *loves* – whereas *he* flees" (FS 103 *original emphasis*). *She* is the active agent who loves and longs for her beloved through the separations, *she* who expresses through symbolic language how she longs for the semiotic of the psychic and physical connections with her beloved when they are apart.

Kristeva notes that feminism, represented here by Phyllis Trible, deciphers the *Song of Songs* as "an instance of support for its 'depatriarchalizing' interpretation of Judaism" (TL 87, 390, n. 10) because of the active voice of the Shulamite. With this understanding, Kristeva proposes that the Shulamite is "the prototype of the modern individual." ... a subject "sovereign through the love and discourse that causes it to be" (TL 100). The poetic discourse makes the Shulamite a sovereign, speaking and loving subject, linking love and the sacred at the crossroads of symbolic expressions and semiotic experiences as both lover and beloved.

Gathering Threads

In our previous chapter we analyzed the importance of Kristeva's theory of language for understanding the narrative of David and Bathsheba. In this chapter we focused on some aspects of Kristeva's philosophy of love since the narrative of David and Bathsheba is considered a love story, although Mieke Bal posits that, "Within the relations of power that are at stake in this story, we cannot even distinguish between 'love' and 'rape,' so that our referring to the text as a love story is ironic" (Bal 11). We agree with her evaluation of the irony of calling this text a

love story and yet, in our examination of this narrative we will be looking for possible signs of love and the sacred in its pages. We therefore looked at the sacred crossroads of love, of the symbolic and the semiotic, between tyranny and delirium. We offered various explanations of love and the need for a healthy love of self as given in the Bible in order to be able to love the other and to be other for the other. As Goethe resolved that the sacred is that which unites souls (FS 137), it is what we hold as holy as we seek to experience love through interpersonal relations in the unity of the sacred.

For Kristeva, the sacred is the ultimate visage of a life that has meaning. In relation to the sacred we looked at the feminine attribute as a principle, and a sacred self-love beyond narcissism. We noted that to have a love that rehabilitates narcissism we need to be more relational than the Cartesian thinking being, and we need to have more substance than the empty being of Don Juan. In the *Song of Songs* we saw that the Shulamite is a speaking and loving subject, “sovereign through the love and discourse that causes it to be” (TL 100). This has prepared us for our next chapter where we will explore Kristeva’s theory of the be[com]ing of the person as a sovereign subject at the sacred crossroads of love, hovering between tyranny and delirium.

Chapter 4

Sovereignty of/for the Subject-In-Process/On-Trial.

In the previous chapters we have seen that for Kristeva language, love and the sacred are important elements of her philosophy of the subject. We noted the power of language and the influence of love in the sacred process of be[com]ing a person as a subject with a proper place. In examining the process of how we become a subject, it is important to consider what being a subject entails. Kristeva posits that in order to be speaking and loving subjects we must retrieve and claim the notion that we each are a subject-in-process/on-trial and not an object in a predetermined and static or fixed position, while recognizing that all stability is but a moment in a process. In this chapter we will add that for the integrity of the subject with a proper place she must be a sovereign subject. Therefore, let us first elucidate what we mean by ‘sovereignty’ and why it is considered a ‘sacred sovereignty’ for the development of the subject.

If we limit the meaning of sovereignty to a nation or state, it is the quality of having supreme, independent authority over a geographical area and its inhabitants. It necessitates a moral imperative on the entity exercising it, that is, the sovereign has a sacred duty to act in the best interests of its citizens. This includes a responsibility to protect from or against external powers that would override its sovereignty. When we include the individual subject in the concept of sovereignty we realize that the issue of personal sovereignty has been problematic for a very long time. Class and economic differences have created hierarchies between those who rule and those who serve, those who have sovereignty and those who do not. Kristeva reflects on “capitalist society – where subjects are reduced to relationships of production” rather than participate in a “sovereign operation” (Boldt 248). Also sexual difference and social hierarchy

between men and women, in addition to class and economic differences, have affected the notion of personal sovereignty. Nevertheless, Kristeva posits that, “love brushes us up against sovereignty” (TL 9). It is in and through love that we can experience sovereignty. Moreover, Kristeva writes, “If the state of love is such a disconcerting dynamic and at the same time the supreme guarantee of renewal, one understands the excitement it could produce when examined by metaphysical discourse, which clings to it from the time of its beginning in Plato” (TL 16). The ‘state of love’ is disconcerting in its power and its ability to empower, to renew, to bring one to sovereignty and to maintain that sovereignty. Sovereignty for the subject is thus not about mastery or control, it is not for one’s agenda or one’s *telos*, but love guides us to a renewal, it ‘brushes us up’ to our rebirth as a sovereign subject, to be “Sovereign yet not individual” (TL 5). To be sovereign therefore does not mean that we are each individually set apart, each an exclusivity, but rather that we “carve out our own territory within love, establish ourselves as *particular*” (TL 7 *original emphasis*). This establishing of ourselves as a particular with our own territory within the loving interdependence of our families and community is a process that is done in and through love. Kristeva decries that “today we lack being particular, covered as we are with so much abjection” (TL 7), and we will focus on Kristeva’s theory of abjection later in this chapter, but here we emphasize that with sovereignty we can be particular as we create “a new map of the particular” (TL 7). When we follow this new map of being particular in a ‘state of love’ we experience that “the effect of love is one of renewal, our rebirth” (TL 15). This new map of the particular shows that our renewal, our rebirth, is an expression of being, for sovereignty is always connected to integrity, in that integrity is a basic component of sovereignty. Sovereignty can be constrained by the power of custom and restrictions on self-determination, that is, to have restrictions on the final authority over one-self takes away one’s

sovereignty. Kristeva observes in her essay on George Bataille that he designates the experience of sovereignty as being ‘inner’ yet more than solely inner as “the site where power is contested, a site constituting the subject who is not the subject of power (as it has been thought and lived by society and, in particular, by Occidental society), but a free, contesting subject, this experience has impacts that surpass, to a great extent, what is ‘inner’” (Boldt 252). It is thus not ‘merely’ an inner experience for the subject, it is also so much more than that. Kristeva explains, “On the theoretical level, the sovereign subject of inner experience founds the possibility for a new subject who, without renouncing the subject of knowledge – whose fulfillment Marx and Hegel showed by completing its negativity in the Concept or the Revolution - returns to the latter its heterogeneous negativity at the same time as its jouissance” (Boldt 252). Within the context of analysis and the notion of transference love, Kristeva notes that this love, “is particular, in the sense that it is destined for a ‘subject who is supposed to know’ (Lacan), but this in no way means that it is something other than just love” (TL 8, 9). In light of Kristeva’s multiple references to ‘revolution’, including the revolution of the subject, it is thus important for the sovereign subject to be a loving and knowing subject because, as she elucidates, “‘The inner experience’ of the ‘sovereign subject’ is one of the symptoms of this revolution of the subject. Thus it must be thought of as an indispensable complement to the social practice of men, a practice whose meaning and objectives it is already modifying” (Boldt 252). We have seen that as an example of personal sovereignty Kristeva analyzes the story of the Shulammite of the biblical book *The Song of Songs* in *A Holy Madness: She and He* (TL 83-100). The Shulammite is a young woman, a loving and speaking subject who speaks of her love and describes her beloved in the most beautiful erotic language that is still valued today. Because the Shulammite took an active role as both lover and beloved as she speaks of her love, Kristeva posits that “she

is sovereign through her love and the discourse that causes it to be” (TL 100). As a sovereign subject she searched the orchards and the streets of the city for her beloved and in doing so she stepped outside the social practice of men, a practice where the woman patiently waited at home for her beloved to come to her, a practice whose meaning and objectives she has modified.

Kristeva considers that the Shulammitte “is the first common individual who, on account of her love, becomes the first Subject in the modern sense of the term” (TL 100). The Shulammitte is a speaking and loving sovereign subject and with her example Kristeva continues to describe the revolution of the subject. This revolution places the subject *en procès*, a French term which means both ‘in process’ and ‘on trial’ (Atkins 560). The subject undergoes a transformation from having a static, unchanging position, to being an active agent as it is placed in-process/on-trial and as it develops and grows as a sovereign subject with a proper place.

Kristeva’s philosophy of the subject is shaped by both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. We will briefly look at some aspects of their theories in so far as they influence Kristeva’s theory of be[com]ing a subject. Kristeva posits two foundational categories, the semiotic and the symbolic and, like the psychic registers of Freud of the id, the ego and the superego (Freud xxiv), and the stages of Lacan of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, they form a dialectic (TL 7, 8). To these registers Kristeva adds three moments in the constitution of the subject: love, loss, and abjection. Our focus is on these aspects of Kristeva’s theory of the subject as they relate to the rereading of the trajectory of Bathsheba in the biblical narrative of David.

Freud and the Id, the Ego, and the Super-ego

The subject in Freudian theory has three elements which in German are called “*das Ich*, *das Es*, and *das Über-Ich*” (Freud xxiv). Although literally translated as ‘the I’, ‘the it’, and ‘the over-I’, McLintock explains that, “Their established English equivalents are ‘the ego’, ‘the id’, and ‘the super-ego’” (Freud xxiv). Robert Coles, in his introduction to *Selected Writings* of Freud, posits that “Psychoanalysis gives us, after all, not only the id, but the ego and the superego, and it is in their interplay that our fates are determined” (Coles xi). It is this interplay that also allows our stories to be told, “in the hope that a new kind of story will emerge: the hitherto afflicted one becomes stronger through a growing felt awareness, a mix of cognitive and emotional introspection that takes place over the extended time of an analytical experience” (Coles xv). The ‘afflictions’ may be different for the people who participate in this process of creating a cognitive and emotional awareness through introspection perhaps with a trusted other or with an analyst. Coles argues that it was “Freud’s genius to envision psychoanalysis as something beyond the abstract, the discursive, the argued. He saw it as a way of being, really, between two humans, the analyst and the analysand as partners, as companions even, in an effort to learn from one another” (Coles xv). This relationship of partners or companions in the endeavour of reflecting and analyzing together is not something to be taken lightly. Coles explains that this process is “the commitment two people can make to one another, as in Nietzsche’s ‘it takes two to make a truth’” (Coles xv). This commitment to each other in order to learn truths in and about each other is why it continues to be important to tell our stories and to hear or read and interpret our current and our ancient stories, including our biblical stories, in order to understand and hope that in our telling and really listening ‘a new kind of story will emerge’.

In his “*Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*” (Coles 313 - 419), Freud explains that the “ego is an organization. It is based on the maintenance of free intercourse and of the possibility of reciprocal influence between all its parts” (Coles 329). Because of this possibility Freud considers that he was justified “in dividing the ego from the id” and yet posit that “the ego is identical with the id, and is merely a specially differentiated part of it” (Coles 327). This differentiated part allows for communication, for ‘free intercourse’ and the possibility of a mutual and shared influence between the ego and the id. Freud elucidates, “...if a real split has occurred between the two, the weakness of the ego becomes apparent. But if the ego remains bound up with the id and indistinguishable from it, then it displays its strength” (Coles. 327). The strength of the ego is in its relation to the id. Freud continues that the “same is true of the relation between the ego and the super-ego. In many situations the two are merged; and as a rule we can only distinguish one from the other when there is a tension of conflict between them” (Coles 327). The ego then, “is, indeed, the organized portion of the id” (Coles 327). The id is the unconscious and in the unconscious there is no temporality and all energy is in a mobile and fluid state. Coles points out that Freud recognized and respected various novelists, including Fyodor Dostoevsky and George Eliot, because in their work, “the unconscious (known, often, as the ‘intuition’ we awestruck readers grant to storytellers and poets) is not only taken for granted but systematically explored” (Coles ix). The id can thus be methodically examined, however it is not an individual concept for we all participate in the unconscious, and as ‘intuition’ it is part of our social interactions. In this description of the id, of the unconscious, we see a connection between Freudian thought and Kristeva, who explains that this is the place where “drives hold sway and constitute a strange place that I shall name, after Plato (*Timaeus*, 48-53), a *chora*, a receptacle” (PH 14). Like the id, *chora* has a fluid motility of no time and no place, yet it too has

its own ordering. Kristeva connects *chora* with the semiotic and the denotations of ‘trace,’ ‘mark,’ ‘engraved or written sign,’ and ‘imprint’ (LM 32). In this we see the similarities with Freud’s theory of the id, and Kristeva’s description of the semiotic as the place where we are inscribed with what marks us and which can be revealed in memory traces. The construction of the unconscious and our participation in the social create communal and cultural memories. The id makes no distinction between what happened and what we remember happening, thus creating memory fragments that are stored as traces of events and the memory image that is constructed in the unconscious is our perception of the event as we experienced it. Freud posits that there has been a change in how we understand memory,

Having overcome the error of thinking that our frequent forgetfulness amounts to the destruction of the trace left by memory and therefore an act of annihilation, we now tend towards the opposite presumption – that, in mental life, nothing that has once taken shape can be lost, that everything is somehow preserved and can be retrieved under the right circumstances – for instance, through a sufficiently long regression (Freud 7).

Freud argued that we store our memories in our unconscious rather than forget them and, because they are part of our unconscious, they continue to influence us and under certain conditions can be recalled. Yet, Coles emphasizes that “No question, however (to repeat) the heart of Freud’s later thinking had to do not so much with the nature of that unconscious activity as with how each of us manages to deal with it” (Coles xi). Therefore, the influence of memory traces, whether we actively recall them or not, are important for the development of the person as a sovereign subject-in-process/on-trial with a proper place as a particular.

In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Coles 235-310), Freud posits that the unconscious, the id, is driven by the ‘pleasure principle’, the drive for gratification that wants instant satisfaction. This pleasure principle is basically wish fulfillment. Freud describes the active

pleasure principle when the repetition of memory traces teaches an infant that if it is hungry and cries it will get food, and the gratification of receiving food that satisfies its hunger gives pleasure. Freud uses the term ‘infant’ in his analogies to explain the development stage before entrance into language. The storing of memory traces then begins in the early sensory and motor perceptions of the infant, before the infant begins to use symbolic language. From these memory traces the infant learns to relieve the tension of hunger by crying to indicate its desire for food and the gratification it gives. The id retains this desire of the infant structure throughout life. When we relate this to the narrative of David we see that he had a sexual hunger and took the object of his sexual desire for instant gratification, even though “most of us *do* have the ability to contend with our drives, to restrain them, to respond to the world’s values and ideals by living up to them, rather than giving way to what we deep down crave“ (Coles xii *original emphasis*). Coles explains further that, “In other words our mental life features antagonists in a continuing struggle between the side of us that wants to possess certain others – or alas, do them in – and the side of us that knows better, knows good, and knows also what will happen if we don’t watch out, if we lose control of ourselves“ (Coles xii). We then think of David’s son Amnon who, in wanting to possess a ‘certain other’, forcefully sated his sexual hunger on her and - alas, did her in – when he gave in to his drives and lost control of himself. Consequently in the narrative of David we see that beyond the infant stage instant gratification at the cost of someone else and its consequences are devastating and therefore not conducive for *eudaimonia*, that is, for the subject who is in-process/on-trial to survive and thrive in her proper place.

Freud developed the concept of ‘drive’ as “a motive principle; any tendency to persistent behaviour directed at a goal; esp. one of the recognized physiological tensions or conditions of need, such as hunger and thirst” (Freud xxvi). This motive principle aims at an object, an

excitement to alleviate perceived needs, nevertheless, as we saw before, the infant must learn appropriate ways to respond to both internal and external ‘hungers’, excitations that are at the border of soma and psyche, in order to mature into the accepted social behaviours of its culture. The infant does not yet make the distinction between the image and the object, and a hungry infant may be satisfied for a time with a pacifier. But the object must match the memory trace, perceptions and images in the mind must be faithful to the external world, in this case the pacifier represents the mother’s breast and its milk that will satisfy hunger. Kristeva embraces Freud’s theory of the drives as she explains that “the semiotic needs to be understood as always already an organization and structuring of the drives” (LM 13). It is the ordering of the drives in the semiotic that motivates and directs its energy to the symbolic and the becoming of the subject through both the elements of the semiotic and the symbolic of language. “Drives and energy flows never fail to leave their traces in ‘social useful language’ and it is such traces that can account for this excess through/across signification that Kristeva calls the semiotic” (LM 14). The drives and energy flows, even though they are sublimated, leave their traces and their marks on us and on the social. Although the primary process in the realm of the id gives an image of what we need, this does not mean that our desire must be immediately gratified and we learn that not all excitations will be satisfied. Hence a necessary secondary process is required for the development of the subject.

In this secondary process the images of memory traces become deeply embedded in us and this process is the realm of the ego. Freud explains that, “the ego is originally all-inclusive, but later it separates off an external world from itself” (Freud 6). In its original myopic view the infant has not yet learned the difference between its ego and an external world, because “The new-born child does not at first separate his ego from an outside world that is the source of the

feelings flowing towards him” (Freud 5). As we saw above, Freud uses the analogy of withholding and, after a cry for help, the giving of the mother’s breast and how “In this way the ego is for the first time confronted with an ‘object’, something that exists ‘out there’ and can be forced to manifest itself only through a particular action” (Freud 5). Thus the infant begins to recognize a world outside of its self and the actions required of the ego. There is no drive in the ego, but the ego relies on and can sustain itself on the energy of the id for, rather than the pleasure principle of the id, the ego is governed by the reality principle as it grapples with the external world. Freud explains that, “Under the influence of the ego’s instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*” (Coles 239 *original emphasis*). Freud appears to struggle with a definition of ‘instinct’ in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Coles 234-310), but allows that “*It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces” (Coles 275 *original emphasis*). Freud connects this definition of instinct to the behaviour of fish and migrating birds. Suffice it to say that for humans instinct is an urge that we experience without necessarily knowing the origins of this urge.

The reality principle helps us to understand not only what we need but also what we need to do to get it. Although the reality principle also leads to gratification, this is not the path to instant gratification but to a sublimation of the drives that is needed to build, sustain, and fortify the ego for a goal, for a later gratification. Freud explains that the reality principle “does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction” (Coles 239). The ego must learn to negotiate the reality principle with the id so that it will experience gratification at its proper time and place

according to the accepted standards of our culture, for all cultures require a sublimation of the drives. In the narrative of David we see the dire consequences when desire is not sublimated and there is a disregard for “the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure” (Coles 239). The ego must endure the tension of delayed gratification and learn to sustain that tension for it is crucial for the be[com]ing and maintaining of its subjectivity.

Thus Freud posits the id with the pleasure principle of immediate gratification and that the ego with the reality principle of delayed gratification is required as the mediator between the id, the unconscious, and the external world of our culture. For this negotiating procedure the ego is influenced by the super-ego. The super-ego is the metaphorical ‘they’ of the voices of parents and people who have cultural and religious authority that inscribe us with what is acceptable for us to be and to do. Freud explains, “The super-ego is an authority that we postulate, and conscience a function that we ascribe to it, along with others – this function being to supervise and assess the actions and intentions of the ego, to exercise a kind of censorship” (Freud 73). This super-ego is at the core of our conscience, it is our internal punitive power and its nature is to never be satisfied and, as such, it creates guilt in us. The super-ego is both conscious and unconscious with no distinction between thought and act. Freud considers that we “know of two origins of the sense of guilt; one is fear of authority; the other, which came later, is fear of the super-ego. The former forces us to forgo the satisfaction of our drives; in addition to this, the latter insists on punishment, for the continuance of our forbidden desires cannot be hidden from the super-ego” (Freud 63, 64). In the story of David we note that he did not express guilt until confronted by the authority of the prophet Nathan.

For Freud, the terms super-ego, conscience, sense of guilt, remorse and need for punishment “all apply to the same relationship, while denoting different aspects of it” (Freud 72,

73). The ego of David had disregarded the sense that he was being supervised and, after he admits guilt and expresses remorse for his actions, he must deal with the severity of his conscience, the enormity of his punishment and his need for forgiveness. According to Freud, “The sense of guilt, the harshness of the super-ego, is thus identical with the severity of the conscience; it is the ego’s perception of being supervised in this way, its assessment of the tension between its own strivings and the claims of the super-ego” (Freud 73). Our acceptance of, and our submission to the standards of the super-ego in the be[com]ing of a subject is a gradual and transformational process where the smallest change has exponential results. Hence we need a balance of the three elements, the id, the ego and the super-ego, and the tension between them is an oscillation between our internal world struggles as the ego mediates the id and the superego with the demands of our external world. With Kristeva we will see how David attempts to restore this balance within himself as he traverses the oscillation process between the semiotic and the symbolic.

Lacan and the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic.

Freud considers the “free intercourse” of the ego, the id and the superego and the “reciprocal influence between all its parts” (Coles 329). Yet Kristeva understands that in this ‘free intercourse’ for Freud the ego struggles with the passions and emotions of the id as it strives for the ideal of the super-ego and so bridges the gap between the id and the super-ego. Lacan differs from Freud as he describes the structure and development of the infant-child from its dependence on the maternal to knowledge of the father through language (McAfee 33). Lacan employs three different phases or stages which he terms ‘the symbolic’, ‘the imaginary’, and ‘the real’. Kristeva explains, “The experience of love indissolubly ties together the *symbolic*

(what is forbidden, distinguishable, thinkable), the *imaginary* (what the Self imagines in order to sustain and expand itself), and the *real* (that impossible domain where affects aspire to everything and where there is no one to take into account the fact that *I* am only a part)” (TL 7 *original emphasis*). Whereas Freud posits a free movement, which for Kristeva is a struggle, she argues that the tying together of Lacan’s three registers, even through the experience of love, can become a ‘tight knot’ that ‘strangles’ reality and with it the pulsing, and throbbing processes of life are tamed and deadened. She notes, “Strangled within this tight knot, reality vanishes” (TL 7). In addition she asserts “I do not take it into account, and I refer it, if I think of it, to one of the other realms. That means that in love I never cease to be mistaken as to reality” (TL 7). This is indeed a provocative sentence and it is important that we understand what Kristeva means. She notes, “If I emphasize love as a crucible of contradictions and misunderstandings – at the same time infinity of meaning and occultation of meaning – it is because, as such, it prevents me from being smothered to death between the hotchpotch of subterfuges and compromises of group or couple neuroses” (TL 2). When Kristeva describes love as a crucible, that is a severe, searching test or trial, we understand her to say that in love one never is fully in control, never in charge, but always on trial, in process. In that way in love I recognize that reality is uncontrollable. My efforts to control will thus never cease to be mistaken. Kristeva explains that even “Going from error to hallucination, deception might perhaps be coextensive with my discourse, but it is certainly so with my passions: deception - a requirement for *jouissance*?” (TL 7, 8). In a world where errors and deception are a part of life, we need love to negotiate a way that avoids the delirium of hallucination as well as the tyranny of Lacan’s tight knot. Kristeva even asks whether the reality of some deception is perhaps a requirement for *jouissance*? This would suggest that *jouissance* is only possible beyond the limits of control, recognizing that our

passions cannot be bound, may indeed fool us in the process/on trial which is the *jouissance* of love.

Yet again we see the emphasis that Kristeva places on love. She notes that “First among the moderns, Sigmund Freud, a post-Romanticist, thought of turning love into a cure” (TL 8). Kristeva elucidates that “he went straight to the disorder that love reveals (rather than induces) in the speaking being” and he did this “with the hope of putting things into place, which is to say re-establishing reality, perhaps not all of it, but some of it at least” (TL 8). This is Kristeva’s challenge as she seeks to unravel the ‘tight knot’, the “jumble of real, imaginary and symbolic” (TL 8), for the explanation of the be[com]ing of a subject through the real, the imaginary and the symbolic is fraught with metaphors and metonyms in order to describe that which is before language.

Although Lacan, in analyzing the development of the subject theorized ‘the name of the father’ and ‘the law of the father’, it is not to the father *per se* that the child turns but rather to what the father represents, that is the language and law of the sphere of the father (McAfee 32). It is therefore important to reiterate that the images of ‘maternal’ and ‘paternal’, of ‘mother’ and ‘father’ used in these descriptions are metaphors and metonyms which describe the unfolding of a psychic space. It is the representative meaning of the word ‘father’ that is important in the articulation of the development process of the infant-child. Understanding metaphors as evidence of condensation, using a term to represent a concept or an idea, and metonyms as evidence of displacement, as a symbol for such a thought or idea, Lacan developed many of Freud’s theories (McAfee 32). As we have seen that Freud’s concepts of the id, the ego and the super-ego engage dialectically, so also for Lacan the divisions of the three psychic registers of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, which correlate to need, demand, and desire, engage

dialectically. The distinctions between these registers of need, demand, and desire are that need has the possibility of being satisfied, but demand cannot be satisfied, it always remains unsatisfied and as such it is a different structure than need in that it is never finished, for instance a demand for love; and desire, even though “the object of desire is never exactly ‘that’ – never exactly the thing aimed for” (LM 71), it arises in the split between need and demand where components of each play out.

The real exceeds signification and language and is governed by loss and by traces of memory. McAfee explains that “The real is what is outside of both the imaginary and the symbolic. It is always, as Lacan put it, ‘in its place’, so parts of it cannot be taken out and inserted into language and symbolization” (McAfee 33). The radical dependence of the infant on the mother in the real is experienced absolutely, for instance, it is not that the infant has hunger, but that he is hungry (he is thirsty, he is cold, etc.), that is, the infant is identified by his need.

Lacan fills what he saw as a lacuna in Freud when he adds the mirror stage. Pamela Sue Anderson clarifies that, “The mirror stage is that transitional period before the child enters both language and culture” (Ward 217). The mirror stage is part of the imaginary and “Kristeva identifies the essential role played by the infant’s identification with its own image and by the nascent self’s identification with an imaginary father; this eventually leads to separation from the mother and formation of individual identity” (Ward 217). This mirror stage must thus occur for the genesis of the ego, his own image in the development of his self, for the ego is in direct relation to our exteriority. Anderson explains that for Kristeva this nascent self’s identification with the “imaginary father gives the subject the ego-ideal, which makes possible the transition to the symbolic order of language and to acceptance of the other, even to acceptance of the authoritative Other represented by ‘God the Father Almighty’” (Ward 217, 218). Here Kristeva

introduces “the idea of the imaginary father into religious discourse”, for she argues that this “Freudian father of individual prehistory is part of a religious fantasy, mediating between mother and child” (Ward 217). Anderson allows that this is a “potentially heretical notion” but Kristeva places it with Augustine in the context of “love - *agapè* - of the imaginary father who enables the child to move on, to displace, to signify, to love others outside the mother-infant union. In this way, the third term becomes crucial for transference love” (Ward 217, 218). Lechte further explains that “Separation from the mother (begun as an expulsion of an object by the drives, and completed by the entry into language) is also a precondition of love” (AML 29). Separation from the mother is thus not so much a separation from love, although the infant may experience it as such in the dissolution of the dyad with the mother, but rather it is a separation to be freed from the mother in order to be freed for the condition and participation in love for ‘others outside the mother-infant union’. Lechte continues that “love is fundamental to psychoanalysis in the transference” because it is “fundamentally, a defusing, or at least an assuaging, of a difficult separation from the mother” (AML 29). This notion of the third is therefore crucial and is at the heart of this developmental mirror stage. The infant experiences a mirroring, that is, it begins to see and recognize itself in a mirror and metaphorically it begins to see itself in the faces of other people. For this recognition therefore, “the subject must operate within an imaginary stage in which it strives to see itself reflected in its relation to others” (Ward 217). This is an important step for the infant because for a sense of self to emerge it must come to know itself through others, and these “imaginary identifications return in adult life in privileged moments, notably in love relations” (Ward 217). One could argue that the process of coming to know one’s self in the face of an ‘other’ has two aspects, a positive aspect that makes the child think, ‘I am like that’ and a negative aspect that makes the child think, ‘I am not like that’. We could then

conclude that in this process of recognizing similarity and dissimilarity the child learns that its subjectivity is interdependent with others.

