The Journal of Religion and Theatre

http://www.rtjournal.org

Published by the Religion and Theatre Focus Group of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education

The Journal of Religion and Theatre is a peer-reviewed online journal. The journal aims to provide descriptive and analytical articles examining the spirituality of world cultures in all disciplines of the theatre, performance studies in sacred rituals of all cultures, themes of transcendence in text, on stage, in theatre history, the analysis of dramatic literature, and other topics relating to the relationship between religion and theatre. The journal also aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge throughout the theatrical community concerning the relationship between theatre and religion and as an academic research resource for the benefit of all interested scholars and artists.

ISSN 1544-8762

Submission Guidelines

- Submit your article in Microsoft Word 1998 format via the internet
- Include a separate title page with the title of the article, your name, address, e-mail address, and phone number, with a 70 to 100 word abstract and a 25 to 50 word biography
- Do not type your name on any page of the article
- MLA style endnotes -- Appendix A.1. (Do not use parenthetical references in the body of the paper/ list of works cited.)
- E-Mail the article and title page via an attachment in Microsoft Word 1998 to Debra Bruch: dlbruch -at- mtu.edu. (Please replace the -at- with @.)
- Or send by regular post with the article on a zip disk, Mac format, in Microsoft Word to:

Debra Bruch, Ph.D.
General Editor, *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*
Department of Fine Arts
Michigan Technological University
1400 Townsend Drive
Houghton, MI 49931

DEADLINE: May 1st of each year

From Sacred Scroll to Stage and Page

By
Yvonne Fein

I

BEHIND THE SCENES …

For Mircea Eliade, the opposite of sacred is not simply the profane. When he discusses religious man's abject fear of having to live beyond consecrated space, the word he employs to define this territory is 'chaos.' Emptied of 'ontic substance,' there is no human alternative but death, provoking a condition, he argues, that matches precisely the individual's dread of nothingness.[1]

In Judaism, I would argue, it is appropriate to read 'exile' for Eliade's 'chaos.' In some of the earliest pentateuchal descriptions of what divine abandonment might entail, followed by subsequent expressions of prophetic castigation and lamentation after the fact, one confronts the rawness of Israel's existential terror writ large. But this is a broad canvas daubed with bold brush-strokes. Were it instead represented as a pencil drawing on vellum, this pre- and post-exilic saga would of necessity include the fine detail of law and legend, of gender and genealogy and of covenantal conditionality all superimposed upon a luminous and audacious narrative that spanned an ancient millennium.

That said, however, using metaphors of art and image to shed light on Judaism – ancient or modern, Orthodox or Reform – is more than a little unseemly, for Judaism is one of the earliest recorded religions not to hold by iconography. Conventional forms and figures associated with consecrated or legendary subject matter find scant place in a tradition which considers the fashioning or worshipping of graven images an anathema. It is the word, and each discrete letter of the alphabet, which is paramount, dominant and overriding of all devices

[1] Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, 1987)

utilised to chronicle both edict and account of the Jews. More than that, without the word, creation itself would have been impossible.

In the *Zohar*, the primary text of Kabbalah, which Arthur Green describes as that "great mediaeval Jewish compendium of mysticism, myth, and esoteric teaching … a work of sacred fantasy," [2] Rabbi Hammuna Sava is quoted as declaring: "When the Blessed Holy One wished to fashion the world, all the letters were hidden away (within the divine mind…). For two thousand years before creating the world, the Blessed Holy One contemplated them and played with them. As He verged on creating the world, all the letters presented themselves before Him, from last to first."[3]

For all that this is a foundation myth pertaining to the very beginnings of the world, there is still much speculation concerning the nature of the written Torah which cannot actually be, it is claimed, the inked calligraphy visible on the parchment. These markings are deemed by many scholars to be merely a design and a pattern covering the numinous whiteness of the true letters on the scroll which we are unable to see at all.[4] The best we can hope for is access to the ongoing staging of the oral tradition, for ultimately it is the Voice (or voice, perhaps) that is the instrument of creation.

