

DAUGHTERS OF ABRAHAM: FEMINIST THOUGHT IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, Eds.
Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001.

BY JOHANNA H. STUCKEY

Originally presented as conference papers at the Center for Muslim-Christian Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., the six chapters of *Daughters of Abraham*, along with the introduction, provide an informative and scholarly overview of the activities of feminists inside Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As Karen Armstrong says in the Foreword, the collection “shows Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women cooperating together to correct the abuses of the past”. An introductory chapter by John Esposito discusses the commonalities of the “three great Abrahamic traditions,” particularly their sexism. Esposito surveys feminist pressures on them and concludes that women are beginning to take “their rightful place as equal partners in determining the future ...” of these religions.

In the first chapter “Settling at Beer-lahai-roi,” Amy-Jill Levine focuses on interpretations of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16,21). She shows how “empathetic feminist reconsiderations” (17) are an improvement over traditional understandings, but points to “new problems” resulting from such reconsiderations: for example, guilt, blame, and even celebration of victimization. Then, through a detailed, critical examination of text, she demonstrates the parallels between the situations of the two women and

how their descendants try to resolve difficulties between communities. Levine concludes that “exploitation is not inevitable, that cycles of oppression can be broken ...”

The second chapter “Hearing Hannah’s Voice: The Jewish Feminist Challenge and Ritual Innovation” concentrates on how a number of contemporary Jewish women are attempting to enrich Jewish ritual with “feminist content and values.” Hannah was the first biblical woman to speak directly to God (I Samuel 1:9-16), though the priest Eli admonished her for doing so. Noting that women communicate with “the Divine” in “very different ways” from men, Rabbi Leila Gal Berner argues that tradition must take into account women’s spiritual experiences. She then asks: “So, how *do* Jewish feminists ‘bake a new pie?’” Her answer is threefold: through doing historical research to recover women’s lost voices, undertaking new interpretation of texts, and changing Jewish ritual “to incorporate and honor Jewish women’s lives.” She then discusses a ritual for survivors of sexual abuse.

Chapters on feminism and Christianity follow. Alice Laffey’s “The Influence of Feminism on Christianity” gives two examples of feminist interpretation of biblical texts, one centring on Vashti of the Book of Esther and the other on the story of Balaam and his ass (Numbers 22). In “Christian Feminist Theology: History and Future,” Rosemary Radford Reuther presents a sweeping overview of global manifestations of feminist theology and concludes that the struggle to incorporate the insights of feminist theology into Christianity has only just begun.

In her excellent article, Hibba Abugideiri demonstrates that, for Islam, Hagar is “an exemplary and powerful figure,” an “agent of God.” Thus she can serve as a “gender-jihad” role model for modern Muslim feminists engaged in the fight for gender equality. As examples of Islamic leadership, Abugideiri discusses

three modern American Hagars, all of whom appeal to “the authority of Islamic sacred scripture.” Thus, while they try to stay within the traditions of their Muslim inheritance, they struggle to reach beyond it “to meet the modern challenges to Islam.”

In the last chapter “Rethinking Women and Islam,” Amira Sonbol surveys the history of women in the Ottoman and modern periods, does a general examination of gender in the Qur’an, and then focuses on a discussion of polygamy. Noting that “patriarchal tightening” in male/female relations, “exists and continues,” she advocates comparison of “the implementation of laws before and after” the establishment of nation-states. Only then will it be possible to eliminate what those states have contributed to gender inequity.

Though a valuable addition to the scholarly literature on women in the three western monotheistic traditions, this book was not written for the general reader. Nevertheless it stands as an important record of a rare occurrence: a meeting of “daughters of Abraham” to observe their commonalities, negotiate their differences, and re-commit themselves to “gender jihad.”

DOUBLE JEOPARDY: MOTHERWORK AND THE LAW

Lorna A. Turnbull
Toronto: Sumach Press, 2001.

BY DORINDA M. STAHL

In *Double Jeopardy: Motherwork and the Law*, Lorna Turnbull articulates the current state of the law in Canada with respect to women’s choices in mothering and suggests that these choices “are more limited than

contemporary rhetoric would lead us to believe." She maintains that while women and their experiences as mothers are indeed diverse, the commonality of these very real experiences are often devalued and, hence, overlooked in the Canadian legal system. Turnbull contends that the court's tendency to ignore the realities of women and their unique stories as mothers (which she describes using the term "motherwork") contributes to the low socioeconomic status of "differently situated mothers." She states quite clearly that the law in Canada does not support mothers and that because of this, "mothers pay twice for the children they have chosen to mother. This is double jeopardy."