It is at this mirror stage that Kristeva places three moments as presence of subjectivity: love, loss and abjection. We will discuss abjection in more detail later in this chapter. Here we have seen that to become a subject the infant must be separated from the loving dyad with the mother in order to receive language and to be able to participate in love with others beyond that dyad. However, this separation creates an immediate loss for the infant. Central to the mirror stage then is the structural emphasis on the loving presence and then the absence of the mother, however, this process of loss is a *pharmakon* of love, a necessary loss, for if all would remain immediate, there would be no need for language to articulate our need, our demand, our desire – to demand our desire to satisfy our need. For the infant to be able to speak it must have negotiated loss, for to enter into language is to be severed from the real and from the mother. Once we have experienced this severing, we need a substitution for this loss and language is this substitution. Language takes the place of the object that is not there, it stands in the place of the object. Words become substitutes for the things they represent and describe. Lechte elucidates that “In order to become a fully social being, the individual must become a competent user of language. Language both constitutes individualities, or subjects, and also the (social) link between them. This is the level of Lacan’s Symbolic order” (AML 26). Lacan’s Symbolic creates inter-subjectivity “whereby each subject might be able to produce reality and fantasies in images, the means for producing the order that Lacan designated as the Imaginary” (AML 26). And, “Lacan’s Real, to complete the triangle, is what cannot be captured by either the symbolic or imaginary realms” (AML 26). He further explains that the “real is what cannot be symbolized, represented, or expressed in any way” and therefore “the real precedes and succeeds

the subject in language and, more generally, the symbolic” (AML 26). It must be noted that these registers “are not entirely abstract”, that is, “each domain is linked to actual processes” (AML 26).

Otto F. Kernberg notes that Kristeva “retains Lacan’s idea of the need for a dialectic relation between the imaginary and the symbolic in order to grasp the ultimate ‘real’, namely, the existence of the dynamic Unconscious and its manifestations in the objective world of interpersonal discourse” (ITB ix, x). Hence the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic are each needed but, although linked together, they do not absorb each other and do not flow easily from each other, that is why, as we saw above, Kristeva calls it a ‘knot’. According to Alan Sheridan, “in Lacan’s thought the real became that before which the imaginary faltered, that over which the symbolic stumbles, that which is refractory, resistant” (McAfee 33, 34). Consequently, the real is a presence that cannot be disregarded for it is the unconscious that influences the imaginary and the symbolic. Sheridan further explains that the real describes “that which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, ... the umbilical cord of the symbolic” (McAfee 34). It is the life-giving connection, the umbilical cord, to the unconscious for the symbolic that would rather just deal with the conscious. Kristeva sees a necessary continuity in this connection of the unconscious and the symbolic and explains, “I think that in the imaginary, maternal continuity is what guarantees identity” (Moi 1986, 14). Therefore, rather than a severing and a removal of the real, of the maternal from the mother-child dyad, Kristeva adds the paternal role of the ‘third’ into a triad and posits the importance of this ‘third’ in the development of be[com]ing a subject. For the dyad of the mother-child, in their love and attachment to each other but without the proper separation, could lead to abjection. The ‘third’ of the triad of mother-child-father facilitates the separation needed for the child to have its “own

clean and proper body” (PH viii). For Kristeva then, we do not leave the maternal realm, which she calls *chora* and the semiotic, when we enter the paternal realm of the symbolic for we need both the semiotic and the symbolic in the process of be[com]ing a subject with an identity, that is, a subject who is always in the process and trial of be[com]ing a sovereign self with a particular proper place.

Lacan’s Imaginary and Kristeva’s Imaginary Discourse

Kristeva connects Lacan’s imaginary with imaginary discourse and explains that we live in a society that is inundated with images. Advertisements on billboards and various media reflect that we live in a “society of the spectacle”, “ where human relations are mediated by images,” and “appearances have come to take over from being, the image from reality, and the copy from the original, in the play of social action” (LM 116). We live in a time when children are entertained by electronic devices and organized play and where imaginative play time or time to quietly sit and daydream or fantasize are becoming the exception rather than the norm. “Kristeva has said, when discussing fantasm and cinema, that the ‘society of the spectacle’, in conjunction with unsatisfactory family relations, leads to an impoverishment of the capacity to fantasize (Kristeva 2002a: 68)” (LM 116). The imaginary and imaginary discourse needs expression in the inter-subjectivity of human relations. Rather than passively observing someone else’s imagination in just another spectacle that they view, children need to fantasize, to develop their own imagination and actively participate in imaginary discourse in the process of be[com]ing a subject. Lechte tells how in an interview in 2000 “Kristeva says that television is often watched in order to get a short-term fix through imbibing clichés” (LM 117). But these clichés can take the place of personal imagination and Kristeva notes that, “when linked to other social problems, leads to what I have called, ‘new maladies of the soul’: our capacity to represent

conflicts with ourselves; to be free and to rebel, to have an interior life – that is, a ‘soul’, a ‘psyche’ – is threatened. The imaginary is standardized” (LM 117). Kristeva thus makes a connection between our imaginary discourse and our cultural imagination and she argues that our imaginary discourse has suffered from the systematic overabundance of media imagination. In other words, having become observers of media imagination we have difficulty articulating our own imaginary. Once we have difficulty articulating our imaginary, we lose a sense of our inner self, a sense of self-knowledge, and consequently our society of the spectacle, of the image is a danger to our imaginary. But Lechte explains it is even more than that for Kristeva, “the imaginary is not limited to the content of the imagination, a content more or less accessible to reflection and consciousness. Instead it includes the primary identification associated with the father of individual history” (LM 123). Our individual history is affected if we are no more than observers of someone else’s imagination and we become estranged from and lose the source of our primary identification. This primary identification is “fundamental to the development of psychic space” and “is linked to the semiotic, and thus to the drives and affect” (LM 123). These drives and affect are organized by “the sensory, non-verbal aspects of ‘melody, rhythm, color, odors’” and can “attain competence at the level of semiotic meaning” (LM 123). Therefore, although not considered a system, the “semiotic needs to be understood as always already an organization and structures of the drives” (LM 123). Thus the imaginary as part of Kristeva’s semiotic element and imaginary discourse as part of the symbolic element of our Symbolic system are both necessary components in the development of the subject.

It is important for Kristeva’s theory to note that, “Although the contents of the imagination are also part of the imaginary in general, they correspond to the level of linguistic signification (also part of the symbolic proper)” (LM 123). Although the imaginary needs

expression in imaginary discourse, “The imaginary in psychoanalysis is constituted prior to reason and the use of language, it can, in a sense, only be transcended; it cannot be modified from within” (LM 125). That is, one cannot go back into one’s imaginary and change what we have seen and heard according to how this has inscribed us. The inscription that occurs in the mirror stage and the imaginary comprise for Lacan the fundamental features in the ego’s formation (Beardsworth 37). Lechte considers that compared to Lacan, Kristeva is less dogmatic, and she uses a Freudian term to show that the imaginary is linked to the “father of individual pre-history” or, as Kristeva prefers, the Imaginary Father (LM 125). Here we see again Kristeva’s connection of the Imaginary Father with *agapè* love, which comes before the formation of the subject-ego. Lechte notes that unlike Lacan, Kristeva does not make a firm distinction between the subject and the ego (LM 125). For her, the subject is in process and the formation of the ego is part of that process.

Although according to psychoanalysis, the imaginary makes up the ‘dumb’ stage, that is the pre-language, pre-symbolic stage of human development (LM 125), Kristeva moves from Lacan’s imaginary to imaginary discourse and the next movement in the process of be[com]ing a subject. She posits that, “how the child becomes compelled to use language – is the move into the symbolic realm” (McAfee 35). Needs, demand, and desire must be translated into the words of symbolic language in order for the infant-child to become a speaking subject.

Consequently, McAfee notes that, “Throughout her writing, Julia Kristeva focuses on ‘speaking beings’ those who not only use language but are constituted through their use of language” (McAfee 14). It is through the use of language that the child stops being an infant, that is a speechless one in the realm before language, and becomes a subject through the symbolic (McAfee 35). This is why Kristeva’s philosophy of the subject and her philosophy of

language instruct each other, there is a relation, an oscillating process, in both the semiotic and the symbolic registers. Language becomes a part of us and a speaking subject must, of necessity, be using language in some way to discuss language and the speaking subject (McAfee 14). As the be[com]ing of a subject is a process, so “language is a signifying process because it is used by someone who is herself a process” (McAfee 29). According to this theory we thus become who we are as a result of taking part in signifying processes (McAfee 29). That is why the infant must come to the desire of the symbolic realm and must learn to articulate through language in order to become a subject. McAfee elucidates that, “For Lacan, culture, language, and unconscious desires produce subjectivity” (McAfee 30). However, the desire of the symbolic realm is not the desire that craves and takes an object, but this desire comes from the experience of the primary or foundational loss of the mother-infant dyad and, as we have noted before, it is this loss that propels the desired movement into language. As the infant moves to the use of language, to the symbolic, it does not leave the semiotic behind, rather its participation in the signifying processes of both the semiotic and the symbolic elements constitutes its be[com]ing a subject.

We have thus seen that, “Kristeva transforms Lacan’s distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic order into a distinction between the *semiotic* and *symbolic*. The interaction between these two terms (which, it must be stressed are processes, not static entities), then constitute the signifying process” (Moi 1986, 12 *original emphasis*). For Kristeva then, subjectivity is created in the signifying processes of both the semiotic and the symbolic, for as much as we need the articulation of symbolic language we also need the force of the language that the semiotic contributes to this process. Therefore to be in the process and trial of be[com]ing a subject we need the signifying process of language, we need the ability to think, to

articulate, to reflect, to analyze, and to participate in imaginary discourse and in dialogue, that is, we must be able to utilize the full range of language. At the same time we also need to be fully aware of the contributions made by the semiotic of language which are often expressed in the how of our signifying system, that is, not so much by what was said as how it was said. Then, we also need to use language in an ethical way, being aware of its power for enhancement and destruction in the development of a sovereign subject with a particular proper place. The importance of knowing and employing the language of our complex signifying system lies in its power to reflect our understanding of the world and how the interpretations and commentaries of philosophical and theological canons and biblical narratives influence the reality of our cultural imagination and our imaginary discourse.

In her claim that the subject is always in-process/on-trial, Kristeva argues that, “the identity of the subject requires an acceptance of the social order” (EPD 79). Allison Weir explains that for Kristeva this means that the identity of the subject, the be[com]ing of a subject for the infant-child through the experiences of love and loss, is achieved in the frame of our social order which is articulated through the symbolic order of language (EPD 79). For one can communicate and recognize the social order in that which is expressed through the semiotic and the symbolic elements of our signifying system in the accepted discourse of a culture.

The Role of Abjection in the Be[com]ing of a Subject.

Kristeva examines various aspects of abjection, from psychoanalysis to literary texts, including biblical texts, to draw attention to stories that show the precariousness of identity, as we will explore and address in the next two chapters with the trajectory of Bathsheba in the narrative of David. We have seen that Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva all establish the need for

separation of the mother-child dyad and the experience of rejection and loss of that dyadic love experienced by the infant in the process of be[com]ing a subject. Kristeva places the development of the infant child through its differentiation and separation from the mother before the mirror stage that Lacan theorizes. McAfee explains that for Kristeva it happens, “when the infant begins to expel from itself what it finds unpalatable. This is the process she calls abjection” (McAfee 35). Thus already at this early stage we can see that although the affects of abjection are physical, as the expelling of what is unpalatable, the cause of abjection is not physical but the necessary differentiation and establishment of and respect for boundaries in the development of the subject. Accordingly, Kristeva argues that abjection is connected with the experiences of borders or margins for we must deal with the sense of rejection as experienced by the infant, the feeling of loss, to take up and maintain an identity within the symbolic. Thus Kristeva posits abjection as an operation of the psyche through which one’s subjectivity is established and maintained by excluding anything that threatens the boundaries of “one’s own and clean self” (PH 65). Through the experiences of abjection in the process of be[com]ing a subject and maintaining one’s subjectivity as always in-process/on-trial, each subject must define herself as a sovereign subject with a particular proper place which is also in process as we develop, and to reject anything which threatens the identification of this unique selfhood.

Oliver considers that Kristeva’s writings “can be read as an oscillation between the semiotic and symbolic, between rejection and identification” (RK 11). It is an interweaving of the semiotic in its representation of the maternal and of the symbolic in its representation of the world of the father, and the need for the infant to be ejected out of the maternal sphere in order to find its identification in the paternal sphere. This oscillation is seen especially in her two books *Tales of Love* and *Powers of Horror*. In *Tales of Love* she analyzes the need for love in the

process of be[com]ing a subject, and the necessary process of losing the loving dyad of the mother-child in order to form a loving triad of mother-child-father in its search for meaning. In *Powers of Horror* she focuses her analysis on the experience of abjection in the development of the subject as she argues that, over against love “what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (PH 2). Thus whereas love leads the way to meaning, abjection leads to the place where meaning collapses.

Kristeva begins her book *Powers of Horror* with the ominous line: “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (PH 1). Oliver notes that it is as if the semiotic of abjection is the impossible of Lacan’s real, but for Kristeva Lacan’s real has the status of “a hole, a void” and by contrast she argues that, “the notion of the semiotic allows us to speak of the real without simply saying that it’s an emptiness or a blank” (LM 13). For Kristeva there is activity in the semiotic and, having set the stage with an image of the horror of abjection, she now expresses a feeling of horror as she adds, “It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries and fascinates desire, which nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects” (PH 1). We will come back to this quote as it relates to David’s son Amnon in chapter six.

If we understand desire as a drive, that is, as a motive principle for persistent and goal directed behaviour, we can see the power of abjection that diverts desire, turns it aside, and rejects the process of becoming an ‘I’, that is a sovereign subject with a particular proper place. This is because “The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*” (PH 1

original emphasis). The infant is confronted by the horror that something external to its self can challenge and prevent the process of be[com]ing an I. This opposition to the I is so strong that, “The one who is haunted by abjection is literally beside himself” (PH 1). We see this in the narrative of David in our next chapter when he is ‘beside himself’ with grief and guilt. Abjection throws us off course, off our goal of be[com]ing a sovereign subject with a particular proper place. Thus, although the infant experiences rejection at the beginning of the process of be[com]ing an I, the feeling of rejection in abjection can continue to haunt us as we struggle, always ‘on-trial’, in our continued process of be[com]ing a subject.

Although a complex composite of abjection is seen in the description of its affects, what causes abjection is “what does not respect borders, positions, rules” (PH 4). Although it seems that abjection involves the feeling of objectification, as when for instance the abject in the form of bodily fluids is rejected, this may be understood as an affect and not a cause. The cause of abjection is the disintegration of borders and boundaries necessary for becoming an I and the experience of abjection thrusts one outside of the oppositions of subject and object, the fundamental dualism by which we establish ourselves as subjects (PH 12). Therefore, striving in the process for sovereignty for the subject, for her particular proper place in her culture, in the context of dualistic concepts of male/female, self/other, subject/object dichotomies creates a structure of self versus other, and the marginalization of this other. But abjection threatens the logic of these dichotomies because the abject does not accept boundaries, and so the abject threatens to draw the subject into an ‘abyss’ where ‘meaning collapses’ (PH 2). Because abjection does not respect boundaries of borders and margin, the experience of abjection thrusts us outside of the oppositions of the dualism by which we establish ourselves as subjects (PH 12). Kristeva thus places the abject at the margins of the self, that border which is the place of

ambiguity, for much like the infant is defined not as having hunger or having thirst, but as ‘being hungry’ or ‘being thirsty’ so in abjection we are defined not as ‘having abjection’ but as ‘being abject’. Thus we experience the blurring of borders and margins and feel a sense of rejection in abjection, yet we must learn to define our self as a sovereign subject-in-process/on-trial. In this process abjection is the “in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (PH 4), for “it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” but “also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives” (PH 9, 10). Kristeva explains that it “is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order” (PH 4). We will see this in the narrative of David when he is confronted with the consequences of his disrespect for borders, positions and rules as he disrupted a person’s identity and the order of the system that he was called to protect and uphold, and in his abjection faced the affects of judgment and condemnation as he yearned for absolution.

Thus abjection is necessary for knowing the borders of the self as a sovereign subject-in-process/on-trial with a particular proper place in its culture. Nevertheless, although the cause of abjection is not bodily, the affects of abjection are experienced in a semiotic of the soma, that is, in and of the body. Kristeva is explicit, “The spasms and vomiting that protect me” (PH 2), by the rejection and ejection of that which threatens the formation of the I. In a vivid visual metaphor Kristeva explains that in abjection, through the spasms of retching “I expel *myself* I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (PH 3 *original emphasis*). Even though abjection is opposed to the I, it is I oriented, and Kristeva writes of the personal I, as the I expels, as the I spits and I abject myself even as I try to establish myself. Although the experience of abjection is a threat to the formation of the I, the

self of the I is here being objectified as something that can be rejected and expelled. It is the abject self that needs cleansing, thus it is necessary for the I to cleanse its self from defilement, it is the I that is responsible for this process, I need to expel and spit out not only the external things that defile me, but I need to abject my self, my defiled and unclean self to establish my clean and proper self in order to satisfy my drive to be a subject. Kristeva continues with her vivid imaginary discourse as she describes how this process of trying to establish her self “turns me inside out, guts sprawling” (PH 3). Yet, during this process “in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (PH 3). These physical symptoms are a “mute protest”, “it abjects”, it is a “shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts” (PH 3). In psychoanalysis, abreaction is the emotional release experienced by an analysand when she puts into words ideas or emotions that she has been repressing.

Kristeva notes that “When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable object (PH 1). Therefore, although we can describe what abjection is in its various forms of rejection and ejection, our imaginary discourse does not give a comprehensible picture, and a clear and concise definition remains elusive. Kristeva acknowledges this elusiveness when she explains that, “The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine” (PH 1). The abject is thus not a thing that I can define in the language of our symbolic system, but rather it is experienced by me as it sickens and revolts me. Kristeva reiterates that the abject is also not “an ob-ject, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest for desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to

be more or less detached and autonomous” (PH 1). As such, Kristeva posits abjection as a “sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it may have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome” (PH 2). Kristeva uses the term uncanny here to explain something that is at the same time both familiar and unsettling, with no clear boundaries, often inspiring feelings of apprehension. It is uncanny because I am attracted and repulsed at the same time. Thus, for example, food to which I am attracted can repulse me if I eat too much or if it makes me sick. Or while there is a certain fascination with my blood as the fluid of my existence, when, as in a nosebleed, if it keeps flowing I am repulsed because it seems that I cannot staunch its flow. In such cases the food and blood is not me, not really food or blood either, but it is not nothing either. Kristeva says exactly that: “Not me. Not that. But not nothing either (PH 2). She elucidates that it is a “‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (PH 2). This ‘something’ is important for although Kristeva posits that the individual subject is composed within and through language, she points us to occasions when we need to transgress the symbolic of our signifying system and enter an impossible yet necessary dialectic of the symbolic and semiotic elements. These are times when we must go beyond the boundaries of language as we experience the semiotic of somatic functions as cleansing and as defilement, in order to become an I with one’s own clean and proper body (PH 8), or “one’s own and clean self” (PH 65). Here Kristeva has a description of be[com]ing a subject, an I whose abjected self has been expelled and ejected. Now the I with its ‘own and clean self’, or ‘one’s own clean and proper body’, represents a law-abiding, normalized, clean or pure social subject, an I which constitutes itself not only through language but also assumes its identity through ritual acts of exclusion through rejection and ejection. Cleansing is then done through abjection with the processes of reaction and abreaction, and Kristeva explains that “defilement is what is jettisoned

from the ‘*symbolic system*’. It is what escapes the social rationality, that logical order on which the social aggregate is based, which then ... constitutes a *classification system* or a *structure*” (PH 65 *original emphasis*). Thus the abject, imaginary and threat, is not a thing yet is something, one does not part from the abject yet one cannot protect oneself from it as from an object, for the role of abjection, although it is opposed to the I, nevertheless is part of the formation and constitution of the I, of the subject as it helps to define and re-define its margins and borders in the context of its culture. Indeed for Kristeva abjection is both unavoidable and necessary in order to separate from the mother and the mother’s world, but she argues that this loss of the mother, connected as it is to abjection, is a gain for the infant/child to enter into the world of the symbolic. In her *Stabat Mater* (TL 234- 263), Kristeva expresses the two worlds as she separates the text into two columns, one part describing the symbolic, the more theoretical and one part describing the semiotic of her own experience. Between is a yawning chasm, a threatening emptiness. However the emptiness that is signified in the space between the two columns, between the symbolic and the semiotic, can be negotiated or crossed when a proper balance is achieved and we then have the crossroads of/for love.

Kristeva describes this when she writes: “On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture” (PH 2). Kristeva is saying that if we give way to hallucination as reality we are lost in despair, annihilated in delirium. But, she notes that she has safeguards to protect her, for the abject and abjection reveal the margins, the primers of her culture. Her safeguard is to accept that abjection with its attraction and repulsion is not a hallucination, but an ordeal that can be lived through in the experience of love. Abjection, experienced with somatic functions in the semiotic order, is an important element of being an

embodied subject. Abjection, a threat that can be faced and thwarted, is nevertheless necessary for the development of our I, to protect the I in its development as it shows us the fundamentals of our culture, that is, it shows us without words of the symbolic system what is acceptable and not acceptable for being included “according to the rules” of our culture (PH 2). Where Freud posits a super-ego that teaches the rules and regulations of our culture, Kristeva posits abjection as elementary guidelines for what is acceptable for us to be and to do. But, even though the abject and abjection are our safeguards, with the I as an agent in this process, this agency is only ever partial and it is our lack of full control that draws attention to the precariousness of our identity and our subjectivity.

This partial agency and our lack of full control over our self-identity as an I is continually flaunted by the presence of bodily fluids which attest to vulnerability both from without and within. Kristeva offers varied examples of bodily fluids, of filth and defilement, that lead to an understanding of the semiotic and the somatic as she situates the concept of the abject as defilement and of how defilement is “jettisoned from the symbolic system” (PH 65). The precariousness of our subjectivity is shown in that the abject is seen as defilement, for example, when a girl begins her menses as she develops into womanhood, she may experience her self as defiled with that which is a danger in her drive for her own clean and proper body. Thus, food, blood, bodily wastes, sexual fluids, vomit, etc. are potentially polluting, even though necessary for the maintenance of life. This serves to remind the subject that it cannot escape basic biological drives over which she has no influence or control, for she is an embodied self. Thus, expulsion of the unclean, the improper, which is always provisional and ultimately impossible, shows the boundaries of the internal and external, a fluidity of boundaries that cannot be stabilized (PH 2). Freud notes that, “The urge for cleanliness arises from the wish to get rid of

excrement, which has become repugnant to the senses” (Freud 42, n 1). Kristeva is specific about what it is that must be rejected by the abject, "Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death" (PH 71). Kristeva then makes a distinction for women in that menstrual blood with its deep meanings of cyclical renewal and potential for new birth and life shows sexual difference between female and male and this sexual difference creates tension, both social and sexual tension, within society. It is an internal danger because each sex internalizes their femaleness or maleness and the social and cultural expectations of being female or male as a part of their identity. This is a necessary part of the process of be[com]ing a subject and only becomes problematic when the subjectivity of female and male subjects become affected by power relations in cultural aggregates based on this sexual difference. Thus, menstrual blood, “stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference” (PH 71). The external dangers have a clear opposite, the ego is threatened by the non-ego, that is the dissolution of our subjectivity, society is threatened by its outside, that is by the other who is a stranger to us, and life is threatened by death, the final step in the process of the subject. The internal dangers to our identity do not have clear opposites but are focused on relations between women and men, relations that are expressed socially and sexually. Nevertheless, in Kristeva’s theory, all persons participate in the same sacred process of be[com]ing an I, that is a sovereign subject. There is no hierarchy or power structure in this process, and Kristeva places the abject at the margins of the I, of a self which is neither subject nor object. The abject person is not secure in her subjectivity for she has not attained or has lost her sense of a clean and proper self.

Here too the emerging subject stands at the crossroads in which a balance is called for. With too much abjection we have tyranny and with too little abjection we have delirium. Thus the role of abjection is a paradox in the formation and constitution of the I as it helps to define and re-define the borders of the subject yet threatens the formation of the I, to draw it into an “abyss” where “meaning collapses” (PH 2). The abject person experiences this collapse as a “weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me” (PH 2). Therefore, our drive for a clean and proper self, our need to be in the process and trial of being an I with a self-identity as a sovereign subject with her own particular proper place is continually threatened and flaunted by the presence of bodily fluids which attest to her vulnerability both from ‘without and within.’

To be abject and the experience of abjection is not the same for everyone. We have seen how Freud argued that each person has her or his own super-ego, the ‘they’ of the voices of authority of our conscience that oversee our actions with punitive power. We see Kristeva’s connection to Freud’s thought when she notes that, “To each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (PH 2). Although abjection also comes from the outside, here Kristeva focuses on the abjection that comes from the inside, how each person’s own super-ego will determine the experience of their abjection. We thus see the influence of Freud on Kristeva’s thought in reference to the super-ego in connection with abjection, and her theories are most helpful for examining the biblical narrative of David and his family in our next two chapters. For example, Kristeva notes that our reaction to the abject occurs outside of language and symbolization, it “constitutes and brings about an effect and not yet a sign” (PH 10). The eyes water, the stomach tightens, the body shudders and chokes and so, approaching God in his abject despair, David wails and sobs. When Kristeva writes, “...desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects” (PH 1), we

think of David's son Amnon, whose desire turned aside as he sickened and rejected the victim of his desire. Yet, this was not a sickening or rejection because of abjection because Amnon gives no indication that he recognizes or acknowledges that he has been immoral (we will discuss this further in chapter six). Kristeva clarifies that "He who denies morality is not abject," for one can have amorality, but abjection "is immoral" (PH 4). Here we see that immoral acts, the unethical, along with disrespect for borders and margins, cause abjection and this lack of ethics, this immorality takes away the notion of a clean and proper body, one's social self, and causes the loss of one's identity as a sovereign subject with a particular proper place.

Gathering Threads

We have seen that Kristeva's theory of the subject engages Freudian theories and goes beyond Lacanian thought to carve out a newly acknowledged reality for the person in the process of be[com]ing a sovereign subject with a particular proper place. Moi explains that for Kristeva, "The modern, unstable and empty subject, she argues, ought not to be fixed and stabilized, but to be turned into a work-in-progress" (Moi 1986, 14). The sacred process of be[com]ing a subject, an I, is an ongoing responsibility to our self, for Freud noted that, "even the sense of self is subject to disturbances, and the limits of the self are not constant" (Freud 5). Here we see in Freud the beginning of the thought that is developed by Kristeva, for this is where the concept of the subject changes and reflects that a "new heterogeneous reality is the reality of a new heterogeneous subject, what Kristeva calls the 'subject-in-process/on trial'" (EPD 3). Whereas Freud refers to "perceptions, thoughts, feelings" that "seem alien, divorced from the ego, and others in which he attributes to the external world what has clearly arisen in the ego and ought to be recognized by it" (Freud 5), Kristeva refers to the other who is internal to us, the stranger within who influences us and connects us with the external world of be[com]ing. Freud too

recognized a self that is not constant and that is vulnerable to, yet dependent on disturbances, not unlike Kristeva's process and trial in be[com]ing a subject. Kristeva's subject experiences the process and trial of development and transformation in and through both the symbolic and the semiotic elements of our signifying process. Be[com]ing a subject is *not* a position that can be reached or accomplished, but rather it remains in the process of developing, growing, and flourishing, hence our 'subject position' is but a moment in a process. Kristeva posits that this "heterogeneous process ... is a structuring and de-structuring *practice*, a passage to the outer *boundaries* of the subject and society" (RPL 17 *original emphasis*). This process is thus a praxis, a blend of theory and practice that transforms as it pushes the limits of the subject to the 'outer boundaries' and will continue to transform the individual person as a sovereign subject with a particular proper place from which to act and to flourish. Kristeva conveys promise and hope for the subject-in-process/on-trial as she posits that this subject-in-process/on-trial will experience the adventure of being alive in the world and then "and only then – can it be *jouissance* and revolution" (RPL 17).