Is it such an immense leap of logic, therefore, to suggest that theatre might become the next frontier, the platform, as it were, on which the pursuit of communicating the sacred concepts and perceptions of Judaism may advance? In terms of precedent or model, the idea itself is hardly original. In a radical move for the times, disdaining theatrical convention which allowed for only a single actor and a circular ballet around a designated sacred item, Aeschylus introduced a second actor into proceedings. Sophocles, his younger contemporary, both a man

---

[2] *Pritzker Edition of The Zohar*, trans. Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) p. xxxi

[3] ibid p. 11

[4] "Thus we have learnt that the Torah was written with black fire on white fire." *The Zohar*, Bemidbar, Book III, Page 154b. But which part of the sacred scroll is constituted of which fire is not self-evident.

of war and of the gods, radicalised matters still further by launching a third actor onto the stage: heady and impressive innovations to be sure, but all this is merely to acknowledge an artistic revolution which erupted in Antiquity. And, like so many ritual institutions of other nations, it would ipso facto have been considered at once taboo and impure by the Jews, automatically shunned and proscribed.

So the questions arise and remain to be answered today: can the notion of Jewish theatre have any cultural or even religious legitimacy and if so, what may it validly be held to comprise? How may it be designated? Is it theatre written by Jews? Or by Jews on Jewish subjects? Or by anyone on Jewish subjects. Is it Steven Spielberg's up-market cartoon of the exodus from Egypt? Is it a movie with big-name actors forced to make agonising choices at the hands of brutal persecutors? Or is it Paul Newman waxing heroic on a battered boat, a latter-day Moses leading latter-day Jews home? The above examples are drawn chiefly from cinema, but I find no more illumination if I turn to the stage. Do I refer to the infamous play depicting the predicament of Anne Frank, so dreary it provoked an audience member to hiss at the actors playing Nazis, 'She's in the attic!' simply to bring the tedium to a close? Or will referencing the ground-breaking works of Harvey Fierstein and Tony Kushner aid my cause in finding a solution to a puzzle that has afflicted me for over a decade?

I do not think so, for such an approach does not address what truly troubles me.

What happens if we go directly to the source, removing the sacred vocabulary from its privileged place in scroll and synagogue and open it up to the profane, some might say chaotic, space of theatre? What happens, in fact, when we move the ancient words of the Jewish tradition from page to stage and subject what transpires to the bright lights of performance? Given these considerations, what then happens when the playwright is a feminist and the work she has been commissioned to write is slated to be hagiography of the female as represented in the holy writ, yet evolves – by chaotic yet inexorable theatrical impetus – into a protest that finds itself questioning the very rudiments of traditionalist teachings? And finally, what is to be done when it emerges that these teachings are further destabilised by subversive texts, along with commentaries and footnotes to the texts, found within the very canon itself?

The stage, ladies and gentlemen, is set. Let the curtain rise.

II

BACKSTAGE …

It began with a poem.

Some might have argued that the poem itself, probably written in the 1940s (but there is no longer any way of ascertaining that), was the first profanity. Others actually did argue that the work was a tribute and a paean to Jewish womanhood through the ages. Whatever one's perspective, it seems only fair to readers to print the work in its entirety[5] so that they may judge. I should also observe that my researcher and I were assigned the task of creating one scene per verse. Now some might also argue that this is too great an infringement upon the artistic freedom of the writer. Undertaking the task as a working playwright, however, I was content to be provided with a structure. Operating within such secure parameters, what could possibly go wrong?

I Am Woman[6]
by Malka Heifetz Tussman,

I am the exalted Rachel
Whose love lit the way for Rabbi Akiba.

I am the small, bashful village girl
who grew up among the tall poplars
and blushed at the "Good morning" of her brother's tutor.

[5] With thanks to Marcia Falk, its translator, for permission to do so.

[6] "I Am Woman" by Malka Heifetz Tussman, translated from the Yiddish by Marcia Falk. Translation copyright (c) 1992 by Marcia Lee Falk. Excerpted from *The Book of Blessings* by Marcia Falk (Harper, 1996; paperback, Beacon Press, 1999). Also in *With Teeth in the Earth: Selected Poems of Malka Heifetz Tussman*, translated by Marcia Falk (Wayne State University Press, 1992).

I am the pious girl
who paled as her mother raised her hands to her eyes
for the blessing over the Sabbath candles.

I am the obedient bride
who humbly bent her head beneath the shears
the night before the wedding.

I am the rabbi's daughter
who offered her chaste body to save a Jewish town
and afterwards set fire to herself.

I am the woman of valor
who bore and fed children
for a promised bit of paradise.