Before Turnbull begins her critique of the relevant case law at hand, she provides the reader with an overview of basic Canadian legal concepts (such as *stare decisis*) as well as prominent feminist theories including liberal feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, and postmodernism in her first chapter entitled "Regulating Mothers." *Double Jeopardy* then goes on to discuss four separate, yet interrelated, areas of law and how these areas of law affect motherwork. For example, one of Turnbull's chapters, "Seeing Mothers: Invisibility and Poverty," discusses the social and economic conditions in which mothers in Canada live. Her next chapters, "Becoming Mothers: Pregnancy and the Law," "Being Mothers: The Legal Characterization of Motherwork," and "Taxing Mothers: Income-Tax Rules and Motherwork," provide much deeper legal critiques of the common law. Turnbull presents the most recent and relevant law in these respective areas and critically analyzes paramount cases—such as *Dobson v. Dobson*, *Winnipeg Child and Family Services (Northwest Area) v. G. (D.F.)*, *Tremblay v. Daigle*, *Brockie v. Brockie*, *Willick v. Willick* and *Miglin v. Miglin*—in a way that is both relevant and enlightening. As well, Turnbull deconstructs various statu-

tory and legislative schemes such as the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Criminal Code*, and the *Income Tax Act*, and discusses how these acts have had, and will continue to have, profound effects on mothers. The last two chapters of the work, "Supporting Mothers: Strategies for Change" and "Justice for Mothers: Reforming Law," focus on the difficulties and challenges associated with seeking transformation (rather, she notes, than 'reformation') in the Canadian legal system.

Many things work well in *Double Jeopardy*. Of particular interest is the way in which Turnbull combines comments and criticisms of case law with feminist theory. Her ideas are cutting-edge and should easily engage both legal and theoretical minds. Undoubtedly, it is a work to be celebrated. However, Turnbull misses a golden opportunity to critique the effects of alternative dispute resolution systems, such as mediation and collaborative law, which are seeing a continuing increase in popularity. It would seem that a scholar of Turnbull's esteem should note the impact of such resolution systems and their influence on the quantity and quality of case law (and for that matter, statutory reform). While these mechanisms are welcomed in so far as they may be more accommodating for women—in that alternative dispute systems are more accessible and timely, less costly and far less intrusive into women's lives—the fact remains that these schemes do nothing to transform, let alone reform, the case law. Further, as more alternative dispute resolution systems are preferred, this places a much higher responsibility on the few cases that are litigated in our courts with respect to motherwork. Given Turnbull's acute awareness and clear insight into the topic at hand, it would have been instructive for her to have commented on and explored this pressing issue.

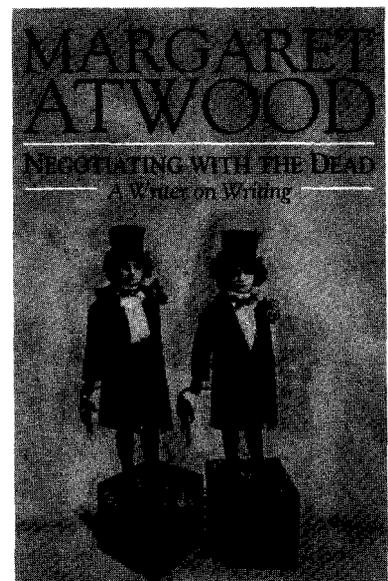
Nevertheless, *Double Jeopardy* is a work which should be found on every bookshelf. For the feminist legal

scholar, the monograph provides a very good analysis of the historical developments of the current case law in Canada and provides a clever and well-articulated synopsis of the intersection between feminist and legal theory. For the demographic that is ignorant of the realities of motherwork and the law, Turnbull's work will be sure to enlighten and rescue them from their ignorance.

NEGOTIATING WITH THE DEAD: A WRITER ON WRITING

Margaret Atwood.
Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2002.

BY SHERRILL CHEDA



Once upon a time, like the Brontë siblings, Margaret Atwood and her brother made up fanciful stories and told them to each other as children. And from these narrative beginnings came the writer, we, as readers, think we know today. This dazzling book of six essays about the writing life, both erudite and witty, down to earth while literary, insightful, and practical, began life as the Epton lectures at Cambridge University.