We have explored Kristeva's relations with Freudian and Lacanian thought and have begun to show the applicability of Kristeva's philosophical concept of the subject as a frame for interpreting the biblical story of Bathsheba in the narrative of David. The amatory discourse and the experiences of love are important for the speaking and loving sovereign subject-in-process/on-trial for it influences her imaginary discourse and her recognition of the other for "in love 'I' has been an other" (TL 4). This understanding of the other, of the stranger who is not only out there but who is also within me, and that in love I can be other to the other and in addition that I can speak of this love in imaginary discourse that employs both the semiotic and symbolic elements of our signifying system is an affirming realization for the sovereign subject,

for her identity and her particular proper place. This subject knows that its be[com]ing is an ongoing sacred process, it is sacred because the process is our individual duty to our self to become a sacred sovereign subject, it is not something that someone else can do for us.

Although it has been suggested that a subject can conform to the demands of others in its cultural setting, we have seen with Kristeva that becoming an I, be[com]ing and maintaining our subjectivity as a sovereign self, is not 'selfish' but a sacred responsibility. It is something that each individual I is responsible for as she traverses the joys and pitfalls of her life's journey. She must therefore actively participate in this sacred process, deconstructing and constructing through our language, our loving, and our imaginary discourse in our interdependence with other sovereign subjects who are also in-process/on-trial. Kristeva calls this process a revolution and she addresses the need for a continued discourse of the subject, an imaginary and amatory discourse that takes into account the whole of our being and our development as sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial with a particular proper place in which to flourish.

Chapter 5

The Story of Bathsheba and David: Beauty Objectified and the Abjection of the Objectifier

We have seen how Kristeva interweaves her philosophies of language and of the subject, and how she searches for a proper place for the sovereign speaking subject at the sacred crossroads of love. In this chapter we take these Kristevan philosophical concepts as a frame for re-reading and examining the story of Bathsheba in the biblical narrative of David. John Fletcher explains that various authors “make use of Kristevan categories – the abject, the semiotic chora and her interpretation of primary narcissism – to elaborate readings of particular texts or to advance meta-critical or speculative debates” (AML 4). Although we also make use of Kristevan categories, we do so because Kristeva’s philosophy gives worthy insights in an elaborate re-reading of this particular trajectory of women’s stories in the narrative of David. However, it is not my intent to advance meta-critical or speculative debates, for speculative debates are rampant already and, rather than attempt to advance one meta-critical response to the narrative and its interpretations, the aim of applying Kristevan concepts is to augment our understanding of the complexities of the implicit stories in the explicit narrative with their possible ethical and theological meanings, and to show openings for further and varied critiques.

We have seen that for Kristeva the concept of the self as a subject is not abstract but in and through language the person is constituted as a sovereign speaking subject (TL 100) who remains grounded as an embodied subject and, as such, an embodied knower through the semiotic and symbolic elements of our Symbolic system. In theorizing about abjection, Kristeva takes the body and its somatic functions as a focus for philosophical discussion. Through a method of challenging and deconstructing the philosophical concepts of Plato and Descartes that

subordinates the body to the mind, she establishes that we are embodied subjects, and this holistic concept of the body and the mind of the subject will inform our analysis of the objectified and sexualized female body that we will discuss in this chapter and expand on in our next chapter. Discerning and examining the stories of the women in our chosen trajectory as told in the narrative of David and his sons is important for our understanding of the concept of the self as a sovereign subject-in-process/on-trial with a proper place. In these biblical stories we learn what happens when the subjectivity of a woman is not respected, when she is reduced to being a female body and when, instead of honouring the woman *qua* woman, her female body is objectified and sexualized, used and abused for personal and political purposes, and we see the consequences of objectifying, violating, silencing, rejecting and discarding the sexualized female body.

Fiona Carson writes: “Interpreted from a Kristevan psychoanalytic perspective, there is a correspondence between the integrity of the body and the integrity of the self” (Gamble 123). With this correspondence between the integrity of the body and of the self, Kristeva focuses on the subject as a whole person and connects the development of this subject who is in-process/on-trial with language and love. It is with this frame of both the semiotic and symbolic elements of the Symbolic system of our language, of the subject as a sovereign and speaking subject, and of the sacred crossroads of love that we now come to the biblical story of David and Bathsheba. With this frame we will also see how Kristeva’s philosophy of abjection can be applied as a theoretical method to provide an enquiring and illuminating hermeneutic for a revolution in understanding through a re-reading of this biblical narrative. Our method will be to follow the story of Bathsheba and some of the other women in the narrative of David as we read it in the

Bible, examine various commentaries on the story, and with our comments and questions apply Kristevan concepts as they suggest themselves.

With this approach to re-reading the biblical story of Bathsheba in the narrative of David, and responding to its interpretations, we note not only that, but also how Kristeva connects the mind and the body, psyche and soma, as she posits abjection as an operation of the psyche through which one's subjectivity is established by excluding anything that threatens one's boundaries, and situates the concept of the abject as "defilement"; of how defilement is "jettisoned from the symbolic system" (PH 65). The symbolic system cannot abide the notion of defilement of the semiotic as it relates to the body, and therefore rejects and discards it. But, as we have seen before, the symbolic system, which is associated with the language of power and conformity, is only one of the two fundamental dimensions of Kristeva's philosophy of language between which the subject balances, the other dimension is the semiotic order, which is driven by primary processes.

The Beginning of the Story in the Narrative

The biblical story of Bathsheba in the narrative of David, which begins in 2 *Samuel* 11, focuses on David, on his actions and his experiences. Bathsheba appears to be on the periphery. She is central to the plot, but the plot is not about her (Plaskow 3). She is talked about in the third person. Yet Bathsheba is integral to the narrative of David and vital to the development of the Davidic kingdom.

When I was young, very young, I believed that this was one of the greatest love stories in the Bible. Something like a Cinderella story, where the king sees a beautiful woman, he invites her for dinner and falls in love with her, and then she gets to live in his palace and they live

happily ever after. But later when I began to read the story differently and more critically rather than as the fairy tale I had thought it to be, I began to question the notion of love in this story. Is love mentioned at all in this story? If so, who loves whom? With what kind of love? Is the Hebrew notion of *hesed* shown in this narrative? The biblical narrative makes it clear that there is love between David and his God. But does David have a love for his fellow human beings, men and women? If so, how is that expressed in this story? If not, what happened?

We have already noted the importance of telling and listening to our life stories and Toni Morrison, a well known American author, believes that stories and story telling convey information, necessary information, available nowhere else. Morrison asserts: "The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, and writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience, it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie" (Gray 58). To limn means to draw or paint in order to portray possible meanings; it is to elucidate that which the words of the symbolic of our language show and express. With this Bible story let us see if we can limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of David and Bathsheba and of the other characters that are drawn into their story, and arc toward the place where meaning may lie, as the narrator tells his tale towards a dialectical, fragmented, and silent significance.

As the narrator of the story does, let us first focus on King David. What can we learn about him? David sent his army into battle, yet David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around; he saw a woman. David sent someone to find out about her. David then sent messengers to get her, and he had sexual intercourse with her. Later he received a message to say that she is pregnant. David sent word to Joab, the general of his army. At David's invitation Uriah, the woman's husband, ate and drank at the palace. David

spoke to Uriah, told him to go home and he sent him a gift. David made him drunk. David devised a plan to kill Uriah and wrote a letter to Joab. Then David brought Uriah's widow, Bathsheba, to his palace. Can we tell from this story what kind of man David is? We can determine from this story that perhaps David is restless, David desires, David gets, David deceives, and David conspires to kill. David is action oriented. David seeks conquest and invades.

And what can we learn about Bathsheba from this story? Bathsheba's voice is not heard in the narrative. The things we know about her are what the narrator tells us from David's perspective. He notes that she is beautiful. That David had her brought to the palace. That David had sexual intercourse with her. That David is told she is pregnant. We have no idea from the text what kind of person Bathsheba is. This inclusion of David and exclusion of Bathsheba shows how a written text can be used as an instrument of power and control. It is within the power of the narrator to describe a person, to give him or her importance, to give or withhold from this person the power of speech, that is, a voice in the story. The narrator gives Bathsheba no speaking voice, no access to words, to the symbolic realm, but gives the voice and the speaking realm only to David. Bathsheba appears to live and move in a semiotic code of silence, but even so we do get an idea and in spite of the lack of words a picture, a drawing of truths, meanings and interpretations describing the images in our minds, emerges and grows.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza writes of a "hermeneutics of liberative vision and imagination" which "seeks to actualize and dramatize biblical texts differently" (Gottwald and Horsley 175). Schussler Fiorenza explains that, "Creative re-imagination employs all our creative powers to celebrate and make present the suffering, struggles, and victories of our forefathers and foremothers" (Gottwald and Horsley 175). A re-reading with a frame of

Kristevan philosophical concepts allows us to draw on a ‘creative re-imagination’ as we ‘actualize and dramatize’ the story differently, to make ‘present the suffering, struggles, and victories’ in the stories of the women in the Davidic narrative. Although we will see that many commentators of the narrative, especially J. Robert Vannoy and Jonathan Kirsch, implicate Bathsheba, the biblical narrator focuses on David, on what he thought, felt, and did, and does not tell us anything about Bathsheba and conjecture on our part will inevitably show our own biases and perspectives. Therefore I acknowledge that in systematically re-reading this story with a Kristevan frame there is no objective hermeneutic and that I will explore and examine the narrative as it speaks to me, a Christian woman in the twenty-first century with a feminist, as opposed to a patriarchal, perspective.

A Subject Position with a Relational Identity

The setting of the story of Bathsheba in the narrative of David is “in the spring, at the time when kings go off to war” and David sent his general Joab, who is also his cousin, “out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army” “But David remained in Jerusalem” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11:1). Why did David, the warrior king, not go to battle himself? Why did he remain in Jerusalem within the comfort of his palace? Especially important for what follows is whether David, as the leader of his army, was consecrated according to the law (NIV *Exodus* 19:14, 15; 1 *Samuel* 21: 4, 5), along with his warriors as they went off to battle even if he himself could not go.

The narrator tells the story skilfully and forcefully, “weaving in words and silences and concealing underlying conflict, fragility and confusion” (ITB 13). One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. Apparently David could see much of

the city from his palace rooftop and from this roof he sees a woman bathing. As noted above, the narrator tells us that the woman is beautiful. An image appears in my mind as I picture the scene. I am surprised that David stands there and stares at her, he could have been sensitive and respected her illusion of privacy and turned his gaze away as soon as he had seen her. But his gaze captures the woman as David sent someone to find out more about her and, objectified by the male gaze she, as yet unbeknownst to her, becomes drawn into the ethical consequences of the objectification of one person by another. The beautiful woman has no voice in the narrative, no agency. Instead, David's gaze beholds the beauty and creates desire, and not satisfied that it has noticed her, has observed her and so has invaded her privacy, wants more. There's more than a hint of power here as there is nothing and no one to disturb the king's gaze, and as he indulges himself by sending a man to find out who this beauty is.

The man informs David, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 3). We are not sure if Bathsheba is her own name or if it means that she was the daughter of Sheba. But she is seldom called by name. She is usually identified as 'the woman' or as someone's daughter, someone's wife, or someone's mother. The emphasis is on her relational subject identity. The narrator shows the interconnectedness of human lives, an interconnectedness that is emphasized as the story develops. Bathsheba belongs to a family David knows well, her father Eliam and her husband Uriah the Hittite are two of his thirty men, the mighty men, the elite of his fighting force (NIV 2 *Samuel* 23: 34, 39), and her grandfather, Eliam's father, is David's trusted advisor, Ahithophel, the Gilonite (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11:3; 15:12; 23: 34). This is no ordinary family. This family is committed to the service of their king, David. Bathsheba's father and her husband are two of the men who went to war for David even when he did not go to war with them. Each man is identified in relation to a father or a son,

the place he is from or his nationality. For Bathsheba, she has a personal identity and subjectivity in the relational sphere of her family. But David does not respect her location or her subjectivity, which places Bathsheba in a vulnerable position because her father and her husband, her protectors in life, are out of the country fighting for David, their king. David does not act in solidarity with his consecrated soldiers as a “faithful warrior who refused to break the rules of purity that applied to a sanctified soldier during holy war” (Anderson 228).

The Objectification of a Subject

David’s gaze becomes actualized when he sends messengers to get the beautiful woman. Not enough to have observed her beauty voyeuristically, David wants to do more than see her; he begins his quest for conquest. His gaze captures her when he has her brought to him in order to sexually possess her. David has objectified the woman Bathsheba, treating her as an object of desire, as a sexualized female body, instead of respecting her subjectivity in a family that lives to serve him as his respected soldiers. With his sexual objectification, making her an object to be possessed, David destroys Bathsheba’s subjectivity and her proper place.

What was David, who had a harem full of women, thinking? But as David strategized a call to arms in order to invade the nation of the Ammonites, so he strategized a call to his arms in order to invade Bathsheba of the house of Uriah. As David set out to conquer a nation that has its own land with its own ruler, so he sets out to conquer a woman who has her own home with her own husband.

Most commentators give a similar analysis of the story up to this point, but here divergences begin. Some suggest that Bathsheba was bathing on the rooftop of her home, but the biblical story does not say so, it says that David saw her from his rooftop. For the narrator it is

not Bathsheba's location that is important but David's, and he specifies that from the rooftop of the palace where David was, he could see her. I propose that she may have been behind garden walls in a secluded area, visible only from some height. Why else would the narrator emphasize that David was high on the rooftop when he saw Bathsheba?

Harry Fernhout places the event in the late afternoon rather than in the evening. He bases this interpretation on the assumption that "David stretched the customary afternoon rest, staying on his couch until evening was approaching" (HF 158). This is where a different Bible translation may contribute to our various interpretations, for the *New International Version* (NIV) text reads that "One evening David got up from his bed", while the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) text reads "It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch" (2 *Samuel* 11: 2). Is the translation disparity important? Does it make a difference when it was? Within the context of Kristeva's philosophy of language, of the power of the symbolic system and the semiotic order of language in understanding a text, of what the words say and what is being said, and thereby influencing interpretations, we are cognizant that all translation is interpretation and the words of the text are indeed important. Hence, there are possible implications in placing the event in the late afternoon when the sun is still shining, or in the evening when the sun has gone down and the twilight casts a protective diffuseness or dimness over the evening sky. Could 'the late afternoon' translation be setting the stage for an interpretation that will make the woman, by overtly bathing in daylight, the tempter, the seducer of a guileless man who became a victim of her beauty, and could 'the evening' translation be setting the stage for an interpretation where the woman is inadvertently observed and becomes the victim of David's lustful sexual desire? Nevertheless, translations of 'late afternoon' or 'evening' could overlap in a description of the event and need not make an important difference

to the story except in the extrapolations of commentators and representations of artists.

Although the meeting between David and Bathsheba has been referred to as an 'affair' or even a 'love affair', let us continue and see what happened when David sent for Bathsheba.

With a hermeneutic of imagination I envision the messengers sent by David as two men who quietly went out the back door of the palace and stealthily crept up to Bathsheba's house. They quietly knock at her door and, as Bathsheba opens the door, they rather shamefacedly say to her: "Uh, excuse us ma'am, we're sorry to trouble you so late in the day but, uh, the king would like to see you. If you would come with us, please ma'am?" Then I shake the romantic cobwebs out of my mind and try to envision this scene more realistically.

When David called the messengers, they either were on duty or quickly dressed for duty at the royal summons. Chances are that they carried a staff as they marched to do the king's bidding. Suddenly I have a picture in my mind of military men in their army uniforms, carrying their guns, marching up to Bathsheba's house, the sound of their boots echoing down the street. Fearful women watch them from behind closed doors, where are they going? A loud knock on the door startles Bathsheba. As she opens the door, the men command in a loud voice, "The king has sent for you." They take her by the arms and walk her through the streets to the palace.

Edith Deen confirms that "according to the laws, Bath-sheba (sic) could not have resisted had she desired, for a woman in these ancient times was completely subject to a king's will. If he desired her, he could have her" (Deen 114). King David has taken for himself the rights of a pagan king, rejecting the Ten Commandments given to Israel by their God, which include the commands that a man should not covet his neighbour's wife, and that he should not commit adultery (NIV *Exodus* 20: 17, 14). Bathsheba was not asked; she was taken.

It is noteworthy that the narrator here tells us, “She had purified herself from her uncleanness” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11:4). This could mean that the bath of Bathsheba that David witnessed was her *mikva*, a woman’s monthly ceremonial bath, a religious rite of purification after menstruation prescribed for women each time their menstruating period ceased, for menstrual blood was considered a defilement (NIV *Leviticus* 15: 28 – 30). In explaining defilement, Kristeva notes that “While they always relate to corporeal orifices as to so many landmarks parcelling - constituting the body’s territory, polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual” (PH 71). As noted previously, Kristeva connects the notion of defilement with danger as she writes that the first type, “Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death” (PH 71). And for the second type she notes, “Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference” (PH 71). The cleansing of menstrual blood in a woman’s ceremonial bath, her *mikva*, is a metaphorical cleansing, a purifying ritual to minimize if not totally take away the dangers coming from within the identity and sexual difference of men and women that has been internalized. We will return to the importance of this religious ceremonial ritual for David later in the narrative.

Kristeva thus makes a distinction between the danger to identity that comes from without, that is the influences of our society and our culture, and the danger to identity that comes from within, the influences which we have internalized, with the explicit understanding that the danger from menstrual blood is a danger to identity that is from within. Each month, the ego that would

like to govern and control is threatened by a somatic non-ego that is a continuous discontinuity, a regular occurrence that expresses the power of the feminine through a blood flow that does not lead to death but that represents the power of life. The narrator's mention of Bathsheba's 'purity' after her ceremonial purification ritual covers three important points. First, that she is not pregnant because she has just finished her menses; second, that ritual cleansing of menstrual blood was required according to religious observations and therefore that she was observant of religious laws, and third, that she was ritually pure when David sent for her.

The narrator does not tell us how Bathsheba was brought to the palace. The important thing for the narrator is that Bathsheba was taken to David as bidden. The narrator also does not tell us what transpired in the king's bedroom, as he does with the rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13). We are given neither a rape description nor a seduction scene, but an image flutters on the edges of my mind that I try to erase before it forms, for we know that David, according to the biblical metaphor, 'knew' Bathsheba, that is, he invaded and took her in sexual intercourse. David committed a crime that night, a violation took place, a code was broken, a transgressing of the boundaries, of order and of the law. The ritual purity of Bathsheba was defiled, for as the male semen entered her body she became ritually unclean and impure, and was thus considered polluted property.

As much as it offends me to use language of impurity, pollution, and property for a woman, we must remember that she is seen and understood here not as a woman, not as a person, nor as a subject with her own proper place, but rather as a beautiful object, and that the object was subjugated in lustful desire for David's sexual gratification. In addition, David knew Bathsheba was married and that as such, according to custom, she belonged to her husband Uriah, thus in taking her in sexual intercourse he had appropriated the property of another man.

David, by objectifying the beautiful, by wanting it and taking it to possess it, not only made the woman ritually impure according to religious law, but he also became ritually unclean. David's actions, his taking of a woman who was another man's wife, moreover a man who devoted his life to the service of David as his king, put into motion the as yet invisible effects of power-over. We name it 'power-over' because of the hierarchy of king over commoner, of man over woman; and a power-over of sexual gratification at someone else's expense.

Lexicons of Meanings

Not only are the sexually lustful actions of David against the law of the Decalogue, but his actions affect him as king and are against the commandments found in the laws of Deuteronomy that a king "must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray" (NIV *Deuteronomy* 17: 17). Rather, the king must "follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left" (NIV *Deuteronomy* 17: 19, 20). These requirements come with the promise that if the king reveres God and follows the laws, "Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel" (NIV *Deuteronomy* 17: 20). These are thus laws with a promise, a promise based on the consequences of the good actions of the king, with the implicit warning that if the king does not act according to the laws and decrees it will not go well with him and his descendants, and that they will not 'reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel'. Therefore, there is much at stake for David and his family, but "the pattern of family dynamics consistently revealed in the Deuteronomic law code exists in obvious contrast to the actions of the Davidic house" (Gottwald and Horsley 175).

Kristeva's philosophy of language teaches us to note how the chosen words in analysis and commentary direct the interpretations of the biblical text and its ethical consequences. Jo Ann Hacket considers that, "it seems the narrator is portraying David, albeit subtly, as a consummate usurper - of kingdoms and of wives" (Newsom and Ringe 92). David, as the active agent, usurped the woman Bathsheba when he knew she was married to another man, one of his own trusted soldiers, and he turned away from the law. Nevertheless, Adele Berlin considers that Bathsheba had "an adulterous affair" (Berlin 72). That word choice is inappropriate and unfair to Bathsheba, for does having 'an adulterous affair' not imply a mutuality or a complicity of both parties involved? But Bathsheba had no agency and no access to the power or control that would have been required to take responsibility for her circumstances. Berlin acknowledges this when she writes that in this story Bathsheba is viewed "as a complete non-person. She is not even a minor character, but simply part of the plot" (Berlin 73). Berlin elucidates, "For lack of a better designation I will call her an 'agent', an Aristotelian term which describes the performer of an action necessary to the plot. This is why she is not considered guilty of adultery" (Berlin 73). Berlin's analysis of the story, that Bathsheba is merely a non-person and as such is not guilty because she has no control over the situation, is not consistent with her lexicon, her choice of words in writing that Bathsheba was an 'agent', a 'performer of an action' and that she 'had an adulterous affair.' With her lexicon Berlin paints a picture of complicity and responsibility on the part of Bathsheba that is not reflected in her own analysis of the text. Thus, contrary to Berlin, Bathsheba is not an 'agent' because, rather than performing an action she is acted upon by David and for that reason, because of *his* agency, Bathsheba is not guilty of adultery.

Harry Fernhout begins his commentary with a different focus and deduces that, "the central concern is not with David's moral sin but with his failure as king. ... David was

corrupting the powers of his office, particularly in matters bound up with God's covenant promises" (HF 158). This is an excellent reference to the Deuteronomic laws and promises we mentioned above. But, although Fernhout begins his analysis of the story noting that "With surprising frankness the writer shows us David's calculated plan of adultery and murder" (HF 158), he nevertheless expresses a concern about the possible moral character of Bathsheba. He writes, "We might be inclined to ask why Bathsheba was taking her bath of purification (after her menstrual period; 11: 4) out in the open, where she could be seen? Was she perhaps inviting the king's arousal?" (HF 158, 159). The questions that Fernhout asks about Bathsheba reflect the questions sometimes still asked today when a woman has been violated. What was she doing in that place? At that time? What was she wearing? Did she lead him on, that is, was she 'inviting his arousal'? In other words, did she precipitate her own violation? Although Canada's legal system has addressed the sexism inherent in such questions in the investigations of sexual assault, we remain aware of deeply held prejudices about the moral character of women and of men.

It was therefore at first disconcerting to read that Kristeva refers to Bathsheba as "the seductive wife of one of David's officers" ... who ... "subsequently, has continued to seduce us from her bath in the paintings of Raphael, Cranach, and Rembrandt" (FS 99, 100). The term 'seduction' and its related forms are most often understood through art, poetry, and commentary in their romantic and sexual meanings. Most of the paintings show Bathsheba in a public setting with maidservants assisting her as she bathes, surrounded by flowers and greenery, with suffused light illuminating the whole scene. However romantic such scenes may appear to be, and however powerful a bathing beauty is made out to be, are they credible according to the biblical story? Perhaps if, as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, these

paintings show more how we can idealize an image with an imaginary that is reflective of our own imagination rather than a rendition of what is described in the biblical narrative.

Kristeva does not use the language of the narrator who refers to Bathsheba as a beautiful woman; rather she calls her a seductive wife. Are beautiful and seductive synonymous? Granted, beauty can be considered seductive in its effect on the beholder. Using 'seductive' beyond the meanings of romance and sexuality, we can be enchanted in a beautiful garden and be seduced into a tranquility that relaxes us. Or we could be enthralled by a beautiful sunset, watching with awe as we are seduced into quiet moments of reflection. This awareness and experience of beauty and its seductive power can lead to sacred moments. Also a painting can be beautiful and seduce us into coming back to look at it again and again. But what seduces us in a painting? Is it the scene or the person in the painting, or is it the beauty of art and the exquisite talent of the artist who communicates with us without words? Certainly an artist can make a beautiful woman look seductive. And without doubt, an artist can portray a person with a recognition and understanding of a deeper level than 'face-value.' But in this case, with this particular woman, could it be that the artists, knowing the story of Bathsheba, painted their interpretations of her and her character after the fact? Yes, Bathsheba was the beautiful wife of one of David's officers, but was she a seductive wife? Can being 'seductive' be passive or does it imply an active disposition? But we have already noted that Bathsheba had no agency, no active disposition in the events that happened to her. Is it therefore Bathsheba who continues to seduce us from her bath in the paintings, or are we being seduced by the beautiful art work of Raphael, Cranach, and Rembrandt, which convey an interpretation of the story without words, without a lexicon from the symbolic element of our Symbolic system, in a semiotic that speaks volumes?

But Kristeva also provides another possible interpretation and understanding of Bathsheba as 'seductive'. We saw in her language theory how Kristeva relates a metaphorical maternal element and a metaphorical paternal element in her language theory to the concept of speaking and embodied subjects as she takes the Law of the Father as her point of departure. Thus, rather than focussing on 'seductive' as the imagined enticement of an illicit romantic and sexual encounter, with Kristeva we can see Bathsheba as seductive also in a different area, that of the symbolic system and the Law of the Father. In this context we could see Bathsheba as she is shown to us through commentary and in art and poetry as representative of the metaphorical maternal element of the semiotic order and drives, versus the metaphorical paternal element of the Law and its order. We could then understand Bathsheba as seductive with her imagined power of the drives of the semiotic to lead aside, to lead astray, away from the symbolic of the Law of the Father. Perhaps then the idea of her seductiveness is a representational image of the danger of the temptation to act contrary to the laws and principles by which one normally abides, to deviate from the way things are and are to be done in one's culture and society, represented by the Law of the Father. Bathsheba is then representative of the danger to trespass this patriarchal paradigm and its symbolic system, to go beyond its boundaries, to be seduced to a new paradigm for ethical and equitable living. Then in a parabolic manner, that is, by taking her story as a parable, Bathsheba is a metaphor for all that seduces us to a disruption of the status quo. We could then deem Bathsheba mimetic of Kristeva's concept of a feminist disruption, a revolution of the feminine in the accepted relation to otherness, that is, as other to the assumed norm of the patriarchal paradigm, and a disruption that will bring about a revolution of a new otherness in a new paradigm. From this insight of Bathsheba as seductive and that she continues to seduce us through poetry and art, we heed

Kristeva's call to a revolution of understanding and interpreting the characters in this story, and consequently of our self as sovereign speaking subjects at the crossroads of love.