I am the mother
who, in great hardship,
raised sons to be righteous men.

I am the Hassid's daughter,
infused with her father's fervor
who went out defiant, with her hair cropped,
to educate the people.

I am the barrier-breaker
who freed love from the wedding canopy.

I am the pampered girl
who set herself behind a plow
to force the gray desert into life.

I am the one whose fingers
tightened around the hoe,
on guard for the steps of the enemy.

I am the one who stubbornly
carries around a strange alphabet
to impart to children's ears.

I am all these and many more.

And everywhere, always, I am woman.

III

NOISES OFF …

I discovered that try as I might to employ techniques for emptying the mind, for deactivating the switch responsible for emotional vulnerability to the heroic, my ingrained responses to such stimuli were far too strong. I am of the generation born and bred on epic tales of Holocaust survival followed by dreams of the Zionist Socialist triumph. This poem was designed to push every button I possessed and then to create a few I did not possess before pushing them too. That those at the Jewish Museum of Australia who commissioned the work to be based on it also responded in kind to this piece – as have many readers world-wide, it would seem – made matters, if anything, more difficult. Some fourteen years previously, we had all worked on an enterprise with similar goals, but that was well before Jewish feminism of the Orthodox variety had reached Melbourne's distant shores. At the time, I was content to pen niceties about the heroism of Ruth following her mother-in-law withersoever, or about Eve silently accepting blame and submitting to fate on account of the apple affair.

No longer.

The more I read "I am Woman," the more I became aware of a subliminal hum vibrating along the furrow separating left and right brain hemispheres. Two syllables. Implacable, unremitting. Like a robot with a faulty voice implant, it persisted over a week of sleepless nights until a mercifully insurgent cerebral core allowed me to decode its pulse.

Subvert.
Subvert.
Subvert.

At length I knew that I would illuminate the story behind the story of the exalted Rachel whose love enabled Rabbi Akiva's learning habit. The obedient bride, prenuptially aroused at humbly bending her head and the rabbi's daughter offering her chaste body, all in honour of Tradition and "Law" would face exposure of another kind. When it came time to consider the freeing of love from the wedding canopy, my researcher's eyes glittered as she created a folder entitled 'Jewish Lesbianism.' I felt momentary, visceral dread at thought of the Museum's patrons, gulped and continued. The pampered pioneer would also be required to bear harsh scrutiny. We would take no prisoners. Even or especially, the raising of sons to be righteous men would be deconstructed.

And this was Melbourne, so there could be no performance tracing 5,000 years of the Patriarchy without mentioning the Holocaust. In our fair city alone, we have the largest number of Holocaust survivors outside Israel.[7] Not only are we well-satisfied at such an achievement, members of the State Parliament are immensely proud of it as well and regularly find a context in which to make mention of it. Such being the case, even though the poem contained no reference to the event, our play must needs insert a relevant scene in an attempt to acknowledge some sort of meaning of the female experience in those times.

Thus through music, dance, poetry and dialogue, moulded from text both ancient and sacred, modern and iconoclastic, *A Celebration of Women,* as we were instructed to entitle the production, would smash the glass. For the duration of writing, rehearsal and performance, I could not rid my imagination of this fancy. At weddings, with the vows in place (the woman's silence denoting consent), the glass is crushed beneath the heel of the groom. By this shattering, even in the midst of celebration, we are charged by tradition to recall tragedy – the destruction of our Temples, the defiling of our scrolls, the slaughter of our people, perhaps even the perfect primeval light that splintered to facilitate Creation – and remember the Holy Blessed One[8] who delivered us from evil.

---

[7] Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Legislative Council, Fifty-fourth Parliament, First Session (April 19, 2002). Extract from Book 3.

[8] It is necessary to note that "the Holy Blessed One" is a feminist revision. Literal translation of this version of the Name (HaKadosh Baruch Hu) is the Holy One, Blessed be He).

I could not but wonder whether the tragedy with which we are constantly enjoined to conjure did indeed serve as potent reminder to these episodes, or was possibly a subtle counter tradition that had somehow crept into and survived the Patriarchy. Was it, no less and no more, a metaphor for the very women Jews have been so proud of themselves for celebrating through the ages? Beneath the wedding canopy, what was really symbolised by the glass, swathed and hidden within folds of white damask – its pieces kept where and for what purpose – being fragmented?