Nevertheless, whereas Kristeva led us to probe her analysis of Bathsheba as seductive in a learning process, other commentators merely cast shadows by their comments and questions. Yet, Fernhout posits, "We are not given any answers because the writer simply does not delve into Bathsheba's role in the whole affair" (HF 158, 159). The narrator does not delve into Bathsheba's role in the story because she was not considered or treated as a sovereign speaking subject but rather as a sexual object, a sexualized female body, and instead of acting she was acted upon by David who exercised his power-over position. Fernhout supports this understanding when he elucidates that the narrator "is concerned with David and the evil he perpetrated. It was David who inquired about Bathsheba's identity. He abused his kingly power by having her brought to the palace, knowing full well she was the wife of his servant. And it was David who committed adultery with her" (HF 159). Biblical commentator and author J. Robert Vannoy overtly casts blame on Bathsheba in an apparent attempt to take away at least some of David's guilt. Vannoy comments that, "Bathsheba appears to have been an unprotesting partner in this adulterous relationship with David" (NIV 438). Whereas Fernhout leaves the agency with David who committed adultery, Vannoy indicates agency for Bathsheba when he speaks of "her sexual relations with David" and of "this adulterous relationship with David", rather than *of* David (NIV 438). One could question if, as according to the biblical narrative David brought Bathsheba to the palace, David had sexual intercourse with her and then she went back home (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 4), one could even call this a 'relationship' or if the common vernacular of a 'one-night-stand' would be more suitable. But more importantly, the sexual objectification and violation of Bathsheba and the awareness that the narrator has not given her a

voice as a speaking subject in her own story is here compounded by the charge that she was therefore ‘unprotesting’. This interpretation of Vannoy, an official commentator of the NIV, and of the editors who allowed it to stand, a commentary in a study Bible that is authoritative for many of its readers, shows a lack of understanding of the lived realities of a woman not only during the time of the Davidic kingdom, but also of the lived experiences of many women today. When a woman is not given a voice in her own life-story, that is, when her story is told about her but not with her or by her, this is one way of silencing a woman. However, this silencing of her voice in her own story does not mean that she is therefore unprotesting, with the implicit accusation that she is therefore complicit when she is acted upon. This lack of understanding of the gravity of David’s sexual objectification and violation of Bathsheba is affirmed by Vannoy’s comment on “David’s dalliance” (NIV 438). With the word ‘dalliance’, which means an interchange of caresses or amorous by-play, or to linger, Vannoy trivializes the actuality of the crime that David committed against Bathsheba, and the life-changing ethical consequences that followed not only for Bathsheba and her family, but also for David, for his family, and for the Davidic kingdom.

The Hollywood movie industry also participated in the re-telling of the narrative and created the film *David and Bathsheba* in the “Sword & Sandals Collection” of 1951 that was re-released in 1979 (Zanuck). This film was promoted as: “A sprawling, action-packed epic that sweeps off the pages of the Bible and across the screen recreating one of the most torrid tales of passion ever told. ... It’s a story of sin and redemption, a searing saga of love as burning as the sands of the harsh landscape on which it was consummated” (Zanuck). Although the film was nominated for three Academy Awards, including best story, I watched in consternation and dismay as this film version of the narrative developed into an idealized romantic story of a

macho dream or of “malestream thought” (Code 28) that has very little connection indeed to the biblical story.

The Canadian poet, Leonard Cohen, refers to Bathsheba in his popular song *Hallelujah*. Although he does not call her by name, the reference is unmistakable. The song begins with David as the musician and how “... there was a secret chord that David played and it pleased the Lord ... the baffled king composing Hallelujah. Hallelujah ...”. The song has many verses, but here the reference begins: “You saw her bathing on the roof, / Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew yah, / She tied you to a kitchen chair, / She broke your throne; she cut your hair, / And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah. Hallelujah ...”. Cohen shows in the poetry of his song the imagined and imaginary power of the unnamed Bathsheba that ‘baffled’ David, but this power is what Kristeva refers to in *Stabat Mater* as archaic and secondary power (TL 245). Kristeva places this ‘power’ in the context of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the ‘courtliness’ of the Lady, who “shared one common trait: they are the focal point of men’s desires and aspirations” (TL 245). Although Kristeva acknowledges that both Mary and the Lady “were unique and thus excluded all other women”, they nevertheless “embodied an absolute authority the more attractive as it appeared removed from paternal sternness” (TL 245). This is the seductive power that Kristeva sees in Bathsheba, a feminine power distinct from, yet simultaneously linked as a danger to the power of ‘paternal sternness’, that is the Law of the Father, for it has its own authority that the poet suggests can lead a man astray, that can overthrow him, that can baffle him. Kristeva elucidates, “This feminine power must have been experienced as denied power, ... a kind of substitute for effective power in the family and the city, but no less authoritarian, the underhand double of explicit phallic power” (TL 245). The experience of this feminine power as ‘denied power’, as a ‘kind of substitute for effective

power', means that it is not a power that is exercised overtly, but rather that its authority is felt on the oblique side of explicit phallic power.

In his poetry Cohen symbolically connects the woman's beauty with the subtle power of moonlight, a power strong enough to overthrow a king who is baffled by it. But Cohen also shows the imaginary strength of a feminine power that can tame a man by tying him to a kitchen chair, and this image has a strong contemporary relevance as even now it is considered an insult for a man to be symbolically tied to a kitchen chair or, to apply a more current usage, to be tied to a woman's apron strings. But for Cohen this feminine power, whether imagined, denied, archaic and secondary or oblique comes to the fore in force when she becomes responsible for breaking his throne, and Cohen compares her to another beauty who brought down a strong man when he namelessly refers to Delilah who cut Sampson's hair and so brought him down, for as his hair fell away, so his strength left him (NIV *Judges* 16).

The quiet reverence of Cohen's first Hallelujah that is raised to God becomes the plaintive Hallelujah of a broken man as he wails that "Love is not a vict'ry march / It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah. ... It's not a cry you hear at night, it's not someone who's seen the light. / It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah. Hallelujah ...". As the last note of the *Hallelujah* fades away an awareness comes that, according to Cohen, the beauty that had overthrown and tied him led David to a cold and broken hallelujah, for although lust may bring forth a cry of hallelujah at the moment of sexual climax, a different cry escapes when the realization dawns of the price to be paid for that hallelujah. Yet, Cohen makes the woman the agent in his song because, contrary to the biblical story that focuses on David and his actions, Cohen refers to 'her beauty overthrew' and 'she tied' and 'she broke' and 'she cut' and 'she drew,' making her the active agent, the driving force and as such the culpable one in the

narrative. The various terms used by Cohen show the crisis of identity that placed David's subjectivity in jeopardy as, not through the oblique feminine power of the woman but through his own actions, he is metaphorically tied, broken, cut, and overthrown into what Kristeva describes as abjection. We will return to David's experience of abjection later.

Can we hypothesize that various interpretations of the story of David and Bathsheba show that commentators and artists, who overtly and covertly make comments and create questions that make us look at the biblical narrative again, even as I am doing, see their own implicit stories in the explicit narrative? Do we not, with Kristeva, continue to go back to the biblical narratives again and again to find meaning for our own stories? In our search for meaning we have noted that our lexicon exposes more than just a list of words that we use, and methods of questioning and interpreting that which is and is not in the text with their extrapolations, assumptions, and implicit and explicit implications of complicity, may reveal more about us than they do about the characters in the narrative. This difference in reading, understanding and interpreting in the building of meaning and knowledge as embodied subjects raises the question asked by Lorraine Code, "Is the sex of the knower epistemologically significant?" (Code 1). Code argues that, "A question that focuses on the knower, ... claims that there are good reasons for asking who that knower is" (Code 1). Although Kristeva does not address the sex of the knower directly, she does allow a distinction between the female and the male subject, and thus between the female and male embodied knower (RPL 235, n 8). Yet, Kristeva notes that we cannot make the claim "that a specifically female writing exists" (Moi 1986, 111). She elucidates, "If it is true that the unconscious ignores negation and time, and is woven instead from displacement and condensation (hinted at by the metaphors of 'language' or 'matheme'), I should say that writing ignores sex or gender and displaces its difference in the

discreet workings of language and signification (which are necessarily ideological and historical)” (Moi 1986, 111). The term ‘matheme’, from the Greek ‘lesson’, is similar to language in that it is a vital method of communication. Thus, for Kristeva, rather than focusing on a possible specific female writing, the focus is on communication with all its ideological and historical influences, for the subject is a speaking subject and the speaking subject is an embodied subject, and an embodied subject is an embodied knower (Gamble 123). Therefore we understand that the realization that a knowing subject is embodied as male or female would not be an argument against Kristeva’s rejection of female writing, but rather an affirmation that our being an embodied knower does not depend on our being embodied as male or as female but on our being a speaking and communicating subject.

However, because some still believe in an objective, neutral analysis of a biblical narrative, we may also consider that Bathsheba’s representation as seductive is a warning that ‘seduction’ may also mean that we are being seduced into passively accepting the alleged neutrality or objectivity of commentators, such as Vannoy and Berlin, which mask their bias in favour of institutionalized and stereotyped patriarchal values. For even as Kristeva rejects the notion of ‘female writing’, she also rejects the notion of objectivity or neutrality in our analysis and revisits femininity and femaleness not in an essentialist way but to show its opposition to the notion of male or patriarchy as normative. Code explains that over against the possibility of an objective or neutral analysis,

feminist critiques reveal that this alleged neutrality masks a bias in favor of institutionalizing stereotypical masculine values into the fabric of the discipline – its methods, norms, and contents. In so doing, it suppresses values, styles, problems, and concerns stereotypically associated with femininity. Thus, whether by chance or design, it creates a hegemonic philosophical practice in which the sex of the knower is, indeed, epistemologically significant” (Code 26).

Code hereby agrees with the principles of Kristeva's theory. Code notes that women as well as men have bought into this alleged neutrality or objectivity as commentators such as Vannoy and his editors have suppressed values, styles, problems, and concerns stereotypically associated with femininity. We consequently witnessed that some woman commentators, such as Berlin, have also used lexicons that reflect a patriarchal reading of this biblical narrative and implicitly make Bathsheba complicit in the events and, by extrapolation, also make her implicitly responsible for the consequences that followed. However, many men, including James H. Olthuis, are very much aware of the importance of our word choices and their implications. Thus we can have women with a patriarchal interpretation and men with a feminist interpretation of our story. Consequently our analysis and interpretations are not so much determined by our female or male sex as it is by our awareness of the social conditioning of our traditions and religions and the implications of our chosen lexicon in our language and in our scholarship. Therefore, as Kristeva challenges us to re-read this narrative with an awareness of a revolution of an otherness that may disrupt the status quo as it brings us to a new ethics, let us continue with Bathsheba's story in the narrative of David.

The Conspiracy to Conceal the Crime

The very terseness of the sentences convey the implications of what happened, for the narrator tells us with a well-known euphemism that "he slept with her" and "then she went back home" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 4). There is no indication of love or of a relationship in this biblical verse, instead the narrator tells us that David arranged to have Bathsheba brought to him and when he had satisfied his sexual lust for her, she went back home. The narrator does not tell us whether it was still under cover of darkness, whether she was escorted back home or whether she

went home by herself. The narrator has still not given her a voice in the narrative, we do not know what she may have said, and we are not told how she is, how she feels, or what she is thinking. The silence around her engulfs me as with my mind's eye I watch her return home.

But this is not the end of the story because the male semen, that bodily fluid that contaminated and polluted the ritually pure woman, also has the ability to give life and Bathsheba became pregnant. The narrator reports that Bathsheba sent a brief word to David saying, "I am pregnant" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11:5). This terse and brusque message may indicate that David had not sent for Bathsheba a second time and that she did not expect him to do so, because otherwise would she not have told him about her pregnancy in person? The narrator does not tell us whether David sent word to Bathsheba to say that he has received her message. No words or signs of care and concern are recorded. Neither have we yet heard words of love. The lack of words is telling.

David's reaction is unexpected but then, there is much at stake for David. He sends a message to Joab, the commander of his army, to bring Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband, home from the battlefield. I wonder for a moment if David is going to confess and ask Uriah for forgiveness. But when Uriah comes to him, David asks him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. David makes small talk. In using many words, David does not say anything. But the unsaid is being heard, exposing the dark side of David, and as I quietly listen to the story and wait, the unspoken words call to me with inner voices of the soundless and the barely-thought, as the silence of the semiotic communicates.

David tells Uriah to "Go down to your house and wash your feet" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 8). For Uriah to go home and 'wash his feet' would indicate that he had entered his house, with the unspoken but understood expectation of a sexual reunion with his wife. Then the narrator tells

us that “a gift from the king was sent after him” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 8). This is noteworthy, for we were not told whether Bathsheba received any gifts, or if a gift was sent after her. What kind of gift did David send for Uriah? Of what magnitude must the gift be to replace that which was taken? But Vannoy suggests that, “The Hebrew word for ‘gift’ has the meaning of food in Ge[nesis] 43: 34 (‘portions’ from the king’s table)” and that by providing food from his table “David wanted Uriah and Bathsheba to enjoy their evening together” (NIV 438). By sending a gift to Uriah’s house, Bathsheba now knows that her husband is in town. Again, the narrator does not mention how this news affected Bathsheba. Deen writes that “in order to avoid a court scandal David acted quickly and treacherously. ... But the conscientious, deeply consecrated soldier ... had respect for the law which forbade intercourse to warriors who had been consecrated for battle [1 Sam 21: 4, 5]” (Deen 114, 115). Hence, although urged to do so by his king, Uriah did not go home to see his wife. And how did that affect Bathsheba? As an observant religious person herself, according to her practice of *mikva*, she must have been aware of the laws for a consecrated soldier and did not expect him to come home.

When David found out, he asked Uriah, “Haven’t you just come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 11). Uriah gives a stunning, perhaps judging reply as he gives his reason to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 11). Uriah swears his honour by the king who has dishonoured him by dishonouring his wife, and David does not let on that one cannot base honour on dishonour. In her analysis of different interpretations of the meaning of this aspect of the narrative, Mieke Bal notes that

“Perry and Sternberg soon come to a question the reader is supposed to ask, that is, does Uriah know that David has slept with his wife, that she is pregnant, and that he has been called back in order to cover this up?” (Bal 22). Accordingly we also ask, had talk of the scandal reached Uriah, and if so, when? And would this have an effect on our understanding of Uriah and of what he did? Although that narrator gave Uriah a voice in the story, he does not give us an inkling of what Uriah did or did not know. And David tells Uriah to stay in Jerusalem one more day, with the promise to send him back the next day. In an effort to make him go home David “ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 13). The narrator specifically notes that ‘David made him drunk’, thereby placing the guilt of Uriah’s drunkenness on David who is anxious for Uriah to go home and see Bathsheba. I wonder if there was a palace etiquette that, much like a woman could not refuse if the king sent for her, a man could not refuse a drink if the king gave it to him. But David knew the laws of his God and he must have known when he made Uriah drunk that drunkenness was also a polluting practise, a defilement of the body for the consecrated person who was ritually or ceremonially pure, a person who had made a vow of separation to the Lord for a certain purpose or length of time (NIV *Numbers* 6: 1-8). David knew how serious Uriah took his vows of consecration as a soldier at war since Uriah had told David why he had not gone home to see his wife the evening before. Having polluted the ritually pure wife of Uriah with the illicit actions of his sexual lust, and polluting himself into becoming ritually impure, David has now also polluted her ritually pure husband Uriah, his own consecrated soldier. And did David think what it would be like for Bathsheba to receive a drunken husband at home? Nevertheless, David is trying desperately for Uriah to go home and have sexual intercourse with his wife so that Bathsheba’s pregnancy could be explained within the marital bond and David’s deed would remain a public secret. But Uriah

kept the integrity of his consecrated body and as such the integrity of his self because, as we saw before, from a Kristevan psychoanalytic perspective “there is a correspondence between the integrity of the body and the integrity of the self” (Gamble 123). Uriah showed the steadfastness and faithfulness of *hesed*, whereas David, God’s own chosen king of Israel, had lost the integrity of his body and thereby the integrity of his self and now seeks to hide his abject lack of integrity. Bal explains that David’s words to Uriah “thematize a conception of language strongly anchored in a particular structure of power” (Bal 28). Because Uriah misunderstood “the intended message he proves to be basically subversive. What David meant as an order is taken as an offer that can be either accepted or rejected. Uriah believes in his own freedom of choice, while David, like the chiefs in the film *The Godfather*, thinks he has made ‘an offer he can’t refuse’” (Bal 28). To further explain this aspect of language Bal notes that “More than an instrument for the communication of opinions, advice, and decisions, discourse flagrantly betrays its place in a social structure of inequality as a monologic manipulative practice. David’s power is exercised exclusively by means of discourse, not action” (Bal 28). This ‘monologic’ and ‘manipulative’ use of language shows an inequality, a power structure, a power-over play with words rather than a communicative effort. Bal concludes that “Except for the failed dialogue with Uriah, all of David’s speech is monologic. Because of this exclusive use of discourse, it tends to represent an abuse of language” (Bal 28, 29). Although David’s ‘power-over’ Bathsheba is noted in his actions and his ‘power-over’ Uriah is noted solely in his language, his conspiracy to conceal his crime had failed.

The Murder of Uriah

Having been unsuccessful in his attempt to make Uriah appear responsible for Bathsheba's pregnancy, David arranges to have Uriah killed in battle. Fernhout writes that Joab's loyalty to a fellow soldier made him change David's orders somewhat, and he simply placed Uriah in a very dangerous position from which the accuracy of an archer on the walls of Rabbah "assured the tragic conclusion of David's plot" (HF 160). But Fernhout observes that Joab also "engaged in a touch of blackmail to prevent David from pinning any blame on him" (HF 160; NIV 2 *Samuel* 11:19-21). Fernhout explains that because he feared a comparison to another battle in which a soldier had died "at the hands of a woman (Judges 9: 50-54)," Joab makes a "very subtle but deliberate association" between the deaths of these two soldiers, but "while Uriah did not die at the hands of a woman, he did die *because* of a woman" (HF 160,161 *original emphasis*). However, although a woman was involved and Joab probably suspected this, that did not make her the *cause*. Uriah did not die *because* of a woman but *because* of the treachery of David. Fernhout himself supports this reading of 'cause' when he writes that when David received the message of Uriah's death, "The utter hypocrisy of the anointed of the Lord, who had turned into a scheming murderer, could not be shown more clearly" (HF 161). David's guilt is further emphasized by the curt closing statement of this chapter in the story as the narrator notes, "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11:27).

There is a debate of just what the 'thing' was that displeased the Lord. Was it the taking of a man's wife? Was it the murder of this innocent man? Although granted, the above are against the commandments as given in the Decalogue, I posit that the thing that displeased the Lord began with David's objectification and sexual violation of Bathsheba. What may have been one occurrence of indulging his sexual lust was actually so much more than that. David

had transgressed the laws of his God which were in place to protect the vulnerable, the marginalised, the widow and the orphan.

When Bathsheba hears that her husband has died, “she mourned for him” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 26). Alice Ogden Bellis writes that, “Bathsheba makes lamentations” (Ogden Bellis 149). Ogden Bellis uses a hermeneutic of imagination that is cognizant of a widow’s sorrow in her claim that Bathsheba expressed her grief in a lament. Bathsheba’s silence in her own story seems to epitomize her grieving, as the baby is silently growing in her womb. “After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, ...” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 27). Again David is the agent and Bathsheba, what else could she do? Where else could she go? “... and she became his wife and bore him a son” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 27). The brief sentence overflows with a semiotic awareness of all that is not said in the symbolic. The maternal *chora* of the semiotic, this place that is not a place in which Bathsheba lives and moves without the spoken words of the symbolic system, swallows her from our view. The conqueror brings his conquest home, from being an only wife with her own familial identity in her own home, to the struggle and anonymity of being one of many wives and the political intrigues of his harem. For the narrator continues to refer to her as the wife of Uriah the Hittite (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12: 9, 15) and only later calls her David’s wife (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12: 24). But at no time is she referred to as his queen. Therefore, even though Kristeva discusses Bathsheba in the context of other queens (FS 99, 100) and, as David’s wife she may well have played the role of a queen, the narrator does not refer to her as David’s Queen, nor was she given the title of Queen Bathsheba in the story.

Judgement and Punishment

Jo Ann Hackett considers that, “David's affaire (sic) with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers, is a watershed, marking the beginning of a downward spiral for David and his family” (Newsom and Ringe 86). The prophet Nathan comes to David and tells him the parable of a poor man who had one little ewe lamb that he cared for, and a rich man who had many sheep and cattle, but when the rich man needed to prepare a meal for a guest he did not take one of his own sheep, but took the one little ewe lamb of the poor man (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12: 1-5). David, the poet, the shepherd boy, the nurturer and protector of helpless sheep, has become a king, a warrior, marauder and thief of a helpless ewe lamb. This is the analogy that the prophet Nathan uses when he rebukes David after his crime against Bathsheba. Regina Schwartz writes that when Nathan uses the example of the ewe-lamb,

he drives home the point that the king's adultery is a violation of a property right: Bathsheba is compared to an animal, a favored animal, to be sure, one that is like a daughter, and the only one the poor man has; but the polluting of his woman is analogous to the slaughter of his animal (Ogden Bellis 149, 150).

Schwartz accentuates that David's sexual violation of Bathsheba was a ‘violation of a property right’, for Bathsheba, as a married woman belonged to her husband. Nathan suggests that Bathsheba's husband cared for her, his only wife and favoured one, and that polluting his wife is analogous to killing her. Nathan shows the enormity of David's crime.

David is outraged when he hears the story and says to Nathan that “the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12:5, 6). It is clear that David knows the laws concerning property rights which state, “If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep” (NIV *Exodus* 22:1). Although it has been understood that God punished David for what he had done, the narrator makes clear that David, by using the property laws and punishments of his God, passes a terrible judgement on

himself, for Nathan points out that he is the guilty one. As in Nathan's parable the slaughter of the ewe lamb is analogous to the death of a person, so we learn how, as David's life story unfolds, four times over his own judgement stands and he pays back four times over as four of his sons die an untimely death.

David, faced with his awful deed confesses to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12:13). In a cynical moment I think with Kristeva, ah, "all those words, now, ever visible things to register the roar of a silence that hurts all over" (Moi 1986, 168). For, although David confesses he has sinned against the Lord, he does not confess his sin against Bathsheba, neither that he has sinned against Uriah. David's focus is not on the persons he has wronged, but he is concerned about his relation with his God. David has separated himself from God, because as bodily fluids are abjected and dispelled, David himself is abjected and dispelled not so much from the social order as he is jettisoned from his relation with his God, a relationship that defines what he is: a God appointed king, and who he is: the beloved one of his God. With the loss of his integrity David has lost his sense of self. David is abject, he is "radically excluded" and is drawn "to a place where meaning collapses" (PH 2). Faced with his sin and consequent estrangement from his God, David has lost his proper place and his sense of *eudaimonia*, for flourishing and happiness does not depend on what we deserve, but on what or whom we serve. David had turned from his God, had left his proper place to serve his own sexual lust for Bathsheba which culminated in his murderous betrayal of Uriah. Having rejected God's laws by his actions, David is now "something rejected", like food or excrement (PH 4). Because he cannot separate himself from this, because it is something "one does not protect oneself from as from an object", ... it "beckons" and "ends up engulfing us" (PH 4). David has become the abject objectifier, the excluded, because he violated the proper boundaries between

himself and an other, between life and death. However, although the danger to David's identity had been an internal influence, that of his own sexual desire, he confessed his guilt after he was confronted by an external influence, the voice of the prophet Nathan. There is a sense of frustration and anguish in the words that Nathan speaks, a recalling of everything that God has given David and if that were not enough God would have given him more (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12: 7-10). Nevertheless, Nathan assures David of forgiveness and that he will not die but that there will be dire and profound consequences for his sin which will not only affect him, but all of the Davidic family, and there is a fore-telling of the events that are later described in the narrative:

Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity to you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12:11, 12).

God will publicly avenge David's secret crime for all to see and know. Even though it may seem appropriate that the punishment should fit the crime, I am concerned about the method or form of punishment that is being prophesied. What about the innocent wives who will be used as tools for retribution? Who will be their protector and helper under the law?

Although Fernhout writes that, "The death sentence which David deserved and which his own pronouncement called for was rescinded" (HF 163), I note that his punishment is not rescinded but transferred to the baby son that is born from his sexual aggression. Deen wonders, "The crime was David's, but what about the penalty for the crime? Was that not Bathsheba's?" (Deen 115). The punishment is aimed at David, not at Bathsheba, but as the mother of the baby she is very much affected by David's punishment. Without words, without any reference to the mother Bathsheba or the innocent, unnamed baby boy, the deathly illness of the child enters the maternal *chora*, this non-place of the emotions, "that space in which the meaning that is produced is semiotic" (McAfee 19), for which words could describe the sorrow? Nevertheless,

the emotions felt and the meaning of the semiotic *chora* experienced “may also make itself felt in symbolic communication” (McAfee 19). Therefore we must not cease in our attempt to communicate with both language and emotions.

This story leaves me with a dilemma, for how do I understand a God who will not convict a man according to the law for his violation of a woman and the murder of her husband, a God who will forgive him but will have the death of his innocent child instead? How do I understand a God who, in his punishment, does not appear to take into account the child’s mother? Fernhout posits that “David’s house could not be built through despotism and adultery. Therefore the Lord was going to remove the child from David’s house” (HF 163). Could it be that the innocent child would remain a visible reminder of the sin of the father and must he therefore be removed from the family and the kingdom? How many children have suffered from the sin of their father under the labels of ‘illegitimate’ and ‘bastard’ as they have been ostracized, literally and metaphorically removed, by ‘God-fearing’ people? How do I understand a people who will punish an innocent child for the sin of its father?

Abject Grief and Comfort

The narrator does not tell us how Bathsheba found out about Nathan’s prophesy, nor whether David was with Bathsheba during the child’s illness or whether he sent her messages. We are only told that David pleads with God for the child. But on the seventh day the child dies (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12:18). The sin of the father is visited upon the innocent child. And the mother, what about the mother? The narrator employs no words from the symbolic system to describe the anguish of semiotic communication, for Bathsheba is a mother yet childless, silent in the maternal *chora* while the milk is abundant in her breasts. As described in her *Stabat Mater* (TL

248, 249) Kristeva's focus on bodily fluids in the forms of a mother's milk and our tears as we mourn, centre back to the psychoanalytical image of the maternal and the need for the child to separate from the mother-child dyad in order to become a separate self. Bathsheba's maternal milk and the grieving tears for her husband Uriah and for her baby boy represent the commonality of milk and tears, communications without words for, "what milk and tears have in common: they are the metaphors of non-speech, of a 'semiotics' that linguistic communication does not account for" (Moi 1986, 174). When a child is weaned from its mother's milk, it sheds tears when it experiences this process as rejection, the tears "re-establish what is non-verbal" (Moi 1986, 174). When David in his anguish rejects food, the metaphorical milk, and weeps, the tears communicate non-verbally what the symbolic system has no words for and thus cannot express. But the tears that are shed here for the child's separation from its mother is not due to the necessary psychological process of becoming a self but a separation through death, in a final abjection.

While pleading with God for the life of his child, and in order to eject from his body the guilt of his sexual violation of Bathsheba, the murder of her husband Uriah, and the illness of their baby, David refused to eat. He rejected food, for in abjection food is associated with, and symbolically competes with words and self-representation. "Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (PH 2). This is because food is nourishment and in abjection we reject literal and metaphorical nourishment. Loathing rather than loving is related to the abject, "Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung" (PH 2). Kristeva is very descriptive as she explains the experience of abjection when food is rejected as just so much waste and offal. She writes, "The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck" (PH 2). Memory traces may recall waves of

nausea that made one retch in an effort to eject food that made us ill, and the awful smell and sight that made us turn away. The description of the theoretical concept of the abject marks traces of abjection in our memory and illuminates our physical and psychic experiences of abjection. For the experience of abjection is not only a somatic experience, an experience in and of the physical, but the physical is representative of the psychic. Kristeva moves from the physical symptoms of abjection to the psychic feelings when she writes, “The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery” (PH 2). David is abject because he finds himself in the middle of the consequences of his treachery. Kristeva elucidates “It is the traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, . . . are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility” (PH 4). By connecting David to the traitor, the liar, the killer, and the criminal of a premeditated crime with an apparent good conscience until he is confronted by the prophet Nathan, we see the fragility of the law and how his sexual objectification of Bathsheba took away her subjectivity and with it her proper place. But in his abjection, David experiences the loss of the particular proper place of his own subjectivity as he feels estranged from God.

Kristeva posits that our reaction to the abject occurs outside of language and symbolization; as we noted before it “constitutes an effect and not yet a sign” (PH 10), and the eyes water, the stomach tightens, the body shudders and chokes as, approaching God in his despair, David cries out to his God. But although all the words of language are at his disposal, and all the emotions with which he can express them are available to him, the whole symbolic system and semiotic order combined into one signifying system, they are not enough. David needs to surpass the boundaries of language in order to purify and cleanse himself of his act of

violation and bloodguilt and accept the forgiving words the prophet has spoken, for the abject is *of* the body as much as it is expelled *from* the body.

No excuse can be made for David, and he attempted none for himself. But there's more to the story. In a curiously veiled literary style, in a biblical psalm quite separate from the narrative, we are reminded of the beginning of the story, where we were told that Bathsheba was bathing, and the narrator stressed the fact that she had just ritually purified herself from her 'uncleannes' through her *mikva*. Now David cries for God to cleanse and purify him of his violation of a purified woman and of his polluting of the consecrated soldier Uriah through drunkenness and then his bloody murder. David cries for a *mikva*, this distinctly female religious observance of a woman's monthly ritual of purification of her menstrual blood flow, to purify him of his violation of a ritually pure woman and cleanse him of the blood of Uriah that he has caused to flow and that now weighs heavily on his conscience. However, David's need and thus his request is for just one cleansing that will purify him from his violation, defilement, and blood-guilt that will have such devastating consequences for so many people. Yet a woman must practice the purity ritual each month after her God-created blood flows not in abjection or death but in a life-giving promise of potential new birth.

David's abject cry is recorded in this psalm as he pours out his heart to God saying,

Have mercy on me, O God,
cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean,
wash me and I will be whiter than snow (NIV, *Psalms* 51: 1, 7).

David needs more than words, for although language is a tool to understanding, abjection is not a linguistic exercise, and subjectivity is not always articulated as much as it is experienced. David cries out for a ritual, a metaphoric cleansing to return him to a level of purity, with the primary

focus of re-establishing his relationship with his God, and to restore his integrity and his sense of self as a subject with a particular proper place.

Eugene H. Peterson has paraphrased the *Book of Psalms* into a “contemporary idiom” for the Billy Graham Association, which came “from my lifetime of work as a pastor, in order to teach people how to pray” (Peterson 3). He paraphrased the same verses of Psalm 51 given above as follows:

Generous in love - God give grace!
Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,
Scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life (Peterson 3).

Peterson misses the important point of this psalm by excluding the word hyssop and by changing the concept of a religious ritual cleansing to doing laundry. For, although these verses are usually read with the emphasis on *cleanse* me with hyssop, and I will be *clean*, *wash* me and I shall be whiter than snow, this bodily washing still creates a different image than doing laundry. With a focus on *cleanse* and *wash* this reading puts the emphasis on the ability of God, as Father of the Law, to cleanse David, to exonerate him, and so to restore him. However, what if we put a slightly different emphasis on the words? What if we put the emphasis on the *me*, when we read, cleanse *me* with hyssop, and *I* will be clean, wash *me* and *I* will be whiter than snow? We then hear a different cry, and come to a different understanding, for it must be noted that hyssop was used in a woman's *mikva*. David cries for a metaphorical *mikva* for himself as he begs God to purify and cleanse *him* with hyssop, so that *he* will be clean, to wash *him*, so that *he* will be whiter than snow.

In his distraught cry for purification through a metaphorical *mikva* David reckons that his bloodguilt began with the sexual violation of Bathsheba and only a woman's blood purification ritual can bring him the cleansing that he craves. The forgiving words of his God cannot do it

alone and in a vivid imagery of a metaphoric gathering, David pleads with the words of the symbolic system as he beseeches God for a semiotic ritual in order to re-establish him in his relation with his God, and so to regain his integrity and his sense of self as a sovereign subject with his particular proper place.

Yet, where does that leave Bathsheba? In another *Psalm* attributed to David, he again cries to his God: “Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll - are they not in your record?” (NIV *Psalm* 56: 8). Did David consider whether God lists and records the tears of Bathsheba as well? Then the narrator tells us that after the death of their child David comforted his wife Bathsheba (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12: 24). “He went to her and lay with her” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12: 24). Even her comfort is spoken of in the codes of sex in the semiotic realm. Yet, this is significant because here her objectification changes, for one does not comfort an object, no matter how beautiful, but one does comfort a person, someone whose grief is acknowledged and as such someone who is treated as a subject. It is important to note that although Bathsheba’s subjectivity has thus been honoured and in that sense restored, it remains nevertheless bound within the boundaries of patriarchy with its privileged place for men, in other words, the in-process/on-trial nature of Bathsheba’s subjectivity struggles with the peculiar restrictions facing a woman in a patriarchal society. Bathsheba conceives again and gives birth to another son and they name him Solomon.

We may assume that Bathsheba raised her son Solomon in the practices of palace protocol in order to prepare him to take his place in the hierarchy and politics of the palace. Kristeva ponders that “Silence weighs heavily... on the self-sacrifice involved in becoming anonymous in order to pass on the social norm, which one might repudiate for one's own sake but within which one must include the child in order to educate it along the chain of generations”

(Moi 1986, 183). The narrator does not tell us but could we assume that this is what Bathsheba did? And yet, with a son to raise did she have any other options? What are a mother's real choices of conduct if the well-being and the future of her child depend on it? And as the days turn into years, we do not hear about Bathsheba again until Solomon is older and she is once again important to the narrative.

Gathering Threads

What about love in this story? Tales of horror lurk just beyond any abuse in tales of love. The sound of silence is not the sound of love, and the echo of silence is not an echo of love. Is the steadfast love of *hesed* represented in this story? Uriah the Hittite, and not David showed the steadfastness of *hesed*, the commitment of a consecrated warrior to his God and to his fellow soldiers. Bathsheba's story tells us what happened when David forgot about love. Denise Lardner Carmody writes that, "to divorce the beauty of a lover from her or his total personality, and then suborn that beauty into the services of one's own sexual hedonism, is to pervert the sexual interaction" (Lardner Carmody 229). David perverted his first sexual encounter with Bathsheba, and because of it and the consequences that followed he became abject and felt rejected by God. David wept in his abjection and prayed for a religious ritual so that he could come to accept forgiveness and feel once more that he was loved by God. For "love is the most divine, transforming force in the human experience - the best evidence that the Spirit of God moves in our spirits, often with sighs too deep for words" (Lardner Carmody 27). Hence Lardner Carmody posits, "it is the power of love to take the self out of itself, into broader horizons, larger states of soul, unwonted generosity" (Lardner 145). There came a transforming

force in David, an unwonted, that is, an unaccustomed and unusual generosity as the power of love took him out of himself and into an ability to give comfort to Bathsheba.

Kristeva refers to this transforming force in the human experience as a revolution, a revolution at the sacred crossroads of love, where sovereign speaking subjects who are in-process/on-trial speak of love. Kristeva shows that as embodied subjects, our language becomes our judge and jury as we carefully choose our vocabularies, for our lexicon reveals much about our deeply held biases and prejudices and our implicit and explicit interpretations. We need a signifying system while at the same time we need to transgress this signifying system and form an impossible - possible dialectic of the metaphorical paternal and maternal elements of our symbolic system and semiotic order; of somatic functions as cleansing and as defilement, or fall into abjection. Kristeva, by entering the murky waters of metaphors of non-speech in her theory of abjection, creates not so much an impossible dialectic as she diminishes the impossible by presenting a possible working together, reducing the tension between opposites. Thus Kristeva shows the necessity of both the symbolic system and the semiotic order, not as impossible opposites in a dichotomous dialectic but as a whole for a revolution in language that leads to revolutions in communication, interpretation and understanding that will keep us from abjection.

Oliver clarifies that in language, “the maternal operates as a function that, in principle, can be performed by both men and women. Kristeva wants to take us beyond categories that have traditionally been used to limit us, all of us, both women and men” (PK 7). Because both the paternal and maternal functions in language can be performed by both women and men they are not essentialist and, because they are used as metaphor, they are not restricted by preconceived boundaries that would limit them. For the abject David the combination of the symbolic element of language and the semiotic element of a woman’s *mikva* rolled into one

whole, worked together in a fluidity that re-established him in his relationship with his God and enabled him to comfort Bathsheba so that both were restored as subjects.

According to Kristeva's philosophy of the subject, we understand that David is also a subject-in-process/on-trial and not a static or fixed subject. In the story of Bathsheba the emphasis has been as much on David-on-trial as on David-in-process. The struggle of the process of his actions put him on trial and showed the abyss of abjection of a selfish but repentant objectifier and his need for a clean and proper body in order to regain his integrity, his sense of self, and his particular proper place in relation to his God. Kristeva notes that, "Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance" (PH 15). Having gone to God in prayer with the agony of his guilt in the abject process of his repentance, God granted the forgiveness that David craved. Although David realized that his punishment was great, he got a new start of life, and a new significance as a clearing of the murky waters of metaphors of non-speech by which to live gave a deeper awareness of the fragility of life, and a fuller respect for the ethical consequences of our choices and our actions. For the consequences of which the prophet Nathan spoke have been put into motion and we will read about the effects of David's actions on his family and his kingdom in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

An Ethical Witness to The Unethical: Toward An Herethics of Love

In this chapter we will look at the implicit stories of women in the explicit narrative of the succession to the Davidic throne. The narrative focuses on King David, his sons Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah, and Solomon, and the prophet Nathan. Although we will note their different roles in the succession narrative, our concentration will be on their ethical relations, or lack thereof, with the women in our chosen trajectory.

A focus on stories of women's experiences could perchance invoke a charge of essentialism, but that may be a necessary risk for ethical listening, to be an ethical witness to the trajectory of women's stories in biblical and cultural narrative. Tina Chanter notes the possibility of this concern as she "argues for taking the risk of essentialism in basing an ethical or political thought on the attempt to grasp the specificity of women's experience as distinct from men's" (AML 5, 6). Chanter's articulated support for the examination of the specificity of the experiences of women as distinct from the experiences of men in our stories reflects that this is not a common endeavour. However, there is value in examining women's experiences as distinct from men's experiences and we saw in the previous chapter how the frame of Kristeva's philosophical concepts strikingly elucidated the story of Bathsheba in the narrative of David for new or renewed insights. Therefore we will read the stories of the women as an ethical witness to the unethical in their experiences, and heed Kristeva's call for a new ethics, "an outlaw ethics, which she calls a 'herethics'" (EPD 5). For Kristeva, this "ethics binds the subject to the other through love and not Law" (EPD 5). Here we have the relation that explains why Oliver thinks that Kristeva's herethics is an 'outlaw' ethics, not because it is outside the law in a negative way,

but because herethics goes outside and beyond the law to a way of love. In herethics, ethical practice is not dependent on the Law, on the 'oughts and shoulds' or even on a reformulation of the law, but rather new practices are called for, a revolution of love as the spirit of the law, a sacred love within which each individual person can be a sovereign subject-in-process/on-trial with her own particular proper place. This new ethics "is an ethics which challenges rather than presupposes an autonomous ethical agent. Herethics sets up one's obligations to the other as obligations to the self and obligations to the species" (EPD 5). We see here Kristeva's connection of ethics and love, for ethical living with the other is to be based on love. Therefore, in herethics, we are sovereign but not autonomous beings, we are the particular but not laws unto ourselves, and we are open to the other in the complexity of being a subject-in-process/on-trial who recognizes the other within, the stranger within. Therefore, in loving the other *as* her self, in herethics the ethical subject-in-process/on-trial will also love the other *in* her self. In this metaphor it is in caring for the other within us that we also care for our selves.

As noted before, we can read herethics as 'her-ethics,' a woman's perspective and participation in herethics, but also as heret-hics with attention to the heretical aspect of this ethics. Without being caught up in an ethics based on law that can be, and often has been, detrimental to women, it is her-ethics, equally rigorous in its expectations for 'right' and 'moral' living, loving, and serving, but perhaps with a different understanding of what 'right' and 'moral' entails, a heretical approach to an ethics of life, love, and service. Herethics works to change our thinking and our actions, our philosophies of life and our social constructs. With this in mind, we will read the stories of the women in this biblical narrative with a frame of Kristeva's concepts. We will be present as ethical listeners to the stories of these women who are drawn into the drama of the power struggle for succession to the Davidic throne. To be

present as an ethical witness to their stories is to be articulated as a self, for to self-articulate *is* to be present, and to be with in authentic presence is a spiritual exercise. Hence we will see in their stories that to be silenced is to be invisible, to be not-present, to be no-self with no sovereign subjectivity and no particular proper place. We will observe the secret and not so secret codes of sex and codes of war as these codes play a profound role in the telling of the story. We will examine the ethical and not so ethical behaviours of the perpetrators of violence and the experiences of the victims of this violence and why Kristeva calls for a revolution of ethics.

Identities in Crisis and the Sexualized Female Body

In our previous chapter, we saw how commentators and artists sexualized Bathsheba with her beautiful female body in a depiction of non-language with seduction as both sexual power and as a danger to the *status quo* of the realm of the metaphorical father, and how David's unethical behaviour toppled him into abjection in an identity catastrophe. As the narrative continues, we see that in the quest for the succession to the Davidic throne unethical behaviour is rampant and identities and subjectivity are again in crisis. Although Amnon is not an active pursuer of the throne, his behaviour initiates and influences the actions that follow. Brute strength is applied as political maneuverings are instigated, revolutions are activated, and it is on women's bodies that this war for power is played out. We will see how the sexualized female body is not respected for its beauty, its fecundity or for the maternal, but is diminished as an object and exploited and abused as a means to an end without any apparent concern for the 'who' of the 'what', that is, the subject of the objectified body. We first saw this lack of respect for the subjectivity of a woman in the objectification of Bathsheba, where David availed himself of her female body for sexual gratification. We will see this again in the story of Tamar and in the

story of the ten unnamed concubines. We will see it differently in the story of Abishag, for she is sexualized because of her virginity and objectified for the value of a virgin female body. None of these unethical acts of abusing the female body have anything to do with the 'woman' of the objectified sexual body. For although the feminine principle has power, and events will incur their inevitable consequences, the stories of these women will reveal how these women were dishonoured, their subjectivity disregarded, their sovereignty negated, and their particular proper place shattered. Identities are in crisis and the devastating consequences last longer than a lifetime. Memories of the sexualized and abused female body are not forgotten, personally and socially, they continue to influence the 'who' and the 'what' of a person, both in the be[com]ing of a subject and in the fragmentation, the shattering and destruction of this subjectivity through unethical behaviours and violation in crimes where women's bodies are abused as weapons in a quest for power.

Anne Cubilié, a consultant in gender, human rights, and education at the United Nations, writes of more recent trauma experiences of sexual violation as a weapon of war, for instance in the former Yugoslavia. She notes that "survivors of atrocity become deeply uncomfortable signifiers for the postatrocity societies within which they live, excessive to structures of normality that privilege forgetting, getting over, and getting on with things through the denial of the terror of death, ..." (Cubilié xii). Cubilié's observations of today reflect what happened to the women in our biblical narrative, "Configured in the uncanny, visible only from the corner of one's eye or when one is not looking ..." and we may attempt to valorize them but "we cannot – will not hear them" (Cubilié xii). We avoid, and thereby deny their stories by focusing on other trajectories in our narratives, or other stories of violence and atrocities of war. But even though women are silenced by our inability or unwillingness to hear their appalling stories, they "haunt

our cultural imaginary” and “have come to be figured by us in the form of ghosts” (Cubilié xii). Whether as survivors of individual violence or national atrocity they are a silent presence in our societies, but “Such positioning strips survivors (once again) of their humanity, removing them from the quotidian realm of ‘us’” (Cubilié xii). In Kristeva’s language, the survivors are stripped of their sovereign subjectivity and their particular proper place; we of the quotidian realm of ‘us’ silence them, regard them as ‘other’ and because of our own discomfort with their violation, treat them as strangers who are no longer part of ‘us’.

In our biblical story there are no survivor testimonies by the women of the sexualized and violated female body. As with Bathsheba, their stories are told about them, not by them. The narrator does not give an ethical witness. However, “ethical criticism demonstrates forcefully how ethical witnessing - listening for the voices of the survivors - reformulates the language of human rights and enhances its ability to intervene against violence and oppression” (Cubilié back cover). Kristeva participates in a phenomenology of telling and hearing our stories and the importance of reflecting on our experiences especially in her book *In the Beginning was Love* and in her dialogue with Catherine Clément in *The Feminine and the Sacred*. With ethical listening we become witnesses to lived experiences and the recognition that the other, the stranger is indeed part of ‘us’. We are then aware of the insidiousness of silencing that again violates the subjectivity of our humanity through the rejection of our stories. Cubilié notes that “Much of critical studies is concerned with silences and silencing and their relation to structures of power, and the basis of much political organizing is directed toward or in the name of those who are silenced” (Cubilié xi). Thus, if we regard the stories of the biblical women as incidental or secondary to the important narrative of the men in their political struggle for the power of David’s throne, we continue to silence them. But, as the politics of human rights and human

dignity affect all of us in all areas of life, Cubilié calls us “to bring the voices of the silenced,” ... into the “gap between the theory and the practice of what I would call the politics of humanity” (Cubilié xi). Kristeva addresses this gap between the theory and the practice of the politics of humanity with a focus on human dignity through her emphasis on the person as a loving and speaking sovereign subject with a particular proper place who is always in-process. In the telling of her own story and through analyzing the stories of women in biblical narrative, Kristeva shows the power of politics, the demands of cultural socialization, and the experiences of being a stranger. One of the complexities of this process is describing emotions, desires, and drives, for they are in the semiotic *chora* which does not have symbolic language. Yet we need both the semiotic and the symbolic elements of language for one signifying system for in our ethical listening the semiotic and the symbolic create communication and understanding.

Having considered the importance and difficulty of ethical listening and witnessing to the stories of women’s lived experiences let us begin to re-read the stories of some of the women in the narrative of the struggle for succession to the throne of David. The narrator tells the stories skilfully and forcefully, “weaving in words and silences and concealing underlying conflict, grief, fragility and confusion” (ITB 13). Seeing the biblical narrative thus as a theatre of linguistic representation, we will go beyond language as the spoken and the written word and include the semiotic order and *chora* in order to examine translinguistic modalities (ITB 5), as we work through the process of seeing and hearing, of seeking connections and meanings.

The Setting

The setting of the succession to the throne of David commences with the story of David and Bathsheba, Solomon’s parents (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11). We saw in the previous chapter how the

story was told from David's perspective, and how Bathsheba was seen as an object of his sexual desire, spoken of in the third person. We learned how David sinned against Bathsheba by having sexual intercourse with her and, having impregnated her, he then compounded his sin by arranging to have her husband killed. David's sexual desire, plus the fact that he acted upon his desire, and the subsequent deaths of her husband Uriah and her baby boy completely changed Bathsheba's life. The prophet Nathan gave an analogical story and David, unaware that he was the guilty one in the analogy, pronounced judgment of 'four times over' on himself, and then the prophet Nathan confronted him with his crime. David confessed before his God and, although Nathan assured David that God had forgiven him, he warned him that not only David himself but also his family would suffer the consequences of his actions. Some of these consequences bring God's judgment as spoken through the prophet Nathan: "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12:11, 12). As the narrative develops we read about these calamities. We learn how David's family disintegrates.

Amnon and the Sexualized Female Body of Tamar

The first sentence in this narrative would make it appear that this is going to be a love story. David's oldest son Amnon (NIV 2 *Samuel* 3: 2) "fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom, son of David" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 1). The narrator spins the tale well in the symbolic system but raises disturbing questions through the semiotic order. The two brothers, Amnon and Absalom, are established with a subject position as sons of David. Tamar's position is given as Absalom's sister, not as David's daughter. Through this literary placing the narrator

blurs Tamar's subject position and her place in the family for he does not clarify that as Absalom's sister she is David's daughter and as such she is Amnon's half-sister. This setting of her subject position is significant because her relation to her brothers and her father are important in the development of her story.

Rather than hearing how Amnon's love for Tamar develops, "Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 2). However, even though the narrator tells that Amnon 'fell in love', the frustration that he feels is very different from feelings of love, for a sincere lover would not be frustrated because his beloved is a virgin. Love does not appear to be the appropriate word here; rather Amnon is suffering frustration not because of unrequited love, but because of unlawful and thwarted lust and that "it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 2). The implicit violence in the lexicon, the ominous 'do anything to her' is chilling. Like his father, Amnon gazed at a beautiful woman and desired her, but there is a difference. Amnon knows that she is his sister, he knows her name and her subject position in the family, but he does not have the power to call her to him. His cousin Jonadab advises Amnon to "pretend to be ill" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 3), thereby acknowledging that Amnon was not 'ill', and they plot for Amnon to satisfy his sexual lust.

So Amnon pretends to be ill and his father comes to visit him. Amnon asks David for "my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 6). Fernhout suggests that Amnon made a "whimsical demand" (HF 170). However, knowing his intent, it is not so much a whimsical demand as a dangerous ploy to satisfy his illicit sexual lust. Unaware of the risk for his daughter "David sent word to Tamar at

the palace: “Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 7). As Bathsheba was not asked, she was taken, so Tamar is not asked, she is told.

Silencing Tamar, the Shattering of a Violated Subject

The narrator, who was so reticent in describing what happened to Bathsheba, describes in detail what happened to Tamar in her brother Amnon’s bedroom (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13). Amnon “grabbed her and said, ‘Come to bed with me, my sister’” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:11). Amnon’s recognition of their sibling relationship as he calls her ‘my sister’ while he ‘grabbed’ her does not enhance our estimation of Amnon. As the eldest prince of the royal court we may assume that Amnon has been educated and taught the laws of God and the laws of Leviticus are specific for ethical interpersonal relations saying that “no one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations” (NIV *Leviticus* 18: 6). Apparently this was allowed in Egypt and in Canaan at that time (NIV *Leviticus* 18: 3), but here it is emphasized that God forbids this. In order to avoid any questions of what may or may not be included in this prohibition, the law becomes specific, including, “Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere” (NIV *Leviticus* 18: 9). And again the law states, “Do not have sexual relation with the daughter of your father’s wife, born to your father; she is your sister” (NIV *Leviticus* 18: 11). The biblical law does not quibble about ‘half-sister’ or ‘step-sister’ but unequivocally states that in all these various relations, she is your sister. To conclude the laws of ethical familial relations the people are warned, “Do not defile yourself in any of these ways” (NIV *Leviticus* 18:24). Therefore, although the narrator calls Amnon’s cousin Jonadab his “friend” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 3), we question the quality and value of a friendship that recommends unethical actions in order to contravene one of God’s laws

and destroy a young woman. For if God forbids sexual relations between brother and sister how much more God forbids the sexual violation of a sister by her brother, therefore the sin of Amnon against Tamar is also a sin against the law of God.

The despair of Tamar is evident as she tries to protect herself and dissuade Amnon and, in response to him calling her ‘sister’, she pleads with him, ”Don’t, my brother!” and again, “Don’t force me” and cries, “Don’t do this wicked thing” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:12). She asks him “What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace?” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:13). Seeing that this has no affect on him, she says, “And what about you? You would be as one of the wicked fools in Israel” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:13). When this does not stop him either she implores him, “Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:13). We note that Tamar refers to the king rather than to their father and implies that the king could allow this and that he would not deny his son whatever he wanted. But Amnon “refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:14). We witness Tamar’s anguish as she is overpowered and raped. But her violation and humiliation are not over yet, for after Amnon has violently raped and dishonoured her, his lust turns to hate and he tells her to “Get up and get out!” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:15). The narrator says much with these few words. Kristeva writes, “If love is a fantasy, it takes in affect as its unrepresentable hell, at the risk of obliterating it Then one understands why physical love might be followed by disgust and be tinged with murderous violence” (TL 351). Amnon’s notion of love was a fantasy and by violating Tamar he obliterated his own fantasy. However, the affect of his fantasy, the ‘unrepresentable hell’ that it caused, is experienced by Tamar. For the fantasy of ‘love’ of his sexual lust now sated and obliterated turns into hatred, not a hatred for himself because of what he has done, but for his innocent victim. With ‘disgust’ and ‘tinged with a murderous violence’

he tells her to get up and get out, but Tamar says “No” as she tries to reason with him, “Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:16). Although at this point Tamar is thus still a speaking subject as she pleads with him, for the second time Amnon refuses to listen to her (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:16). He then adds to her violation as he calls his servant and tells him, “Get this woman out of here” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13:17). No longer acknowledged by name or by the familial relation of sister she has become a nameless generic ‘woman’ and her subjectivity with her particular proper place is shattered.

In his hatred for Tamar after he raped her, did Amnon experience abjection, a feeling of having done a violence that violated him as well? And we return to the ominous quote we looked at before, where Kristeva writes, “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated” (PH 1). Amnon may have realized that he has gone beyond the scope of the possible and the tolerable, and has done the unthinkable. But this dark revolt of being became a revolting being, he just lies there as he turns away from his sister Tamar and we hear no words of regret from him, no cry for forgiveness, instead he rejects her and ejects her from his presence rather than rejecting and ejecting himself in abjection.

The ethical laws of Leviticus state clearly that those who seek familial sexual relations, as in this case Amnon, are thereby defiled. Nevertheless, according to her social and cultural realities, Tamar is now considered defiled. Because of Amnon’s sexual violation of Tamar, she has lost her value as a virgin daughter of the king, for now her father could not offer her as wife to any potential husband for political or social negotiations; Tamar is no longer acceptable as a man’s pure bride. Kristeva questions the notion of purity when she asks “What is defilement?

What is dirty?” (SNR 20). And she posits that “... the modern individual concludes that the impure is that which does not respect boundaries...” (SNR 21). Thus the concept of ‘impure’ applies to Amnon rather than to Tamar and, because he did not respect but transgressed several boundaries in relation to his sister and the law of God, *he* is the impure, yet the dire consequences of his actions are on the innocent sister whom he violated and dishonoured. The narrator informs that “When King David heard all this, he was furious” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 21), but he did not do anything, thereby abdicating his responsibility both as father and as king. There is no justice for Tamar and no punitive consequences for Amnon from their father King David.

Tamar uses the traditional signs of mourning and as I listen to her story with the symbolic element of language and witness the unethical ruthlessness of her betrayal with the semiotic element, I weep with her and for her, and for all women who have experienced sexual violation. I witness how she puts the ashes on her head, tears her “richly ornamented robe”, a symbol of her status as a virgin daughter and a marriageable princess, and “She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 19). I note the linguistic heteronym of ‘tears’ and ‘tears’ and how in the semiotic the tears of her eyes and the tears of her robe work together to describe her desolation.