IV

DIRECTOR AND CAST …

A brief note only, but imperative. The director was a man. This was not intended as irony or tokenism, nor was it misunderstood by any involved as a statement about which sex actually held the power in all endeavours of significance in our community. It was as much by accident as it was by design. The effort of fourteen years ago had had little, if any, feminist consciousness. The director (let us call him Hillel for his mildness and his creativity with theatrical lore and law), had directed it then simply because he was the best we had and he could and would. Feminist consciousness not withstanding a decade and a half later, the same tenet applied.

The cast of eleven was a group of women drawn from a potpourri of professional, community and amateur players, singers and musicians. It ranged from the best on offer to the least experienced and most enthusiastic. Because, however, Jewish theatre in Melbourne has its origins in the Yiddishist, Bundist traditions, the most talented have always been drawn from their descendants and disciples. Children and grandchildren of the brave and irreligious, of the politically incorrect rupturors of conservative certainty, have always been attracted to the stage in our town. These would comprise the majority of our cast.

They did not have my tortured love-hate relationship with the text that both enraged and defined me. They did not care deeply if at all about the politics of religion as it pertained to gender. Feminists all, they had been taught from infancy that the sancta of Judaism were there only to exclude them, forever to cast them in roles of secondary importance. They came to my script like fuming novices banished, if you will forgive the allusion, to a convent, like conscripts to boot camp, but they came and they brought with them in the end – even those with the least know-how and proficiency – an irreverent passion that forced me to rethink my convictions and rewrite my inspiration countless times. For reasons that still mystify me, all, including myself, were prepared to work for nominal payment, possibly because all were led to believe that in under ten weeks the entire enterprise would be over, forgotten, forgiven.

Nothing could have been further from the truth.

For a multitude of reasons, most of them important, none of them significant to this writing, an entire year was to pass before our production would hit the stage, risk the wrath of the community and be invited north to a festival of women's theatre that had no understanding of our challenge, but applauded us humanely at show's end. Perhaps they were simply pleased to be released. Or perhaps they understood, as we had come to understand, that there was indeed much to celebrate, even if the glass was irretrievably shattered. At the next wedding, a new glass would be produced and crushed, but always there would be more glasses, no matter how many heels presented themselves. It was not a willingness to be trampled that was being marked. On the contrary: it was a consciousness that for all of tradition's demands, we would yet rise and make voices – directed to be silent in prayer and in song – wild, fierce and, above all, audible. We would put the glass together again, fill it to overflowing and invite all to drink from it.

V

SCENA …

Taking the sacred to the stage, not only decodes the holy texts in ways conventional and not-so-conventional commentaries have not even contemplated, it also translates these texts into

chaotic art. I use the word 'chaotic' here in the sense of unruly, boisterous, hectic and frenzied. In terms of the profane, the theatre is at once well outside and deeply within the scope – physical and cerebral – of what is not sacred. Because it is more than prose narrative and not necessarily less than spiritual and/or mystical inquiry, it allows for responses to and interpretations of biblical and talmudic texts that do not rely solely on the imagination of an individual sage. Through directorial imagination, it may introduce music to the poetry to create song; movement to testimony to create dance. It may allow instrumental and percussive backing to accompany dialogue and lift it to realms the mere speaking or reading of it aloud to a congregation simply cannot. While I do not suggest that theatre can supplant worship or its actors the divine, however vigorously modern culture with its idols of stage and screen might beg to differ, I do most keenly hold that it may illuminate it. For me, it is critical to light at least a pair of candles in the darkness.

To take each verse of "I Am Woman" and attempt, scene by scene, an account of the play's progress would be a lengthy and not necessarily enlightening modus operandi for the purposes of this paper. I shall be brief regarding a number of verses, for not all spoke to ancient text; neither were all actually subverted by playwright and players. The pious girl, for example, who 'paled as her mother raised her hands to her eyes/ for the blessing over the Sabbath candles', was represented simply by a rendition of the blessing followed by traditional song and dance. The 'Hassid's daughter,/ infused with her father's fervor/ who went out defiant, with her hair cropped,/ to educate the people', used the polemic and rhetoric of the union meeting. Present were rebels and rabble-rousers, Emma Goldman, Klara Lembeck, Rose Schneiderman and Pauline Newman. Feminists before their time and, by definition, thus outcasts, they incited strikes, advocated both free love and birth control, risking their lives each time they mounted their platforms.