The word must have spread quickly; people at the palace must have looked at her with compassion at this proof of her violation at the hands of her brother. They may then have spoken with bewilderment at the lack of defense, the inaction of her father. If her father the king does not seek justice for her, who will? Tamar’s brother Absalom appears to minimize the significance of her rape when he tells her: “Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don’t take this thing to heart” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 20). Absalom’s words of consolation are hardly

comforting. The semiotic is conveyed beyond the words, the emotions are stirred, the heart cringes, the eyes water as we see the weeping Tamar and then look to her brother Absalom who figuratively turns away from his sister in her anguish by telling her to be quiet. In silencing her she is once again rejected. Was Absalom uncomfortable, can he not or will he not hear, as we noted above (Cubilié xii) the expressed emotions of Tamar's loud weeping? But having been denied the words of the symbolic as Amnon would not listen to her, as her father does not defend her, and now Absalom tells her to be quiet, why should she not access the communicative expressions of the semiotic? So she weeps aloud for the changes this violent act has brought to her life, the death of her life as she knows it. She laments for what is considered to be *her* shame. How could she not take it to heart as Absalom suggests? Is the fact that Amnon is her brother supposed to make her rape less horrifying for Tamar? Instead, is it not more traumatic because of the betrayal of an unspoken trust that a sister has in her brother as a family member? Or is she to be quiet in order to not further damage the reputation of her brother Amnon? And we are reminded of the "structures of normality that privilege forgetting, getting over, and getting on with things through the denial of the terror of death, ..." (Cubilié xii).

Consequences

The narrator tells us: "And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 20). Fernhout explains that Tamar "shut herself up in her brother Absalom's house, a widow without ever having married" (HF 171). However, to say that Tamar 'shut herself up' implies that she was an agent who had choices, but Tamar had no agency and no choices. She was doomed to be cloistered where she could not be seen, for although the shameful act was done *to* her and she was acted upon against her will, the defilement of a raped

woman was considered not only her shame but also her family's shame. Tamar is now one of the "uncomfortable signifiers" we mentioned before, and becomes one of the invisible, a presence of the absent who "haunt our cultural imaginary" and who "have come to be figured by us in the form of ghosts" (Cubilié xii). Tamar is reduced to being a 'signifier', an uncomfortable reminder, a non-subject without a particular proper place, who hovers invisibly and ghost-like between the living and the dead, a living dead woman.

Later we read that: "Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 14: 27). The sons are not named but "The daughter's name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 14: 27). From this, we may assume that Tamar had died for it was customary to name children after deceased relatives but not living relatives. However, when the narrator tells us that the child Tamar became a beautiful woman, it reminds us of what happened to her aunt, the beautiful Tamar, and her grandfather's wife, the beautiful Bathsheba. Did the child Tamar learn of her family history and did they teach her about her vulnerability and possible ways to protect herself? Did the sons learn of their family history and what did they teach them?

David had not upheld the ethical law; we heard no words of the symbolic system, but the emotions of the semiotic brew just below the surface until they steam forth in yet another violent act. Absalom took the law into his own hands to avenge his sister Tamar as two years later he kills Amnon. Why did Absalom wait two years before he acted? Did he not act until he began to understand the enormity of the consequences of the violent act of rape, to know the realities of Tamar's life, as she had been condemned to live it? After the murder of his brother Amnon, Absalom flees into exile. So, "Uncontrolled lust, murder and abuse of power all began to haunt David in the second generation" (HF 150). David's negligence as father and as king whose

mandate it was to uphold the law but who failed to do so for his own daughter, precipitated the murder of one son by another son. Yet, when David was consoled over Amnon's death, "the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 39).

Absalom and His Crime of War Committed on Ten Sexualized Female Bodies

The wise woman of Tekoa entreats David on behalf of Joab to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem, and there is an apparent reconciliation between father and son. After four years, Absalom requests of David that he may go to Hebron to fulfill his vow to the Lord, "If the Lord takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 15: 8). David accepts the reason for his son's request and said to Absalom, "Go in peace" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 15: 9). However, Absalom does not go in peace. He has been conspiring to revolt and overthrow his father the king by talking to the people and implying that they would not get a hearing or justice from King David or his representatives. He thereby inferred that if he were king the people would get a hearing and there would be justice in the land, and thus he had won the hearts of the people (NIV 2 *Samuel* 15: 1- 6). It is not mere coincidence that Absalom used the notion of a hearing and of justice in his conspiracy against his father the King, rather it is evidence of a lasting animosity against his father because David had not sought justice for Tamar.

Having killed Amnon, now, in another unethical move, Absalom is conspiring against his father David as king. David and his entire household must flee Jerusalem, "but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 15: 16). However, David left no one to take care of the ten unnamed women. As David flees Jerusalem he was "weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 15: 30). David is not afraid to show his emotions publicly, he wept for Amnon, he kissed Absalom. Now, because of the betrayal of

Absalom, and at having to leave his city Jerusalem and all it symbolizes, David is weeping, covering his head and going barefoot. These are the same signs of mourning that Tamar displayed after her betrayal by her brother Amnon. Now David is betrayed by his beloved son Absalom. As Absalom had said to the weeping Tamar, “Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don’t take this thing to heart” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 13: 20), did anyone dare suggest in a similar vein to the weeping David to ‘be quiet now, he is your son, don’t take this thing to heart’? As we watch David weep, we are left in a world of semiotic *chora*, a world of drives, emotions, feelings, repetitions and timelessness, but with no words of the symbolic system to give answers to our spoken and unspoken questions.

David’s advisor Ahithophel, who is Bathsheba’s grandfather, has joined the conspirators with Absalom. Implicitly we again see Bathsheba’s involuntary involvement in the political maneuverings of the royal family, here through her grandfather’s actions. Fernhout writes: “We can only wonder whether a lingering anger over David’s handling of the Uriah-Bathsheba affair led Ahithophel to cast his lot with Absalom” (HF 182). We also wonder if Ahithophel harboured feelings of anger and resentment against David because of what he had done to Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. But as an ethical witness we note that there was no ‘Uriah-Bathsheba affair’ as such that David handled, for neither were agents, rather David committed a sexual crime against Bathsheba and he was responsible for the death of Uriah. Later, Fernhout notes that, “...the sin for which God had judged David was committed with Ahithophel’s granddaughter” (HF 189). Again, the word *with* implies complicity if not agency, but the sin was committed not *with* but *to* Bathsheba even if, as discussed in our last chapter, we were to argue that perhaps Bathsheba was seduced by David, for that would be no less a sin against her. The implicit codes of our words can cast shadows of guilt. Being aware of these shadows of the semiotic in the

symbolic we can then either resign ourselves to the lexicon of the commentators or we can recognize that in knowing and yet resigning ourselves to disregard the implications of our word-choices, we become complicit in an explicit and implicit method of “psychic battering” (van Wijk-Bos 24). Psychic battering is perpetrated through the use of the symbolic system and experienced in semiotic *chora*, that is, psychic battering occurs when emotions created by the unsaid are assaulted through the said of our signifying system. Hence, we must continue to be vigilant and fight psychic battering in a linguistic battle for psychic healing.

Because Absalom is conspiring to seize the throne from his father King David, Ahithophel “advised Absalom to follow the custom of a new ruler in appropriating his father’s harem” (HF 189). That is, Ahithophel advised Absalom to “lie with your father’s concubines whom he left to take care of the palace” (NIV *Samuel* 16: 21). With these words Ahithophel becomes an architect of terror for ten innocent women. The calamity that Nathan had prophesied is about to take place, and what David had done in secret, Absalom would do in public. “So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 16: 21, 22). Absalom activated the codes of sex as a weapon in the codes of war. The claiming of David’s ten concubines through sexual intercourse was an irreversible break between Absalom and David as it indicated that Absalom considered David as dead and that David was powerless to protect the women. For, although Absalom perpetrated the crime of rape on the female bodies of the ten unnamed women, using them as sexualized objects, mere tools in a methodical process to humiliate the king, the target of the crime was David. The sexual violation of the concubines signified that David was literally and figuratively dethroned.

The ten concubines are not named, we do not know if they were young or old, but we can imagine what it may have been like for these women to be forced, one after the other, “to lie

with” Absalom, a euphemism for having sexual intercourse, but in this context for being raped by Absalom “in the sight of all Israel” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 16: 21, 22). For the women would have been well aware of the consequences a woman suffered after having been raped, victims of a war crime perpetrated in a revolt against the king. Nameless, voiceless, and powerless, they are pawns in a political power play where men make the rules and women suffer them.

Consequences

What happened to Ahithophel as the instigator of the crime, to Absalom as the offender, and to the ten unnamed concubines as the victims? Ahithophel again advises Absalom, this time on how to kill only David and prevent a battle in a full war effort, but Absalom follows the advice of Hushai the Arkite and disregards Ahithophel, who then goes home, puts his house in order and hangs himself (NIV 2 *Samuel* 17: 23). We may assume that once again Bathsheba mourned her loss.

Regarding the ten women who were the victims of the crime, we learn that, “When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them, but did not lie with them. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 20: 3). However, widows were not usually kept in confinement or imprisoned under guard in house arrest. Widow, in this case means that David rejected them and ejected them from his presence, he was no longer a husband to them, and took away their duties and privileges as part of his harem. David treated the concubines as if *they* had committed a crime, as if *they* were the offenders rather than the offended. Again we remember how Cubilié said that, as survivors of atrocity the women have become deeply uncomfortable signifiers for the post revolution society

within which they live, they have become excessive to the structures of normality that privilege forgetting, getting over, and getting on with things through the denial of the terror of death, ... (Cubilié xii). The ten women are visible reminders of Absalom's betrayal of his father and the king's inability to protect them, thus they are placed where no one will see them so that David and his family and all the people, through denial of the terror, can forget, get over it, and get on with things. Lechte and Margaroni posit that "Kristeva's approach to the Old Testament in *Powers of Horror* becomes anthropological, even structurally so ... that is, the meaning of the text is in what it is, in its unconscious, rather than in what it says at a hermeneutical level" (LM 90). The meaning of this biblical story about the unethical treatment of the ten unnamed concubines is what it is and although at the conscious level we can apply a hermeneutical model for interpreting it with the words of our symbolic system, the meaning of the story also strikes at the unconscious level. It is experienced in semiotic *chora*, it is felt in the depths of our being, the horror of rape, the systematic abuse of the sexualized female body in a crime of war, the violence, the injustice, the crime of punishing the victims of a crime.

And Absalom? Things do not go well for Absalom and he dies in the struggle for his father's throne. David weeps for the loss of his son Absalom, as he had wept for his son Amnon, as he had wept for leaving his city Jerusalem. But just as we have no reference to David weeping for his daughter Tamar because of his son Amnon, so we have no reference to David weeping for his ten concubines because of his son Absalom. But as ethical witnesses we weep for them and with them as we listen and hear their stories, know their violations and their anguish, and see the consequences in their lives of the violence enacted upon them. They are abandoned, ejected into abject despair without justice or moral recourse, they are the wretched and rejected, thrown away into hidden places.

David returns to Jerusalem and ‘normality’ resumes as the narrator tells of the continued ups and downs of David’s life as he sins and repents and is punished and forgiven by his God.

David and the Virgin Abishag, the Impotence of Not Knowing

The first Book of Kings opens with David, who is by now old and cold, and his servants’ search throughout the land for “a young virgin to attend the king and take care of him” (NIV I Kings 1: 1). They searched for a ‘beautiful’ girl and found Abishag, a Shunammite. We then learn that “the king had no intimate relations with her” (NIV I Kings 1: 4). Other Bible translations read, “but the king knew her not” (King James, Revised Standard Version). As ‘intimate relations’ and biblical ‘knowing’ are both euphemisms for sexual intercourse, we could say of David that even as he was not ‘intimate’ with Abishag, he was not ‘intimate’ with the political maneuverings at the palace. However, the use of the more traditional translation of sexual intercourse as ‘knowing’ and that the king ‘knew her not’ more clearly shows connections and meanings. For at the peak of his political power David had ‘known’ many women, and David ‘not knowing’ Abishag is now analogous to his ‘not knowing’ about the political struggle for succession to his throne. David’s sexual prowess and his political power, bastions as they are of the male imaginary, have gone flaccid and have wilted away. The semiotic code reveals that David, the man who took women and won wars, has become impotent both as a man and as a king.

Adonijah’s Conspiracy in the Struggle for David’s Throne

Having set the stage of David’s location as an old man, the narrative moves to David’s son Adonijah who follows in the footsteps of his older brother Absalom by declaring, while his

father is still living, that he will be the next king. Again, by claiming the throne, the son has symbolically declared his father dead. Almost as an aside, the narrator notes the kind of father David has been. He points out that Adonijah was “very handsome” and that David “had never interfered with him by asking, ‘Why do you behave as you do?’” (NIV 1 *Kings* 1: 6). Although the narrator emphasizes that David loved his sons, he seems to have been a consistently negligent father. Adonijah confers with Joab, the commander of the army who had assisted David with the killing of Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. Joab supports the conspiracy of Adonijah and hereby David loses political and military loyalty. Adonijah prepares a feast and all his brothers are invited and thus David also loses family loyalty. But because Nathan the prophet and David’s special guard had not joined Adonijah, they were not invited to the feast; neither was Adonijah’s brother Solomon, son of Bathsheba.

Suddenly, Bathsheba is brought back into the narrative. The prophet Nathan calls on Bathsheba and asks her, “Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king without our lord David’s knowing it? Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon” (NIV 1 *Kings* 1: 11,12). David does not ‘know’ and Nathan has a valid concern for Bathsheba and her son Solomon. However, Nathan also wants Bathsheba to use her position as one of the king’s wives for his own survival, for if Adonijah is successful then Nathan, not having joined Adonijah in his conspiracy for his father’s throne, will not live long.

Breaking Bathsheba’s Silence

As we saw in the previous chapter, although Bathsheba’s subjectivity was restored after David had objectified her, her silencing continued to be problematic for she had no voice in her

own story. Now Nathan wants her to break this silence. But breaking the silence puts the responsibility on the one who has been silenced, and this is different from providing time and space to hear the silenced into speech, where the onus is on the ethical listener. But now it is imperative that Bathsheba speak to David with a request emphasizing relations of power and powerlessness. Because Adonijah had not invited Solomon to his feast, as a potential rival for the throne he is indeed in danger and in the turmoil and dangers of a succession war it may not go well with him or with Bathsheba as one of the king's wives.

Nathan counsels Bathsheba to go to her husband King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: "Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on the throne? Why then has Adonijah become king?"' (NIV 1 *Kings* 1: 13). Previously in the narrative Nathan had revealed God's royal promise to David. "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom" (NIV 2 *Samuel* 7: 11-12). The Lord had promised to raise up a son of David to be his successor but God did not name the son in the promise and without any reference to God, Adonijah had raised himself up to claim David's throne. Nathan now brings the message for succession to Bathsheba rather than directly to David and promises her that, while she is still speaking to the king, he will come in and confirm what she has said. Nathan implies the possibility that David will not believe Bathsheba, or may not remember the promise he had made. The symbolic and semiotic maneuverings in the textures of the narrative emphasize the ambiguity of possibilities as they describe palace intrigue.

Bathsheba has to make a choice. For her son's survival, and her own, she must transgress the boundaries of her designated place, a semiotic *chora* that she has silently inhabited. For

Kristeva, transgression can be either negative or positive, as it means a breaking of codes. Breaking the codes can be a freeing experience, but it can also bring with it the danger of a new code, of an impossible dialectic between the symbolic and the semiotic, between the expected and the experienced, as we face the unknown of the not-yet. But again, does Bathsheba have a ‘real’ choice? Can she know and not act? Can she accept the consequences of not acting even as she must face the possible consequences of acting? Bathsheba’s options are reminiscent of the biblical story of the Jewish girl who became Queen Esther. She was advised by her uncle Mordecai to go and see her husband King Xerxes in order to save her people and her own life, and her hesitation to do so in light of the dangers a royal wife faced in approaching her husband the king uninvited (NIV *Book of Esther*). In the context of the politics of the royal Davidic family, Bathsheba must step out of and beyond the codes of her established boundaries, for with the introduction of Abishag, we may infer that David no longer invited Bathsheba to visit him in her role as wife. The position of Bathsheba as wife to David is gone, as a young maiden has replaced her presence with David. Therefore, in leaving her own sphere to speak for her son, there are no guarantees that David will receive her with favor. Kristeva understands this dilemma when she writes, “Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words” (Moi 1986, 162). Bathsheba leaves her shelter and takes a chance by entering, uninvited, into David’s rooms to speak the words given to her by Nathan.

Creating a Speaking Subject

Bathsheba enters a chilly climate as she goes to see the aged king in his room where Abishag is attending him. Bathsheba follows the customary rituals as she bows low and kneels before her husband the king and David says to her: “What is it you want?” (NIV 1 *Kings* 1: 15,

16). No words of welcome greet her. No invitation to sit down. No respect of privacy is offered to her, if Bathsheba is going to speak to her husband, she will have to speak in the presence of Abishag, his young companion. Could it be true, as Claudia Camp claims, that the narrator explicitly includes Abishag in the scene when Bathsheba confronts David, suggesting the underlying reality of this woman-versus-woman conflict? (Newsom and Ringe 99). But is this a woman-versus-woman conflict? Perchance Abishag is invisible in the room, much like Bathsheba has been invisible in the king's harem. Or perhaps again, Bathsheba looked at Abishag with a certain amount of empathy, remembering only too well that at one time she also had been brought to the palace to serve the king.

Bathsheba speaks the words given to her by the prophet Nathan. She tells David that Adonijah has declared himself king and he, David, does 'not know' about it. She tells David of the feast to which all of his sons, except Solomon, are invited. She then points out that the eyes of Israel are on him, to learn from him who will sit on his throne after him. Camp points out that, "Bathsheba hardly speaks so as to curry favour. Despite her humble obeisance, her words are direct and demanding, repeating to David's face that he 'does not know' what is going on" (Newsom and Ringe 99). Although Adonijah has assumed his father's place as king, Bathsheba makes it clear that it is not official until David has spoken. Bathsheba reminds David that if he does not speak "as soon as my lord is laid to rest with his fathers, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals" (NIV 1 *Kings* 1: 21). Is it significant that Bathsheba calls Solomon 'my son' instead of 'our son' or even 'your son' or does it reflect that after his death David will not be able to protect Bathsheba and her son? The semiotic code reveals questions not addressed in the symbolic system, yet together they speak of unspoken codes and underlying tensions perhaps only understood by the initiated.

Power and Periphery

The king who had summoned Bathsheba in order to have sexual relations with her, ‘to know’ her, is now being summoned by her ‘to know’ and to perform his royal duty to name a successor. Nathan may have proposed the words that she speaks, but we may imagine that the presence, the attitude, the tone and the delivery of those words are all Bathsheba’s. The semiotic code and the symbolic text intertwine with the speaking subject Bathsheba as mediator in the deliverance of her message to David.

While Bathsheba is still speaking, Nathan the prophet arrives. Bathsheba is summarily removed from the scene. Nathan went before the king and bowed with his face to the ground and tells David what Adonijah has done and he asks, diplomatically, whether this succession is something David has done without telling him? David commands to recall Bathsheba and then takes an oath, “As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place” (NIV 1 *Kings* 1: 29-30). David uses the language of Bathsheba when he specifies, ‘Solomon your son’ will be the successor after David. Then Bathsheba bowed low with her face to the ground and, kneeling before the king she said, “May my lord King David live forever!” (NIV 1 *Kings* 1: 31). Bathsheba is either expressing her thanks in the hyperbolic language of the court or she is expressing her fear for the coming fight for the throne and wants to postpone it for as long as possible.

Camp considers that, “though the initiative for her action appears to come from Nathan, she possesses her own power, skills and motives for her role” (Newsom and Ringe 99). However, as Kristeva describes the power of another mother in her *Stabat Mater*, “this feminine

power must have been experienced as denied power, more pleasant to seize because it was both archaic and secondary, a kind of substitute for effective power in the family... ” (Moi 1986, 170). With this, Kristeva helps us to question the notion of Bathsheba’s power in the family as she briefly speaks on the periphery of a narrative that is about men, and she once more disappears from the narrative. Nevertheless, in transgressing her boundaries as she stepped out of the women’s quarters, by breaking the silence as she speaks to David, and thereby moved out of the semiotic *chora* as she took on symbolic language, Bathsheba became a speaking subject in the narrative. Therefore, although breaking the silence and transgressing our boundaries can thus be positive for be[com]ing a speaking subject, we need courage to break the silence and we need to have experienced the limits of our boundaries. For we come to know our boundaries when we rail against them and often we only become known as speaking subjects with our own stories when we break the silencing codes and create a breach as we transgress the boundaries of the social contracts of our lives.

The Politics of the Virgin Female Body

After King David’s death, Bathsheba’s son Solomon sits on the throne of his father (NIV 1 *Kings* 2: 12). One day Solomon’s brother Adonijah, whose conspiracy against David had failed, comes to see Bathsheba. Her fearful apprehension is evident as she asks him if he has come peacefully. Bathsheba is now the king’s mother and although this position brings with it prestige and some power, it contains new dangers for her and makes her vulnerable in new ways. Kristeva explains that all discourse moves with and against *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends on it and refuses it (Moi 1986, 94), and we hear that although Adonijah says that he has come peacefully, it is what he does not say that we also hear. Adonijah does not

say that he has come to ask Bathsheba something but that he is going to tell her something. In so doing, Adonijah establishes himself in a power position over Bathsheba as he takes control of the conversation before telling her the reason for his visit. Having established his power-over position, he can then say that he has a request to make of her and to demand, “do not refuse me” (NIV 1 *Kings* 2: 16). Bathsheba again has no ‘real’ choice and responds in the only way possible. He may make his request.

The narrator gives us a detailed account of what follows. Adonijah asks Bathsheba, “Please ask King Solomon - he will not refuse you - to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife” (NIV 1 *Kings* 2: 17). Considering Bathsheba the best available conduit to the real power of her son, the king, Adonijah places her in a difficult position with his request. “Very well,” Bathsheba replied, “I will speak to the king for you” (NIV 1 *Kings* 2: 17).

Although we have no further biblical reference to this conversation, we wonder about Bathsheba’s motivation to speak for Adonijah. Some have psychoanalyzed Bathsheba with a hermeneutic of imagination that does not bode well for her, and which gives danger signals to other women whose stories are told. For instance, Jonathan Kirsch calls Bathsheba a “savvy political insider,” and he notes that “scholars”(without naming or referencing them) “suggest, Bathsheba falsely accused Adonijah of making a demand for Abishag ...” (Kirsch 283). Later Kirsch writes that when Bathsheba agreed to speak to Solomon, she was “perhaps hiding a sly smile” (Kirsch 283). In commenting on this narrative, even while the focus is on King David and his sons and their well-known unethical actions, with only a brief mention of Bathsheba, some commentators, like Kirsch and Vannoy, still find it necessary to vilify her, to implicitly lay at least some of the blame and the guilt on her, whereas the biblical text makes no such inference.

Yet, the conversation with Adonijah raises questions, not so much about who Bathsheba is but about how we are to understand Bathsheba. Was she so naive that she was not aware of the significance of Adonijah's request as Vannoy suggests?(NIV 474). Or was she a 'savvy political insider' and did she falsely accuse Adonijah as Kirsch presumes? But the biblical narrative clearly relates that Adonijah had sought Bathsheba out and that he had come to her with his request. Was Bathsheba afraid of Adonijah, afraid to not grant him his request, even though he said he came peacefully? What flashed through her mind as she considered his request? In addressing Kristeva's philosophy Anna Smith notes that, "The presence of the drives in language gives rise to a multiplication of meaning as well as to its destruction. ... The ego is at home in a familiar landscape, travelling only to rediscover the same" (Smith 54). And so we consider whether a man could identify with David and his sons and in the need of his own ego seek some sense of justification in the narrative, some meaning he can relate to? Or could a woman be familiar with the 'landscape' of the narrative and her ego needs the affirmation of understanding the story the way that a patriarchal worldview interprets its meaning? Yet, we have learned from Kristeva that we can widen the road and broaden our horizons to give rise to a multiplicity of meanings as well as a deconstruction rather than a destruction of less felicitous understandings and interpretations. Kristeva shows how, when we diverge from the main line and choose the road less travelled we come to deeper understandings of the possible meanings of the various implicit stories in our explicit narrative.

According to her promise, Bathsheba goes to her son King Solomon to speak for Adonijah. Solomon respects Bathsheba as a speaking subject and he stands up to meet her, bows down to her and sits down on his throne. He has a throne brought for her and she sits down at his right hand (NIV 1 *Kings* 2: 19), which is a place of honour. How different is the welcome of

her son from the earlier reception of her husband for Bathsheba. The semiotic of body language, of who bows for whom, who stands and who sits, speaks of her changed status from one of the old king's many wives to the new king's mother. This time Bathsheba remains standing upright while the king bows to her and, rather than being left standing, she receives a throne upon which to sit. How far removed this scene is from David's brusque 'what is it you want' as described above. Although Solomon promises his mother that he will not refuse her, he seems incredulous when she tells him Adonijah's request, and he does refuse. He reproaches her, "You might as well request the kingdom for him" (NIV 1 *Kings* 2: 22). For although Solomon was declared king by his father's decree, with Adonijah's request for David's companion Abishag it appears that Solomon's kingship is not yet consolidated and that the power struggle for the Davidic throne is not yet completed. There is a deeper meaning to Adonijah's request than to simply have his father's companion, the beautiful young virgin Abishag, as his wife. By asking for Abishag, Adonijah is not merely asking for a consolation prize now that his brother Solomon has succeeded their father David, but for what a son would inherit if he were the successor to the throne. Abishag has become a pawn in the struggle for succession. The importance of Abishag is her sexualized female body, but here of significance is the absence of sexual intercourse since, even though she had been David's companion, she had remained a virgin. Her known virginity emphasized the sexual impotence of David and correspondingly his political impotence, an impotence that Adonijah could put forward in an effort to invalidate David's decision to have Solomon declared as his successor. Thus, through the apparent innocuous request for Abishag as wife, Adonijah challenged the competence of David and thereby Solomon's right to the Davidic throne. No further justification is given for his execution as Adonijah was put to death that day (NIV 1 *Kings* 2: 24).

We remember the analogy of the poor man and his ewe lamb that the prophet Nathan told when he confronted David after his violation of Bathsheba. We recall the judgment that David had unwittingly called upon himself as he had cried out in righteous indignation: “He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 12: 6). First David and Bathsheba’s baby son, then Amnon and Absalom, and now Adonijah, and although David did not live to see this fourth son die, David’s family paid four times over for the lamb that David had taken, ‘because he did such a thing and had no pity’.

The ‘Who’ of Bathsheba as a Subject

Although Bathsheba is known to us as Uriah’s wife and then as David’s wife and Solomon’s mother, that is the ‘what’ of her relational subjectivity, bounded by the patriarchal system of her time. Her story is on the periphery of the narrative about men and we are told no more about the ‘who’ of her as a person. But we do know that when called upon, Bathsheba had the courage to break the silence of *chora* and to trespass the codes of her boundaries as she bravely stepped out of her consigned location. We know that she used the Symbolic system with the symbolic element of words and the semiotic order of drives and emotions to convey a summons of responsibility to David and to protect her son Solomon, both before and after he was declared King.

Kristeva considers Bathsheba in her role as Queen Mother and links her with other biblical Queens when she writes:

These Queens are not always sympathetic, I grant you that, but all are subversive, nonconformists Strangeness, or, let us say, the female power, insinuates itself into the social order, threatens it, is sometimes integrated into it, even while remaining rebellious, desirable, never passive or docile (FS 100).

Does Bathsheba come across as ‘not always sympathetic’? As we have seen, that depends on one’s perspective. Was she ‘subversive’? If playing by the unwritten codes of court intrigue is subversive, then yes, she spoke for Adonijah as asked and that may have been a subversive act. Was she one of the ‘nonconformists’? We assume that she conformed sufficiently to raise her sons, Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon (NIV 1 *Chronicles* 3: 5) in the palace protocol. Otherwise we only read about her as an agent in reaction to a man’s need for her to speak to the man who is in power, first from Nathan to David, then from Adonijah to Solomon. Both Nathan and Adonijah recognized and laid claim to Bathsheba’s connection to power. This female power, secondary to established power but influential even if derivative, Kristeva calls ‘strangeness’ and how this strangeness insinuates itself into the social order. For while the narrator kept Bathsheba in the background, invisible and silent, when she is asked to speak as needed by Nathan and Adonijah it is revealed that, although she was threatened by the social order, she also threatened and influenced that social order. Hence, although Bathsheba may have been integrated into the social order of David’s harem, we do not know how well she adapted, even for the sake of her sons. Now desired as a speaking subject rather than as a female sexual body, she was courageous rather than passive or docile as she fought for her son Solomon to be given and to keep the throne of his father David.

Gathering Threads

The narrative of the struggle for succession to the Davidic throne shows the relations between David and his sons Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah and Solomon and the prophet Nathan. Yet, the succession narrative could not have been told without the stories of the women who were drawn into the drama of the events, the unethical actions against them and the

consequences each woman suffered. Why does this biblical narrative show so clearly how the men in their lives exploited Bathsheba, Tamar, the ten unnamed concubines and Abishag in an abusive code of sex in the secret, and not so secret codes of violence, war, and power? Do the women represent only their own stories, in their own time and in their own place or, as Cubilié suggests, are women's stories representative of a systemic treatment of women through the ages?

As we read of personal betrayals, of violence and death, and that David loved his sons who violated, betrayed, killed and died, we continue to be an ethical witness to the unethical actions as we listen and look for the presence of love and the sacred for the women in this narrative. With Kristeva this ethical witness to the unethical leads us towards a herethics, an ethics that could be considered heretical in its approach because it is an ethics that considers *her*. Our role as ethical witnesses means to be ethical listener, and with our focus on the stories of women in this narrative we note how symbolic and semiotic scheming in the fight for power and power-over was an unethical struggle that was played out on the sexualized bodies of women. Our role as ethical witnesses is also to “challenge traditional structures of knowing, of power, of community and of violence”, and “to open up new avenues for critical investigation of structures of violence, power, and identity” (Cubilié xi). With Kristeva's emphasis on the subject as a speaking subject, we note “the concerns that revolve around silence” (Cubilié xi). Although the stories of the women in this biblical narrative do not contain ‘survivor testimonies,’ with the sensitivity of herethically listening to Tamar we hear how subjectivity can be shattered and we witness with Bathsheba how subjectivity can be restored. With herethics we are aware of the implications of our chosen lexicon, we see the importance of acknowledging and accepting the grieving and the weeping for what is lost. We have considered how an explicit and implicit patriarchal understanding of women's stories support patriarchal structures which cloak the

connections between codes of sex and codes of violence, war, politics, and power-over, which are still being experienced and enforced today in the overt and covert power plays of nations, families, and individuals.

In examining the stories of the sexualized female body and the considered value of the sexualized virgin female body, we find what Kristeva has called “lacks of love” (TL 7). Kristeva uses the plural ‘lacks’ as if to emphasize the significance and magnitude of this lack. Even as we realize that we must re-think and re-conceive of our ethics with a herethics, we must reinvent love, a love that with herethics will give a new understanding to our “discourse in the face of the twisted mingling of sexuality and ideals that makes up the experience of love” (TL 1). As seen in this biblical narrative, to sexualize the female body is an objectification of women, it is distinctly different from a mutually expressed sexual loving, because in any objectification there is no speaking and loving sovereign subjectivity, no particular proper place for them where they can flourish.

We therefore continue to be an ethical witness to the stories of women in the biblical narrative for understanding our own stories, for they have a timeless message that continues to inform, to warn, and to inspire us as we participate in the sacred process of being loving and speaking sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial with a particular proper place.

Epilogue

Into the Future: a Her(ethics) of Love Between Delirium and Tyranny

Our search for identities as speaking and loving sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial on the edge between the tyranny of the symbolic and semiotic delirium has taken us through language, love and the sacred in terms framed by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva notes that her work in philosophy and literature keeps her coming back to the Bible. For her the Shulamite of the *Song of Songs* has a special place as a woman who in her culture was a speaking and loving sovereign subject who spoke of her love. Kristeva's contemplations on and appraisals of several women in the Bible brought us to an examination of the biblical story of Bathsheba as we sought to understand the identity and the subjectivity of the women who were drawn into this trajectory in the narrative of David. We looked for love and the sacred in the stories and we critiqued the language used by commentators. We were an ethical witness to the stories of women who were treated as sexualized female bodies in the violence of rape and incest, and we grieved at the rejection which the victims of these crimes experienced.

We also heard how David went from playing 'a holy' to 'a broken Hallelujah' as the poet Leonard Cohen describes. Cohen envisions David to wail, "And even though it all went wrong/ I'll stand before the Lord of Song/ with nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah, Hallelujah". And the Hallelujah that was once a holy song to God is all that David has left as he approaches God in his abjection. He has no other words, no words of explanation or excuse and so he cries to God with a broken Hallelujah as he begs for forgiveness, for a semiotic sign of the religious ritual of a woman's *mikva* when the words of the symbolic were not enough to cleanse him of his sins. We learned that when David could accept that he was forgiven by God, even though he had to suffer

the consequences of his actions, he was able to comfort Bathsheba, thereby acknowledging her grief and restoring her from object to subjectivity.

But what does that all mean for us? We do not live in theory, either philosophical or theological, neither can we stay in the past with our reflections on biblical stories. We also need to understand the development of the identity and subjectivity of women today and what that signifies. We all face the challenge of forging our identities between drowning in the semiotic delirium of passions and woundings and the symbolic tyranny of logical concepts with their formal precision. In this epilogue - which is not an end - we will take a brief look at examples of issues concerning women's struggle for agency and identity. Our aim is to make clear, that in spite of the significant advances that have been made by women, Kristeva's call for revolution and a herethics of love remains unfulfilled.

An Oscillation Between Rejection and Identification, Between Delirium and Tyranny

The identity of women has been in crisis for many years. In the discourses of our history, our philosophy, our theology, and in our biblical interpretations, there are gaps, interruptions, and flashes where women are seen. What is a woman's identity in the context of her family, in the political, social and religious realms? Who or what defines us? Who or what has authority in our lives? Whom or what do we choose to serve? That too is part of our story.

Oliver writes that, "Traditionally, philosophers have tried to describe human experience by abstracting from their own experience and articulating the essential characteristics of that experience" (PK xii). This usually took the form of assuming to be objective while forming general statements. However, Oliver explains that, "As philosophy has become more aware of itself and its methodologies, it has become concerned with the relation between experience itself and its articulation of experience" (PK xi). This philosophical concern with the relation between

experience itself and its articulation has its own problems as it seeks to find meaning and tries to deal with the question: “What might get lost in the translation from experience as it is lived to the philosopher’s articulation of it?” (PK xi, xii). How do we describe the empirical data of women’s experiences in ancient as well as contemporary stories and abstract from these experiences and articulate the ‘essential characteristics’ and meaning of those experiences? In the face of these difficulties, Kristeva remains constant in “her attempts to bring the speaking body back into theoretical discourse” (PK viii), her attempt for word to meet flesh.

Thus McAfee notes that, “Throughout her writing, Julia Kristeva focuses on speaking beings, those who not only use language but are constituted through their use of language” (McAfee 29). We become who we are as a result of taking part in signifying processes (McAfee 29), for subjectivity is interdependent with others. We come to know ourselves through interaction with others. As noted before this can be both positive as in ‘I am like that’ and negative as in ‘I am not like that’. But there is a fear in our identity formation that we can become entrapped in an image of ourselves that is wrong, ‘that is not me but I want to be that’, a fear that I may take that image inside of me and try to live up to that image. But that image is an alienation from my self, it is the internalization of an exterior misrepresentation of my identity, a falsification of who I really am as an authentic self. Kristeva writes about ‘the stranger within’ and Olthuis explains how when we internalize what we think is expected of us, “At some deep levels we become strangers to ourselves” (BR 84).

Kristeva notes that Catherine Clément “wrote a sensitive response to my view of women’s lives as a detective novel, an unfulfilled revolt, a latent atheism” (FS 1). To tell our stories in the narrative of life is not an easy task, for once we do so we become vulnerable. What clues would a detective find in our stories? What could be signs of unfulfilled revolt, and could

they lead to a crisis of understanding God and our proper place in the world in a possible atheism? Here too, we need discernment as we live, tell and listen to our stories with integrity in “an oscillation between the semiotic and symbolic, between rejection and identification” (RK 11). Kristeva’s writing has a depth that is complex and intense, and it is this complexity and intense depth of her writing that reflects this oscillation. But this is because in reality there is oscillation. Kristeva sees life as the fluctuation between semiotic difference and symbolic identity. A speaking subject comes to be in a non-oppositional positioning between the semiotic and the symbolic. A balance between the semiotic and the symbolic is needed, for too much semiotic, without the symbolic leads to confusion and delirium; and too much symbolic, without the semiotic, leads to tyranny and hollowness.

Oliver explains that Kristeva’s writing “is a discourse that breaks the law of non-contradiction upon which the traditional notions of identity are built” (RK 1). This oscillation of contradiction may appear as a flutter when it is first encountered but can increase with a ripple effect as its ambiguities excite one into further thought and discussion even when its logic sometimes agitates and frustrates. This oscillation is built-into the creational process, and it is this inherent fluctuation “what opens up the possibility of interpretation” (RK 1). Oliver gives evidence of the various ways Kristeva’s work has been interpreted by several critics (RK 1), and we recognize that this ‘possibility of interpretation’ is also evident in my work, both with the understanding of Kristeva’s work itself and with the application of the philosophical concepts we chose for interpreting the trajectory of Bathsheba in the narrative of David and for discerning our stories today. In reflecting on the stories of women, on the reality of the empirical data of their existence and the interpretations of their experiences, we see the influences of our philosophical and theological discourses and of biblical interpretations, of the ideology and worldview built on

them, and what this means for our relationships, our religion, our culture, and our sense of identity and proper place in the world. We acknowledge that all our stories are contestable because they are told with hindsight and we cannot foresee a good hearing or a lamentable one. Why then do we tell our stories? We read and listen and tell our stories in order to remember, to understand and to know who we are. We listen and give an ethical witness to our stories and the history of our stories with a sense of humility, for ethics is always self-reflective, it implies a person thinking and doing, that is, we are ethical through our attitude and practice. When we engage in Kristeva's call for revolution, for transformation, we face ethical choices, whether we advocate for justice or maintain a status quo which remains unjust. "Transformation is the alternative to endurance and passivity" (Carlson Brown and Bohn 146). This means that "Transformation is the means by which, refusing to accept injustice and refusing to assist its victims to endure suffering any longer, people act" (Carlson Brown and Bohn 146, 147). This too is part of our stories.

As we tell and listen to our stories, we must sift through social and religious phenomena as they reflect ideology, for ideology is taught and it can be coercive, and the coerciveness of the dominant ideology can be a soul-crusher for women and for men. We need to learn a new ethos, a spiritual ethos that is less bruising and coercive, less fearful and with more joy. Therefore we must 'unlearn' much as we examine, discard as needed, identify what is most precious and essential to us and keep the enduring values that help us to flourish in our proper place, to experience *eudaimonia* in and with love.

Kristeva writes of her time in Canada when she "had to put on a violet archbishop's robe, at the University of Western Ontario, where I was voted *doctor honoris causa*" (FS 43). She relates how she "had tears in my eyes thinking of my parents. Of them and nothing but them,

that goes without saying. They would have been so proud! A sacré debt, the debt to one's parents of which one is never finished paying the sacré dividends" (FS 43). We have a sacred debt to those who have gone before us, who fought for positive changes in understanding our identity and our subjectivity. We have a sacred debt to those who walk with us as a "soul-friend" (BR 12), who make the spiritual journey of our be[com]ing worth the struggle and who share with us the wonder of the experience as sacred dividends of love. My soul-friend is Jerry, my loving and beloved spouse, my fellow traveler on our life's journey, my companion and discussion partner as we live our philosophy and our faith with family and friends.

In explaining how her correspondence with Catherine Clément in *The Feminine and The Sacred* originated, Kristeva notes that, "In a personal and professional trajectory, there comes a time when you want to pursue the essential thing, within the shelter of solitude and without the strictures of the group. Sometimes, for a woman, it also happens that the essential thing appears to be what is shared with other women" (FS 1). So let us briefly look at only some of our shared history in be[com]ing speaking and loving sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial with an identity and a proper place.

Biblical Interpretation and Identity Formation

Identity formation through biblical interpretation is very strong and when used for relations of domination, of power-over, it is alienating. "Women have been taught to find their identity first from association with fathers, then from husbands - always in relationships to males who have control over them"(Carlson Brown and Bohn 110). We saw this with the identification of Bathsheba as the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11: 3), and even when her subjectivity was restored it was still in her relation as being 'the wife of' David and 'the mother of' Solomon. In Canada it is still traditional for a married

woman to be known by her husband's name, i.e. I am officially known as Mrs. Jerry Bergsma, although also here changes are occurring, a disruption of patriarchal tradition as many women are legally keeping their given name and their father's surname. Although in our discourse it has been argued that women are included in the philosophical study of 'man', there are separate studies of 'woman' which have usually focused on her identity in relation to man. The understanding of woman in relation to man rather than as 'woman qua woman' has further been studied in theology and religion, and from there it has entered society and church policies and politics. When considering the concept of woman in relation to man, Sister Prudence Allen describes three possibilities: sex unity, sex polarity, and sex complementarity and notes that it is sex complementarity that begins to emerge in Christian thought (Allen xxiii). She believes that only the theory of complementarity "presents an integrated view of the materiality in human identity and for this reason it also seems to offer the greatest possibility for fertile and creative relations between women and men" (Allen 5). However, although Allen may consider the theory of complementarity as the most positive for 'fertile and creative relations' between women and men, too often in the practice of the theory man is the norm and woman fills in what is lacking and in that sense she is perceived to complement him. I argue that to so understand woman as complementary to man, rather than woman and man each as a sovereign subject in mutuality, is detrimental to identity formation for both men and women as it still perpetuates the polarities and stereotypical dichotomies of what is considered to belong to male and female essence or nature.

Sister Prudence believes that, "it is not a mere coincidence that this theory was first articulated by Christian philosophers. Sex complementarity is perfectly compatible with fundamental Christian theological beliefs in the creation and the resurrection of the body" (Allen 5). Although the concept of theoretical sex complementarity may be considered compatible in

the discourse of theological beliefs that have been articulated by theologians and philosophers, I question whether this concept, not as it is theorized in discourse but as it is practiced in reality, is indeed compatible with beliefs from the Bible. Étienne Gilson, also a Christian philosopher, proposes that, “When concepts, instead of being made in the image of reality, begin to make reality in their own image, there is something rotten in the kingdom of metaphysics” (Gilson 1952, 96). Could I extrapolate on his thought and propose that when concepts regarding ‘woman’ and ‘man’, instead of being made in the image of reality, begin to make reality in their own image, there is something rotten in the kingdom of the concept makers?

Olthuis notes, “We agree that for far too long the West has been embroiled in an ethos which sees self and other, the same and the different, as two reciprocating poles, simultaneously attracting and repelling each other” (TEC 5). In that kind of reciprocating complementarity, neither the same nor the different are celebrated. Rather, in the practice of the theory a hierarchy has developed where men can and do decide the ways and the limits of women’s complementarity instead of a mutual complementarity based on the talents and qualities of the individual persons. Carole Bohn notes that what is not recognized in this hierarchy of power-over is an underlying “theology of ownership” (Carlson Brown and Bohn 113). “This theology of ownership is pervasive and foundational to much of Christian thought and practice, though it is rarely named directly and most of its practitioners are unaware of it” (Carlson Brown and Bohn 106). In some religious structures of denominations and churches this ‘theology of ownership’ is noted as women’s identities continue to be affected by discussions and schisms among men to decide what he will or will not ‘allow’ her to do or to be.

Olthuis proposes that “in contrast, we suggest adopting and shaping an ethics of connection which does not play the self-same off against the different-other” (TEC 5). Olthuis

calls this “a model of non-oppositional difference – an economy of love” (KO 146). This economy of love is “an intersubjective model of mutual recognition, attunement, and empowerment” (KO 146). This mutual recognition is shown and experienced in “mutual yielding/receiving, mutual delighting, mutual empowering” (KO 146). Even as Kristeva writes of an oscillation between rejection and identification, between delirium and tyranny, Olthuis writes that here is “the oscillating rhythm of giving and receiving, the dance of identity and intimacy called love” (KO 146). He explains, “Instead of power-over (with its corollary of power-under), or power-held-in-abeyance (to avoid domination), there is a power-with and the dance of mutual empowerment” (KO 146). In power-with one can be a “connective self” for “the formation and nurturing of self-identity is possible only in an intersubjective matrix” and “my connection with others is constitutive of my identity” (KO 146). Olthuis adds the caveat that these “mutual relations are not to be confused with or reduced to the reciprocities of market relations of exchange and contract” (KO 148, 149). Rather, he explains, “Mutuality is attunement of expression, recognition, and desire, a dance in which simultaneously the differing gifts and needs of each person are honored, recognized, and often met” (KO 147). In the oscillation of this dance “each of us seeks a rhythm in the other without hierarchy and without abasement - beyond considerations of duty, balance, or advantage” (KO 147). In this dance we experience an ‘ethics of connection’ for “selves-in-connection” (TEC 6). Here, “We recognize each other, seek each other’s good, identify-with each other - in the process loving the other as we love ourselves” (KO 147). Olthuis clarifies that “The aim is not to eradicate, accommodate, suppress, or repress difference, but to allow contact with difference to move, enhance, and change us as we become ourselves more fully” (KO 147). Kristeva expresses this aim of movement, enhancement and change in the concept that we are all subjects-in-process/on-trial,

that our psyche is in perpetual flux in the process of loving and be[com]ing. This perpetual flux of the process of our be[com]ing, of our subjectivity and our proper place, is not to be understood as a tedious experience that reveals a melancholic quality of human existence but rather it shows the process of our development and growth as a person, as a self in mutuality with other persons. Olthuis notes that when we are graced with this mutuality we meet “the fundamental ingredients of love” (KO 147). He cites Kristeva (TL 15) who notes that “The psyche is one open system connected to another, and only under those conditions is it renewable. If it lives, your psyche is in love. If it is not in love, it is dead” (KO 147). This mutuality is an ethics of connection-in-love, however, here too a caveat is needed, for “The dance of mutuality is always drenched in vulnerability and risk because it is a non-coerced meeting of two free subjects in the wild spaces of love” (KO 147). For Olthuis this “mutuality is the normative” (KO 153, n 8) in our attempt to establish a “subjectivity capable of ethical relationships” (KO 155 n 32). This mutuality is the norm which makes possible and facilitates the process of our loving and our be[com]ing. The ethics of mutuality is thus not based on a perceived patriarchal male norm with its perception of being and of our identity as a self as a composition of these perceptions. Rather, this mutuality addresses the controversy concerning identity with a herethics which respects each person as a self and honors the unique difference of each person as a self in ‘an ethics of connection’ for “selves-in-connection” (TEC 6). I understand this mutuality of connection to be different from complementarity, for, “In genuine mutuality it is not that the other fills up or augments myself; nor do I lose myself in the other” (KO 149). Olthuis elucidates that “Difference as invitation and evocation calls us to responsibility and mutuality in which authentic connection is mutual empowerment: power-with rather than power-over or power-under” (TEC 6).

In light of this ‘ethics of connection’ in mutuality, it is noteworthy that those who have the power of speech and decision-making bestowed upon them by the authoritative structures of religious institutions can participate in interpretations and discussions about what the Bible says about women without any apparent realization of the impact this discourse has on the existential reality and identity of the individual woman. Even though Kristeva claims that the symbolic being is “the being who lives in language” (PK 381), in this context, like Bathsheba and the women in the trajectory of her story, women are again/still denied language in their own formation of who and what they are and so denied an identity as symbolic beings. In the discourse where women are compelled to listen while they are talked *about* but not *with*, we are reminded that Kristeva describes how we feel the “tissue of meaning” (ITB 6), the actuality of the meaning of the words in our body, the semiotic reaction to the symbolic words. I wept with my husband when told that once again, after many years of discussion starting in 1973, the Synod of our protestant denomination at that time, had rejected women and would continue to exclude them from ‘office’ in the church. Other women spoke of their reactions, how they cried, could not eat and could not sleep, while trying to accept the loss of their hope and expectation. Since then this denomination has accepted ‘women in office’ and experienced a schism because of differing biblical interpretations regarding the role of women in the church. This power-over, silencing and schism becomes more fraught with emotional and spiritual tensions when selected texts from the Bible are referenced in discussions as the authoritative word of God and the Holy Spirit is invoked in the decision making process.

Kristeva is disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church and with the women who continue to struggle to serve as its leaders. She writes, “Personally, I do not see what women gain from being priests, from becoming like priests, the faithful and acknowledged officiants of

the cult of the father and the son” (FS 64). Having left the church of her childhood, she questions why women should want to be a part of the church as it is now. Why would they want to be like the men, the ‘officiants’ of this power-structure? But also, “What interest do they have in the ratification by the males” (FS 64)? That is, why do women want to be recognized, approved and accepted, that is be ratified, by the male hierarchy of the church? She wonders, “What do they expect from the Church? That the Church allow itself to be transformed, invaded, reformed? Why should it?” (FS 64). For Kristeva, the church is what it is, and she suggests, “Shouldn’t these anxious women instead found another sacred place, other spaces for questioning the sacred, who knows? Shouldn’t they leave the Church, since it develops its own logic and would not know how to transform itself without destroying itself” (FS 64). Kristeva does not see how the church can become inclusive of women in the male hierarchy and thinks that the structure of the church as it is would not survive if it were to change. Her frustration is apparent when she seems to shrug as she concludes, “that institutional question ... does not interest me in the first instance” (FS 64).

But the evaluation of the church is part of her search for the sacred, for a possible place where the sacred can be encountered. Nevertheless, although in the New Testament we read of several women leaders in the development of the church, in my own moments of frustration I ask with Kristeva, “What place is there for women in that history dating from the birth of Jesus, what chance for them two thousand years after him?” (FS 1, 2). Yet we witness hope in Kristeva that reflects my own anticipation of the possible in a new vision of our world with a disrupting and an overthrowing of the patriarchal tradition that excludes women. Kristeva writes, “If, as we believe, it is true that women will awaken in the coming millennium, what can the profound meaning of that awakening, of that civilization, be?” (FS 2). What meaning indeed in this

awakening new civilization? How do we imagine the transformation of “the social practices of men” in our world (Boldt 252)? How do we see the crossing of boundaries that separate people? How do we envision making positive change? People do not necessarily resist change but people often resist other people’s changes. Even if everyone wants change, not everyone wants the same change, and some fear what they may lose in the changes. But we are confident that in this awakening of our civilization a new kind of story will emerge.

Ogden Bellis argues that, “although there is much in the Bible that is uncongenial to contemporary women, there is also much that nourishes feminists and helps keep alive their struggle to have women’s full humanity affirmed” (Meyers 26). To have one’s full humanity affirmed is what Kristeva describes as having an identity as a sovereign subject-in-process/on-trial with a proper place. And so women have not given up on reading, studying and interpreting the Bible. In the nineteenth century, as a slave, Sojourner Truth was an illiterate non-subject, a bound woman, however, as a freed woman she was a speaking subject with agency who traveled the itinerant preacher’s circuit across the Northern United States. Once, in 1851 in Akron, Ohio, questioned by a man on her right to speak, she declared that Jesus was born of God and a woman, and that a man had nothing to do with it (Ruth 490). In the silence that stopped the heckling, she continued to speak with a fierce love of God against the inequities of racism and sexism that she saw and experienced.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton participated in writing the Declaration of Sentiments for the first Woman’s Rights Convention held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Among the eighteen grievances listed were the following two,

He [man] allows her in Church, as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the church

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God (Cady Stanton vi).

In the nineteenth and twentieth century women were active in the Abolition, Suffrage, and Civil Rights movements which created calls for the critical re-thinking of accepted ideas in society and church based on biblical interpretation. Women argued and ‘fought’ for the freeing of slaves, for the right and responsibility to vote in political elections, and for the equality of all peoples with the explicit purpose of attaining full citizenship and full social and spiritual adulthood. But, Ogden Bellis writes, “Opponents of women’s suffrage used the Bible as ammunition” (Meyers 24). As we saw with Sojourner Truth, women “were criticized for stepping outside of their proper place by speaking in public, especially to mixed groups (groups composed of both women and men)” (Meyers 24). Here we have a reference to a woman’s ‘proper place’ that was designed and governed by men, and how the Bible was used as ammunition to keep women in this perceived ‘proper’ place.

Then some women joined together and a ‘movement’ was activated which called for the same ‘critical re-thinking of accepted ideas in society and church based on biblical interpretation’ but this time specifically regarding the identity and subjectivity of women. However, although perhaps active in other movements, many women did not join this movement and rejected the term ‘feminism’ by declaring explicitly and/or implicitly their fear of going against the teachings of the church that did not allow a woman to step outside of her ‘proper’ place as understood by the leadership of the church. Interior colonization had been framed in male language and biblical teaching, and who dared go against God and his created order as women had been taught? To question the views of respected biblical scholars and commentators is disconcerting, for how does one disagree with the experts? This fear shows the scripting on a

woman's mind and soul, the internalization of external teachings. This is one of the reasons why we so carefully examined the story of Bathsheba and the women in her trajectory in the narrative of David, why the way we understand the actions and the consequences in this narrative remain so crucial for the present. This is why we were so critical of the commentators who insinuated complicity and implicit guilt where the biblical story gave none. Biblical interpreters "have profoundly affected women's self-understanding and men's perception of women" (Ogden Bellis 3). We hear, we listen, and we internalize what we are taught from the stories and how they are told by whom. Once we have internalized the explicit and implicit interpretations of the narratives it takes concentrated effort to eradicate the false and unjust teachings from our minds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton led the efforts of many women to "interpret the Bible in a way that affirmed women's full humanity and thus to combat the interpretations used by men to hold women back" (Meyers 24).

In a previous chapter we discussed how Kristeva writes about the war between the sexes, using examples from biblical stories. We mentioned above how Ogden Bellis wrote that, "Opponents of women's suffrage used the Bible as ammunition" (Meyers 24) to keep women in their supposed 'proper' place. Mieke Bal notes that "Texts trigger readings; that is what they are: the occasion of a reaction. The feeling that there is a text in support of one's view makes texts such efficient ideological weapons" (Bal 132). Thus we note that metaphors of 'war', 'weapons' and 'ammunition' are used to describe the struggle for women's identity and subjectivity. Lakhoff and Johnson explain that, "Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language" (Lakhoff 3). However, rather than being extraordinary, Lakhoff and Johnson "have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in

thought and action” (Lakhoff 3). The sad thing is that these metaphors, this lexicon of ‘combat, weapons and ammunition’ describe biblical interpretation as a battle in a war zone with the implicit notion of winners and losers. The ‘winners’ then often present a prescriptive rather than a descriptive reading of a text, continuing in argumentative combat, and using their interpretations as ammunition for weapons of control and to establish and sustain power. But this paradigm of power is a win-lose pattern. Notions of power-over implicitly convey that there is a lack of power for some and those who have power want to hang onto their bit of it. How then do we change paradigms of power? Power-for or power-to, as well as power-with expand with their use and we then realize that there is ‘enough’ power for everyone. Is that the sacredness of power? A sacred power for good, a sacred power to do well, a sacred power for being ‘with’ each other rather than the power-over of domination?