The 'barrier-breaker/ who freed love from the wedding canopy,' utilised a moving monologue,[9] that explored the condition of Jewish lesbianism. Its jokes were greeted with faint

[9] adapted for the stage by my researcher, Rebecca Forgasz, from "The Letter…and the Word" by Hinde Ena Burstin (*Generation* Vol 1 & 2, October 1996)

and nervous laughter and its conclusion with a confronting silence before a storm of applause. It was not text-based in its references and therefore not profane in the sense of challenging and restating rabbinic mores and tenets. In the Jewish canon, lesbianism is not, in fact, against the law, because, it has been suggested, such an act was beyond the scope of the otherwise quite vivid, if not fervid, rabbinical imagination. Even, however, to place tales of the sacred matriarchs and heroines on the same stage as lesbianism was seen as a profanity. For this and, I presume, myriad other reasons, one rabbi in our fair town forbade his congregants to buy tickets to the show.

The 'pampered girl' who 'force[d] the gray desert into life' and 'whose fingers tightened around the hoe,/ on guard for the steps of the enemy,' was an irresistible target. Through her we deconstructed the feminist myth surrounding the early Zionists, a move risky and provocative in a city which holds Zionism only marginally less sacred than the Holocaust. I saw it as a necessary evil, in spite of – or perhaps because – I had grown up believing that fairy tale of most passionately of all.

VI

THE PLAY'S THE THING …

I admit that although those scenes which subverted the dominant paradigm were the most difficult to write and the most thorny to communicate my intentions about to director and actors, they were and remain my favourites. It is not simply that I hail from a long line of paradigm subverters or that as a daughter of rag-traders and manufacturers I was brought into the world profoundly understanding the meaning of cutting (not just fabric) against the grain. It goes without saying that my default setting was one of a weaver and a spinner of yarns and that my most beloved tales told of quests ostensibly doomed and unpredictably redeemed by unlikely heroines.

As a girl-child, I accepted the exaltation of Rachel's role in Rabbi Akiva's life. Taught the canon by small 'c' and not inordinately erudite conservatives, it seemed quite logical for the times (my own as much as Rachel's) for a woman to subsume her entire life to her man's. To do so for the sake of Jewish learning – there could be no higher cause.

But with more luck than brains as the old Yiddish aphorism has it,[10] I found my way inside the manuscripts. Armed initially with only my schoolgirl's Hebrew, (marginally advanced by those months spent in Israel pursuing the Z.S. Dream), I discovered that all around me (in virtual rather than actual time and space: Australia, unlike Israel and the U.S., offered little by way of serious learning/teaching without ideological, religious or gender constraints) women sought the key to the Hidden Torah. Not 'hidden' in sense of esoteric or impenetrable which, our sages teach, is the true Torah, accessible only to those who have reached the most sophisticated and elevated levels of understanding and holiness respectively. I refer simply to the phenomenon of Torah hidden from women because they were a) illiterate in the language of text, b) forbidden to study much of it should they somehow attain literacy and c) programmed to believe that its innate sacredness was not only better suited to investigation by the male mind but also egregious to the female.

I mention these obstacles because without an understanding of them, the fact of women writing about and staging a performance that questions millennia-old principles has no real context. It is one thing to challenge from a position of power, or at least from one of some precedent and knowledge, quite another to dive in at the deep end of a pool knowing only that to avoid drowning it is imperative to exhale continuously. Creating air-bubbles may guarantee one's eventual rising to the surface, but these self-same bubbles are a fragile defence against the tide of hostility awaiting the head's reappearance above the water-line.

For all that, let us still look deep inside, finding footnotes and *aggadah* [11] which tell the story behind the story. Such 'afterthoughts', with their often whimsical embroideries of biblical

[10] *Mit meyr mazl vie farshtandt*

[11] rabbinic tales and legends explicating both law and morality, held to be as sacred as the text they interpret and as divinely inspired.

subject matter, assumed women's eyes would never see their pages. Thus freed from constraints of 'appropriateness,' flowering with arcane specifics that illuminated the austere original in a strange, mediaeval light, they fearlessly examined physicality, psychology and eroticism. The dazzling narratives of these post biblical, Dark-Age poets penetrated the heart of the fiery text, revealing elemental detail to those both foolish and fearless enough to confront the blaze.

i

I am the exalted Rachel

Whose love lit the way for Rabbi Akiba.

In order to understand my approach to this story, it is necessary to take a brief look at kabbalistic idea of *nizozot ha-neshamot* (sparks of the souls) extensively developed, although not conceived, by Isaac Luriah and his followers. The roots of all souls, this premise supposes, were once contained in that of Adam, but their sparks were dispersed with the introduction into the world of the very first transgression against the word of God. In each successive *gilgul,* or incarnation, the souls experience the possibility of restitution for sins committed in previous embodiments. The more effective the reparation, the more closely the souls approach their original structures. Pre-Lurianic Kabbalah suggested that Cain and Abel were reincarnated within Jethro and Moses. David, Batsheba and her husband Uriah play out the drama of Adam, Eve and the serpent, but matters are clearly not resolved within this second incarnation. In *Sefer ha-Gilgulim,*[12] both Isaac Luria and his student Chaim Vital elaborated on the biblical possibilities of transmigration of the souls, further broadening their account to embrace key characters from the pages of the Talmud. Thus I discovered the story of the earlier, tragic

[12] Printed in Frankfort, 1684 and *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* (first printed in 1875) are works transcribed and developed by Chayim Vital, foremost student of Isaac Luria

incarnations of Rabbi Akiva and his beloved. In a very early draft of the play,[13] the narrative, ultimately much abridged and proclaimed against a background of drums, appeared something like this:

> In an ancient tome of the Kabbalah, in a volume called *The Book of Incarnations*, the sacred words weave a mysterious tale about the obsession of the rabbi and this woman…
>
> Once upon a time there was the only daughter of Jacob, the Patriarch, and her name was Dinah. A prince fell in love with her; his name was Shechem. He raped her and then asked for her hand in marriage. Furious, her brothers, Shimon and Levi, slaughtered Shechem, his father and all his subjects. They said, 'Should our sister be treated as a common whore?'
>
> Centuries pass, *The Book of Incarnations* relates, and another prince, this time of Israel, whose name was Zimri, fell in love with Kazbi, the beautiful princess of Midian. Zimri challenged Moses publicly, claiming, 'If you can marry the Midianite, Zipporah, can I not take for my wife, Kazbi?' Before all of Israel, Zimri carried her to his tent to possess her. At which, Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron, followed them inside and slew them, impaling both lovers on his one spear.
>
> Again, the centuries pass, and once more, this dual passion is reignited. This time, it manifests in the body of Rabbi Akiva, the wisest of all men. Inside him reside the souls of Shechem and Zimri, but now he has learned restraint. Conversion and marriage pave the way for a passion, whose first spark was lit on the day Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah, went out to visit with the girls of the town. Now it achieves the quality of sacred, not strange, fire and it does not destroy. When Rabbi Akiva sees his soul mate one thousand years after the tale began, the story of the wandering *gilgulim* ends

[13] The final draft of *A Celebration of Women* was numbered Draft 13.

> without bloodshed, the sparks returned in peace to their original souls.

What both intrigued and incensed me, however, was the fact that this soul mate of Rabbi Akiva's was not the 'exalted Rachel whose love lit the way' for him to be regarded forevermore as the greatest scholar ever produced by the Jewish tradition. It was Rufina, wife of the Governor of Judea, Tyranus Rufus. Tradition is somewhat muddled as to when exactly this union took place, whether Rufina divorced Tyranus Rufus for the rabbi or was widowed by the Governor, or even whether the savage execution of Rabbi Akiva was in some way connected to his temerity for having married (and caused to convert to Judaism) a Roman aristocrat.

All that notwithstanding, it is made quite clear in the Talmud – and in the drama I scripted – that for marrying Rabbi Akiva when he was still only a poor, unlearned shepherd, his first wife, Rachel, was disinherited by her father, Kalba Savua, one of the wealthiest men in Jerusalem. She yet went ahead with the marriage, we are told, in the winter. The newly-weds slept in a barn and, when they arose, the scholar-to-be had to pick pieces of straw from her hair. "If I had the money, instead of this straw, I would adorn your hair with a golden ornament that had Jerusalem engraved upon it," the Talmud interpolates,[14] suggesting rather early in the Akiva narrative that we are dealing with a somewhat quixotic character, a romantic, in fact, whose emotional intensity will match that of his extraordinary intellect.