Struggles for Subjects-In-Process/On-Trial

But even now not all scholars respect the identity and subjectivity of women. Therefore it is important to consider “The historical continuity of women’s various identities without lapsing into essentialism” (Huntington xiii). This ‘lapsing into essentialism’ in trying to understand ‘woman’ has been prominent in many scholars. Without being anachronistic because the history of their thinking is still influential, Aristotle considered the female as a misbegotten male and Thomas Aquinas argued that women were not misbegotten but were made for the work of regeneration (Young 68, 69). Although they used the term ‘regeneration’ a more contemporary term is ‘reproduction’. Lest we think this way of thinking about women is ancient history, in 1965, the same year that Kristeva arrived in Paris to further her study in philosophy, Jean Guitton, from *l’Académie Française* in Paris at that time, and a well-known author, wrote a

small book with the title *Feminine Fulfillment*. In the introduction Bishop Fulton J. Sheen describes him as “the greatest lay theologian” in the Roman Catholic Church today (Guitton viii). In this book Guitton posits that,

women are somewhat *amphibious* creatures who find themselves with two natures and living in two worlds - the most humble material world and the most exalted spiritual world. The woman is naturally made for two things: household and domestic tasks and the exercise of pure love and devotion (Guitton 4 *original emphasis*).

Instead of seeing women as men are seen, that is as persons, as efficient, productive, speaking subjects, mutually interdependent with each other, Guitton’s analysis of women shows his views are based on presumed differences of the essence of women and of men. This view is in opposition to research and study that is based on the presumed sameness of women and men. However, a presumed sameness is also problematic because, as Olthuis explains, “Minimizing key differences so that sameness may abound not only suppresses what deserves moral attention, but it obscures the reality that the so-called neutral policies are in fact the policies of the dominant cultural group, bear the distinctive marks of this group, and discriminate against those who differ from it” (TEC 5).

The problem of an emphasis on presumed differences of the essence of women and of men is clearly shown when Guitton argues that, “Man *has* a sentiment, a sensation. Woman *is* sentiment, sensation, suffering, love” (Guitton 6 *original emphasis*). This means that for man ‘a sentiment, a sensation’ is constituent of his attributes, but for woman ‘sentiment, sensation, suffering, love’ are constituents of her essence. Sheen emphasizes that for Guitton, “Beginning with the difference of love in a man and in a woman, he writes: ‘man gives; woman is a gift’” (Guitton viii). But Kristeva notes that a ‘gift’ is a “sign of the giver - presence of the giver” (MS 133). For Guitton it is man who is the active agent as giver, on the contrary to be a gift is passive

with no agency over when and how and to whom one is given. It does not allow for her own subjectivity and intellect, but then, Guitton elucidates that women's "intellect does not function like a man's", however, "woman certainly has the ability to mime; and since our civilization is an entirely masculine one, the woman mimes man's ways of doing things with ease" (Guitton 3). Suffice it to say that Guitton's view that 'our civilization is an entirely masculine one' confirms the notion that, according to him and to those who support him, women, even those who mime well, are gifts to man and make no contributions of their own to this civilization in which we live.

Having ascertained woman's cognitive powers as 'mimes', Guitton goes on to explain that "a woman is intuitive and she understands through the heart", with the resultant conclusion that "[p]roof holds little interest for her and it is very difficult to prove to her that she is wrong" and "arguments contrary to her point of view do not embarrass her" (Guitton 3). Guitton may be right in this because my argument contrary to his point of view does not embarrass me, and he would have a difficult time proving that I am wrong. As much as I would like to think that the opinions of Guitton show him to be an anomaly, the publication of his thoughts on women and the subsequent translation of his book into English, plus his endorsement by Bishop Sheen point to the fact that this understanding of women continues to be even more prevalent and far-reaching than I fear.

Mary T. Malone wrote in the year 2000 that "When Freud said 'women are the enemies of civilization, he was simply voicing the wisdom of the ages" (Malone 13). It was "to give the lie to the Freudian version of human life" that she decided to write her book *Women and Christianity* (Malone 13). In it she reflects, "I am reminded of my early teaching days, when seminarians pointedly laid down their pens whenever I included women in the history of

Christianity, and just as pointedly resumed their note-taking when I returned to the real history of men's doings" (Malone 247). This experience relates to Serene Jones' comment that "part of women's oppression has been a denial of women's role as leading actors on the stage of history" (Jones 123). Did the seminarians not know that they were contributing to the oppression of women by their passive aggressive attitude and actions in denying women's agency in history? Jones, also in the year 2000, asserts that she brings "feminist theory directly into contact with some of the Reformation traditions' most treasured themes and thinkers. As such, this process of remapping is fraught with tension, because these themes and thinkers are incontestably oppressive in their views of women and yet they tell a Christian story filled with emancipatory possibilities" (Jones 20). Jones explains that the "Protestant tradition therefore describes the church as *ekklesia reformata semper reformanda* ("the church reformed, always in need of being reformed")" (Jones 159). However, sometimes the actual practice of 'reforming' is brimming with tension. Jones recalls how she "recently served on a ministerial search committee that was debating whether a woman should be hired as the next pastor" (Jones 22). The congregation had never had a woman pastor before and they did not have a specific candidate in mind but wanted to discuss the option "in principle" (Jones 22). Jones notes that "revealing comments were made about what a woman minister is and is not" (Jones 22). She reports that "In support of hiring a woman, some members suggested that women ministers are more nurturing and pastoral than men; that women are good listeners and excellent teachers of children; and that a woman's more intuitive spirituality would bring a sense of God's 'feminine side' to our worship" (Jones 22). However, "On the other side, several members asserted that women have soft, high voices, which people in the back pews cannot hear; that they usually do not have enough experience to be senior pastors; and that the congregation was simply not ready for such a radical change"

(Jones 22), because having a woman minister is “just not the same” (Jones 23). Instead of a discussion based on theological understandings or on church practices founded on biblical interpretation, Jones notes that even today this “church conversation reflects just one of the many ways debates over ‘women’s nature’ have taken shape in Western Christianity over the centuries” (Jones 23). But Jones notes that not only in church meetings, “it also sits at the centre of the many conversations about sexual difference taking place in workplace meetings, in public-policy discussions, and perhaps most important, in daily conversations between family, friends, and neighbors” (Jones 23). As shown in Jones’ experience, this focus on woman’s perceived ‘nature’ inevitably includes a comparison to man’s ‘nature’ instead of a focus on the person, whether male or female, and their talents, abilities, and suitability for the work to be done.

But with this depiction of ‘woman’ how can one apply the second of the two great commandments of the Bible as we discussed with Kristeva? Is it possible for a man who so thinks of a woman, to love her as he loves himself, to recognize in her the same value and worth as a person, as a self, as in himself? Could a woman accept this judicious view of her as a person and love her self as a ‘somewhat *amphibious* creature’ even with the ability to ‘mime’? Or could we agree that Guitton and Bishop Sheen, and also the seminarians and members of the selection committee, show no respect for women as persons, do not honor her as a self with subjectivity, neither do they indicate a genuine understanding of who or what a woman is.

But one could ask, does loving your neighbor as your self then mean that there is no hierarchy and no difference between people? One could argue that the early Christians, in having all things in common, thought that, but many interpretations of this command see it as compatible with differences, for example in social status, housing or income. But this social or economic hierarchy is a different issue than our discussion here on the perception of a person

with sovereign subjectivity. To live in poverty, for instance, need not take away from a person's intrinsic value or worth as a subject, as a self, and our concern here is what it means to be valued as a person, to have an identity with a proper place in mutual respect for each other, each as a self, each with a sovereign subjectivity. Our concern is the devaluing of a person and the disrespect that occurs through mental, psychological, and physical abuses and their consequences and through sexual abuse when a woman is treated as a sexualized female body. Our concern includes that women were called 'amphibious creatures' by a lay theologian and that his view was supported by a Bishop of the church or that women were considered suitable only for so-called '*kinder, küche and kirche*' rather than respected as a person with a sovereign subjectivity. Our concern is that many women continue to be denied participation in scholarly discourses and as full participants in religious, social and economic realms, not because of ability but because of gender. We reject different spheres for women and for men and we affirm one world in which women and men are honored and respected each for our own identity, each with our own proper place in which to flourish, to experience *eudaimonia*. Here is no theology of ownership, but a theology of mutuality built on a precept of love, a law of love, in an equality that is understood as a mutuality in that we all are subjects-in-process/on-trial, in that we all have human dignity and worth as a self, as a person, which creates the possibility of mutual ethical relations between persons, regardless of social and economic status.

This understanding of the mutual equality of our identity as persons with human dignity and worth has been fraught with difficulties. The theological and philosophical discussions on the identity of women implicitly and explicitly include the question of whether women and men are considered to be equal in human dignity and worth. Daphne Hampson asserts that for a woman to be forced to argue that she is a full human being of equal dignity is quite

extraordinarily undermining (Hampson 31). This observation is reminiscent of the discussion of whether woman had a soul, a discussion in which also Thomas Aquinas, who wrote so eloquently about the law of love for our self as for our neighbor, took part. The learned philosophers and theologians at that time decided that yes, woman does have a soul, but some still questioned her equality in human dignity and worth. The problem is not so much with the answers, but with the fact that these questions were thought and articulated, the fact that they were actually asked, written about, debated and discussed as part of philosophical and theological discourses. The problem is in the fact that these discourses influenced and continue to influence our lived reality today. The problem is in the fact that philosophical and theological discourses do not remain abstract academic discussions, but affect a woman's reality, her life experiences, in the spoken and unspoken codes of her social, political and religious environment.

On her reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, Kristeva writes, "The universalism of the prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, asserts even more strongly the idea that all mankind is respectable in its intrinsic dignity - and this even before Greek philosophy and Stoic cosmopolitanism" (SO 68). We appreciate Kristeva's insight of the message of the prophets and what this universalism may mean for women, as part of 'all mankind', for the intrinsic dignity of her identity and subjectivity. Yet, we are aware of the difficulties a woman may face as she negotiates a masculine discourse in a patriarchal worldview. In Canada, along with the suffrage movement of the twentieth century, women had the additional long and arduous legal struggle to be declared persons under the law. To challenge the *British North American Act* of 1867 that excluded women, five women, Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Mary Irene Parlby, Henrietta Muir Edwards, and Louise McKinney, went through several trials at the various levels of the legal system, were repeatedly denied, and appealed right up to Canada's Supreme Court. Here it

was again decided that women were not persons under the law. Stunned but not defeated they appealed to the Privy Council in London, England, the highest court for Canada, where it was decided on October 18, 1929, that indeed women are persons under the law. Ironically, as a celebration of the 75th anniversary of that court decision Canada printed a commemorative picture of the five women on our fifty dollar bill and the Famous Five as they are known are represented in a larger-than-life sculpture on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Now women are Senators and Provincial Premiers in Canada, and we briefly had a woman, Kim Campbell, as our Prime Minister.

We have seen how Kristeva appreciates Deborah who, in the time of the Judges, led Israel in battle and in peacetime (NIV *Judges* 4). Yet, just being a woman in leadership does not necessarily mean positive change for women. Kristeva evaluates some changes when she writes to Clément, “The English get on my nerves a little with their obsolete formality, but they intrigue me” (FS 42). She explains, “I like the academic rituals of the English, I like them very much now, though a few years ago they seemed to me ridiculous in a sinister way” (FS 42). Among the beauty of the academic gowns, the ceremonies and the rituals there lurks what may have been the ‘sinister’ for Kristeva, for she notes, “Granted, they’re in no rush to have women move into the university, and many of my English friends are champing at the bit in inferior positions” (FS 43). Kristeva is fully aware of the consequences for women of hierarchal structures in patriarchal institutions and what is called the ‘glass ceiling’, and I wonder how many of her friends who are ‘champing at the bit in inferior positions’ are confused by her ambivalence with a feminism that would seek a transformation in the system as one of her revolutions? Kristeva explains her thinking of the English further,

True, the realm has a queen at its head, but her graceful crowned head cannot hide the misogynous forest any better than Mrs. Thatcher’s iron grip could: the Anglicans

and the Protestants allow their ministers to marry, they even have women deacons and priests, but they continue to eject women from the realm of the spirit, and nothing prevents women from being excluded from the highest positions (FS 43).

So, what are we to do with this ‘misogynous forest’? For many women the ongoing discussion about what a woman may or may not do through persuasive rhetoric and eristic arguments is a catalyst for analyzing different perspectives of biblical interpretation. We must articulate the questions and discover the whence and wherefores of our different interpretations as we search for our identity as subjects who are always in-process with a proper place that is also always in-process, for love and the sacred, for justice and for grace, thereby not necessarily easing our troubled minds but increasing our understanding. Elaine Storkey reminds us that in this search, “We do not have to stay defeated with the past, but are called to build one another up, to honour one another, to share the love of God together. And this too must be part of women’s stories” (Storkey 1995, 84).

It is in the context of our established discourses that Kristeva writes about women’s identity and subjectivity and calls for a revolution that will retrieve and restore the personhood of women, without diminishing the personhood of men, in order to celebrate the subject predicate of each, in the recognition that we are not stable/fixed subjects, and we do not have an identity or a proper place predetermined by others based on prejudicial notions, but that both women and men are sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial.

Herethics for Sovereign Subjects-In Process/On-Trial

In embracing the revolution of an alternative vision for humanity and for our world, many women and men are working for systemic change. Although Kristeva calls for systemic change through revolution, we have seen that she is ambivalent about the work of feminism, but,

as we noted, there are many types and theories of feminisms. Feminism, as a general rule, critiques patriarchal systems and addresses systemic inequities and injustices. Denise Lardner Carmody connects the logic of the law of love and the law of feminism when she explains that, “Christian faith imposes the obligation to love one’s neighbor as oneself Feminism imposes the further obligation to honour women as the full equals of men in the possession of human dignity” (Lardner Carmody 226). Here we see a correlation between Christian love and feminism. For does loving one’s neighbor as oneself not include honoring that neighbor, that other whether male or female, as oneself in recognition of our common good as Thomas Aquinas claimed, but also of our common and equal human dignity and personhood? In this love there is a mutuality with no domination, subordination, or negation. The other needs to be recognized, not as the same, but as other and our ethics needs to acknowledge the non-oppositional difference of male and female. Here is no power-over, or power-under but a power-with that is deeply ethical. With this ethics we are all part of our celebrated heterogeneity as subjects-in-process/on-trial. Many women are learning a healthy self-love and claiming the symbolic system as their own, with an acceptance of the love and the tears and the laughter of the semiotic code.

With her call for revolution, for a transformation of our traditional world, Kristeva advocates for a new ethics, an ethics of love, an ethics that includes ‘her’, a herethics. As we noted before, herethics describes the participation of women in ‘her-ethics’ but also the heretical nature of this ‘heret-hics’. For Kristeva,

if a contemporary ethics is no longer seen as being the same as morality; if ethics amounts to not avoiding the embarrassing and inevitable problematic of the law but giving it flesh, language, and jouissance – in that case its reformulation demands the contribution of women (McAfee 85).

Kristeva here posits an if - then argument: if morality as the rules of conduct is different from ethics as the theoretical study of those rules, if ethics means facing the difficulties of

those rules and living them in our being, in our embodiment, our speech and in the joy of all aspects of our life, if it is to give *eudaimonia*, that is, happiness and flourishing, then we need a new ethics, an ethics that needs the participation of both women and men for a herethics. This herethics is what unites and bonds us, brings and keeps us together in word and deed because herethics is based on the logic and law of love. Kristeva argues that not the imposed rules and prescriptions of morality are the basis of ethics, but herethics has its basis in love, which is the other logic in us, and this love is wild, beyond the grasp of the symbolic law. We have seen in our discussion on love that this logic in us creates a healthy self-love that will bring us to love of the other as ourselves. That this revolution of the logic of a transforming love in our ethics will create an herethics that Oliver calls an ‘outlaw ethics’ because it “binds the subject to the other through love and not Law” (EPD 5). Not because herethics is outside the law in a negative way, but because herethics goes to a way of love beyond the ‘oughts and oughn’ts’, the ‘should and shouldn’ts’ of the letter of the law, even though the intent, the spirit of these laws was to make it possible for us to live peacefully together in community.

Kristeva asks, “is not the ethics of love always a ‘herethics’?” (FS 57). Herethics does not separate love and law in a preferential mode, rather it shows that herethics is not legalistic, it is not mandated, but herethics is an ethics that is practiced in and out of love. Kristeva reflects that, “This is perhaps what Christianity celebrates in divine love. God was the first to love you, God is love: These apothegms reassure the believer of God’s permanent generosity and grace” (ITB 25). Apothegms are terse and pointed sayings that speak out plainly or cry out with short reminders and instructions. Therefore, we are called to celebrate that God is love and that God loves us with a permanent generosity and grace. Grace is something unexpected that is positive

in our life, often considered a loving gift from God. Kristeva elucidates that, “This fusion with God, which is more semiotic than symbolic, repairs the wounds of Narcissus” (ITB 25). It is with the knowledge and experience of God’s permanent love, generosity and grace that we can participate in the process of the study of our identity as sovereign subjects-in-process/on-trial who are called to love themselves as their neighbor in an unfolding path of discovery and meaning. This process is a cessation of trying to control our discourses, to discontinue the claim of mastery as ownership in our scholarship that implies the possession of ‘the’ answer, in the awareness of a polyvalence of meaning and purpose. This is not a matter of ‘everything is relative’ as the texts are our guides and our guardrails, but it is an opening, a broadening of our horizons. For when women are respected and accepted as speaking and loving subjects, as subjects-in-process/on-trial, as subjects who voice a language that speaks of love, then the semiotic order joins with the symbolic system in a language of *signifiante* and celebration. When women are not defined by others, either as glorified servants or as saints, either as strictly biologically determined females for reproduction or as complementarities to augment the male norm, then we are all subjects and our speaking and our loving will define us, as subjects-in-process/on-trial, as lover and beloved. For then we all will have a sovereign subjectivity through the love and the discourse that causes it to be.

Kristeva’s Revolution as Sacred Transformation

Kristeva argues that we must have a revolution in order to have a herethics. She sees the need for revolution not as an abstract ideal, but as a practical experience of transformation. What is needed is a shift in worldview, a disrupting and overthrowing of our patriarchal tradition, a revolution that is a sacred transformation process with power for positive change. Kristeva’s revolution calls for courage in finding the way of love in a continually oscillating

process between semiotic complexity and symbolic distinctness. This process is a spiritual exercise seeking loving passage between the delirium of only the semiotic and the tyranny of only the law of the symbolic. Coping with the surge of semiotic sensation through continual symbolic tweaking and adjustment we come to voice as speaking subjects on a sacred journey. Life itself then becomes sacred, as Kristeva concludes when she writes to Clément that, “I will cling to life as the ultimate visage of the sacred” (FS 12). She claims, “that what comes back to us as ‘sacred’ in the experience of a woman is the impossible and nevertheless sustained connection between life and meaning” (FS 14). Kristeva thinks that the sacred is a private encounter that gives meaning to us. But that encounter, although private, is not something secretive or solitary, for “it is in the sharing of it that the sacred unveils its risks as much as its vitality” (FS 178).

As we looked for encounters with the sacred in the women’s trajectory of our biblical narrative, we learned about experiences that were sacrilegious. We saw what happened when women were not respected nor treated as subjects. We saw the loss of the sacred when David forgot about love and broke the laws he was called to uphold. We witnessed the devastation brought about by the malevolent actions of rape by Amnon and Absalom. We saw how Adonijah plotted and schemed to have the virgin Abishag, not for who she was but for what she represented in his attempt to gain the Davidic throne. I tried to imagine what I would have thought, how I would have felt, what I might have seen or heard, or said and done in the stories. As a foster parent of teenaged girls I learned the anguish of their feelings of “lacks of love” (TL 7) and of betrayal, of their loss of identity and their proper place. Trying to read the biblical trajectory of women from *their* perspective, how would *they* read the narrative of David and his sons? Would they identify with the women in the story? I worked with girls and women who

had been abused, often by the very men who, according to the ideal of the family and the church, were supposed to protect them, and I understood how and why they were “sorely in need of love” (TL vii). I thought of Tamar who did not experience her father’s protection, who was silenced, whose subjectivity was shattered and who lost her proper place where she could flourish. The rape of Tamar is ancient history and current reality. I well remember the story of a pastor who announced from the pulpit that Tamar was in church last week. A hush fell over the congregation as it segued into a reality check of sexual abuse and on connecting the biblical story with women’s stories today. We are made aware that individual stories often reveal larger truths.

We remember how David had objectified Bathsheba and the appalling consequences of that and how the narrator explicitly reports, “But the thing David had done displeased the Lord” (NIV 2 *Samuel* 11:27). We think how God gave specific laws for the boundaries of sexual relations, for what and who would be considered defiled. Yet, how this became twisted as the victims rather than the perpetrators of the crime of rape were shamed and considered defiled. And I wonder, would this not displease the Lord? Would God not be displeased with the lack of respect, the lack of an ethical hearing, the lack of justice, the lacks of love and the sacred conveyed in the silences of cautiously and tentatively told stories of physical and psychological abuses, and of sexual objectification of women through the ages? From the perspective of ethical witness and of herethics, what do we see and hear and what do we do?

I thought of Absalom and the ten unnamed concubines whom he raped in his quest for his father David’s throne, and their consequent rejection and house arrest. And I thought of the women of the former Yugoslavia in the film of the National Filmboard of Canada, *Rape, A Crime of War* and how some of them experienced rejection by family members and friends. We note that it was not until the Nüremberg trials after World War II that the systematized rape of

women was officially acknowledged as a crime of war, but no one was charged at that time for fear that no conviction would be possible. But in the year 2000 at the tribunal in The Hague, The Netherlands, the first man was convicted of sanctioning and even commanding the systemic rape of women as a crime of war. In many countries there are laws against rape in place to give a hearing and justice for the women who have been violated. Still, for many and complex reasons, including the notion of having been shamed, it remains difficult to talk about the trauma in a public setting. Also the method of questioning a victim of rape that implicitly and explicitly examines the possibility of the woman's complicity or even consent in her rape is a daunting reality. Then, because of the fact that the offender may have been a 'friend' or a family member, and the victim has been urged to be silent, many rapes still go unreported. In other countries women are still shunned and even imprisoned for being the victims of rape. This leads us to question how far we have come in over 2500 years in dealing with the crime of rape and the victims of the crime, and with the notions of 'shame' and 'honor' for the men who rape, for the women who have been raped, and for their families. Sadly I think of the words of the Teacher, who laments that "there is nothing new under the sun" (NIV *Ecclesiastes* 1: 9). Tearfully I want to cry out with the folksong, 'When will we ever learn'?

It is also for this reason, for the notion that 'the more things change the more they stay the same', that Kristeva calls for revolution and seeks a sacred transformation of the perceptions we have of our self and of each other to an awakening that we are all subjects-in-process/on-trial. We need a revolution of language with an awareness of the semiotic and the symbolic elements as we become more conscious of our lexicon and the implications of how we use language and the power of insinuation and guilt by association. We need a revolution in ethics to a herethics, including a revolution of examining and understanding our own perspectives as we ethically re-

read and listen to familiar and new stories, to know what it is that we question and what it is that we support and what that means. For subjects-in-process/on-trial this revolution is a move from power-over and power-under to a celebrated reality of power-with, being with each other in authentic presence as a spiritual exercise with women and men in mutual partnership. Some theorists have argued that there is no further need for feminism, that all inequities of the various 'isms' have been dealt with and that it is now up to the individual woman to take her place wherever that may be. They have argued that we therefore no longer need a discourse on subjectivity. But with Kristeva we learn that revolution is an ongoing process, that we are not called to 'do' revolutions but we are called to be revolutionary, just like we are not called to 'do' philosophy, but to live a philosophical life. To understand philosophy as a way of life, as a spiritual exercise, is revolutionary. Kristeva's philosophy helps us to question and to learn and to put our knowledge in the service of a revolutionary, transformative life. Revolution as transformation is then part of our herethics that takes us from passively watching, enduring, and accepting injustices to a refusal to assist victims of injustices to endure their suffering, that is to remain victims. Instead, our herethics brings us to action, to 'be with' them in the struggle and trial of harnessing the power of healing as they move from victim to survivor to having an identity as a sovereign subject-in-process with a proper place. To clarify this practice of 'being with', Olthuis coined the phrase "withing", which "is a synonym for loving and caring" (BR 48). He explains that, "The sharing of love – hearing and being heard, seeing and being seen, touching and being touched, giving and receiving, blessing and being blessed – is at the heart of the human journey" (BR 49). Olthuis further states that "Our stories of identity are essentially faith stories. Each of us answers the question of identity beyond literal explanation or palpable demonstration" (BR 73). Our faith stories call us to be authentically present, and for that we

need to be articulated as a self, to be able to self-articulate. But to be objectified as generic ‘woman’, to be silenced in our own story, to be talked about but not with, to be denied articulation in the symbolic system of our language is to be made invisible, to be not-present, to be no-self, hence to have no subjectivity and to have no proper place in which to flourish. And we remember how the women in the narrative of David and his sons had no voice in their own stories.

Living with our bodily semiotic profusion in a shared symbolic identity without drowning in the swirl of sensation or losing oneself in a symbolic system can take us into a realm far beyond our comfort zones, beyond mere opinions and familiar prejudices (BR 13), where there are no preset limits or boundaries as we seek our identity and our proper place from which we act in and out of love. Love leads the way to meaning, and we have seen that the effect of love is one of renewal (TL 15). In this sharing at the heart of our human journey, in traversing our spiritual and faith journey together there is no separate sphere for women and men, and in love there are no hierarchies of power-over, in love there is no objectification and subjugation. With Kristeva we lament that there remain ‘lacks of love’ and that we remain ‘sorely in need of love’ as we seek the transformation and renewal of her revolution.

Olthuis reminds me of Søren Kierkegaard when he writes of love as a leap of faith. His philosophy, like Kristeva’s, is influenced by psychoanalysis and his sensitivity as a psychoanalyst motivates him to name the risk of love and to name this risk beautiful as he explains that this “beautiful risk is a leap into the wild spaces of love, a dance of faith in prayer” (BR 237). Olthuis explains that these spaces of love are “‘wild’ because they are uncharted, and therefore venturing into them is to take a beautiful risk” (BR 48, 49). For Kristeva love is ‘wild’ as, in giving voice to the semiotic flux, it is an excess beyond the capture and legislation of any

law. It is a beautiful risk to participate in a revolution of love and ethics, “to ‘know *other*-wise’: to be ethically wise with respect to the other” (KO 9) in a process of transformation that eliminates the injustices of sexism, racism and any other ‘ism’.

Kristeva makes an implicit reference to Martin Buber when she writes of the importance “of what is really at stake *between*” (TL 5 *original emphasis*), what is happening *between* persons as subjects, for it is in the between that sacred love is found. It is in the between of our relationships, in the transformation of our interactions with each other that we discover love as healing the traces of our inscription and the experiences which mark us. Although at times filled with “fear of crossing and desire to cross the boundaries of the self The meeting, then, mixing pleasure and promise or hopes, remains in a sort of future perfect” (TL 6). Then our thinking and our tradition will undergo a revolution, and we will see things in a new light based on an ancient biblical commandment of love. Even though framed by Kristeva as ‘future perfect’, we can already participate in this vision of the beautiful risk of the interactions between people who each are honored and respected for their own identity as sovereign speaking and loving subjects-in-process/on-trial with an in-process- proper place from which to flourish as we stand straight and experience *eudaimonia*.

Do we dare take this risk, however beautiful? Olthuis assures us that this risk is a process of ‘withing’, of being-with others who are also in-process, and who are willing to take the risk with-us in a sacred dance of love that is danced in faith and in prayer. As Kristeva “will cling to life as the ultimate visage of the sacred” (FS 12), I embrace all of life, living it in love as the ultimate encounter with the sacred - at the crossroads between delirium and tyranny.

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