In the same passage, it is clear that Rachel takes the initiative and charges Akiva with the task of going away and becoming a Torah scholar by learning at the Yeshiva. Thus he spends the next twelve years, at the end of which he returns home. Before entering, he hears from the outside how a wicked neighbour taunts his wife. Trying to stay as close as possible to the original text, I wrote the next part of this drama virtually by copying it word for word, changing only the format so it could function as theatre:

---

[14] Talmud Bavli: Nedarim (50a)

> **Neighbour (***stands, and moves downstage, talking as she moves***):** Your father did the right thing disinheriting you! Firstly, your husband is not your kind – he is poor and ignorant and the son of converts! And worse – he left you a living widow all these years.
>
> **Rachel:** If my husband would listen to me, he would stay in the Yeshiva and learn another twelve years.
>
> **Rabbi Akiva (***who has been walking towards* **Rachel** *and is half-way there, hears her words and says to himself, as he turns around and walks again downstage***):** Since she is giving me permission, I'll go back.[15]

This evoked the first laugh of the evening, but it was clearly ironic in nature, from an audience which understood the mentality and tacitly approved of it even while acknowledging the inequity upon which it was based.

After an absence of twenty-four years in total, Rabbi Akiva returns as a celebrated sage and teacher, accompanied by 24,000 disciples. Everyone comes out to pay homage to him, his wife and children in rags among them. Rachel is almost not allowed to pass because of her dishevelled and pitiable appearance.

> When she came close to him, she fell on her face and kissed his feet. His attendants tried to push her aside but Rabbi Akiva cried out to them, "Leave her alone! My Torah and your Torah are due to her!" [16]

After her husband's poignant acknowledgement of her role, she vanishes entirely from the narrative, but the poet, the dreamer, the advocate of doomed quests, the scholar and the

---

[15] ibid. Ketubot (63a)

[16] ibid.

lover goes on to experience many more adventures. Who is to say which is his greatest? In order, however, for the sparks of his soul to fulfil their destiny, he must unite with the woman with whom, for a thousand years, he has attempted and failed to find peace. As mentioned above, she takes the form, this time around, of Rufina, going unwittingly to her fate.

Once again, the talmudic text required little adjustment to tell its arresting tale.[17] My script, following its lines very closely in all but the stage directions marked by bullets – an important caveat – do little more than transcribe the action:

> **Narrator:** There was a Roman governor of Judea by the name of Tyranus Rufus. It was his habit to challenge Rabbi Akiva to debates on theological matters, but it was also his habit to lose. One evening, after yet another defeat and humiliation, he came to his wife's chamber.
>
> **His Lady:** You seem dejected and irate, my lord. Tell me what ails you?
>
> **Tyranus Rufus:** It is the Jew, Akiva. Each time we meet, he confounds me with his cleverness. It seems I can never best him.
>
> **His Lady:** You are aware, my lord, that the God of the Jews despises immorality. If you will allow me, I will humble him. I will cause Rabbi Akiva to sin and he will lose his impertinence, his pride and his presumption.
>
> **Tyranus Rufus:** Do as you understand.
>
> **Narrator:** So the fine and noble lady, bathed, anointed and adorned herself.

[17] Talmud Bavli: Avodah Zarah (20a)

- *All women, wherever they are on stage strike and hold provocative poses.*
- **Tomi** *plays "*May West – Ancient Rome*" on piano.*
- **Rabbi Akiva** *now comes centre stage & collapses at the sight of all the female pulchritude. As he collapses, he inadvertently slides through* **Fred's** *legs, coming up in front of her to face the audience.*

Rabbi Akiva: Oy! *(He then proceeds to spit, to laugh and to weep).*

The Lady: My lord, are you not well? What is the meaning of such outlandish actions?
(Provocative poses now unstruck and all non-participants return to original seating).

Rabbi Akiva: Two things, I can explain to you, the third, I cannot… I spat, dear lady, because I was remembering the manner in which all of us – the high-born and the lowly – are brought into the world: by a drop of sperm which resembles my spittle. And I wept, dear lady, for the exquisite beauty you parade before me that, one day, will lie rotting in the ground.

The Lady: You must tell me, sir, I insist, why you laughed. Do you find me amusing? An object of mockery? Absurd?

Rabbi Akiva: I laughed for, with the spirit of prophecy God has gifted me, I saw that one day soon, you will convert because of your love for me and we will marry.
(The stage goes to dark except for The Lady who, spot-lit, falls to her knees) [18]

[18] Scene II, *A Celebration of Women*

Using the device of two women who have been acting as a sort of Jewish chorus commenting on the action, the audience is reminded of Rachel, whom the succeeding drama was intended to make them forget.

> **2nd Woman:** What's your point?
>
> **1st Woman:** What's my – What about "the exalted Rachel" the one who lit the way so the great Rabbi Akiva could become so great? What happened to her?
>
> **2nd Woman:** She died.
>
> **1st Woman:** She *died*? That was her reward for all her sacrifice?
>
> **2nd Woman:** That was her reward.

In this, the closing vignette of the scene, my intention was clear: to provide an echo of the fate that ultimately befell the great rabbi himself, recounted in yet another Talmudic tale. With his death, following the death of Rachel (an event which earned no words of record) and after his having consummated his love for Rufina, the sparks may truly have been said to have returned to their original souls.[19]

---

[19] Rab Judah said in the name of Rab, When Moses ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in affixing coronets to the letters.5 Said Moses, 'Lord of the Universe, Who stays Thy hand?'6 He answered, 'There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiba b. Joseph by name, who will expound upon each tittle heaps and heaps of laws'. 'Lord of the Universe', said Moses; 'permit me to see him'. He replied, 'Turn thee round'. Moses went and sat down behind eight rows7 [and listened to the discourses upon the law]. Not being able to follow their arguments he was ill at ease, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master 'Whence do you know it?' and the latter replied 'It is a law given unto Moses at Sinai' he was comforted. Thereupon he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou hast such a man and Thou givest the Torah by me!' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree'.8 Then said Moses, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou hast shown me his Torah, show me his reward'. 'Turn thee round', said He; and Moses turned round and saw them weighing out his flesh at the market-stalls.[R. Akiba died a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans during the Hadrianic persecution]. 'Lord of the Universe', cried Moses, 'such Torah, and such a reward!' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree'. (Menachot 29a)

A final note regarding this scene concerns the actor who played the part of Rabbi Akiva. She is an artist much respected in her professional capacity on the Australian stage as well as being highly regarded within the Jewish community. It is fair to say that these tales were as strange and unfamiliar to her as they were to the rest of the cast, but for all that, her eye for dramatic verity was as unfailing as it was unflinching. When she finally rehearsed the scene after much workshopping, she portrayed Rabbi Akiva as a man present in and aware of his physicality and his sexuality. Just writing the words recalls for me the fear – there is no other word – I experienced when I realised that she would play him in this light: as a charismatic man and teacher whose power to enthral women was an essential element of his temperament and makeup. It was clear in her characterisation that he was as much beguiled by as beguiling to women and, when I finally caught my breath, I realised her interpretation had a great deal of merit. I felt that with it she had added another layer of Midrash[20] to the ancient story and I am very much mistaken if I cannot claim that by doing so, she had blurred the boundaries between the sacred and the profane so effectively as to render an understanding of their divergence immaterial.

ii

I am the rabbi's daughter

who offered her chaste body to save a Jewish town

and afterwards set fire to herself.

From the outset, this verse troubled me for a number of reasons, not least of which was a visceral rejection of female martyrdom, especially as espoused in narratives whose origin was

[20] Midrash (pl. Midrashim) is a technique of interpreting biblical narrative. Divided between *Aggada* (parables, theology, allegory, homily and ethics) and *Halakha* (law and moral codes), it adds respectively dimension and latitude to the basic account as well as explicating and elaborating upon divine edict.

clearly the male imagination. The only comparable tale – but possibly from a parallel universe – that came to mind as I attempted to counter its force was the story of Queen Esther who had also offered her chaste body as a pledge for Jewish lives, but whose fate was far different.

My first task, as I saw it, was to source this anecdote. Neither Bar-Ilan Project, nor Soncino Classic Collection could help. No rabbi of my acquaintance, neither in Melbourne nor overseas, could do likewise. I emailed around the world and the closest I came was my own rabbi's intuition that this tale probably had its source in a Hassidic tale of the 16th or 17th century. He also wrote of rabbinic debate over the centuries, questioning the morality of Queen Esther's actions, that brought to mind this very tale whose authors, he suspected, felt death an apposite finale for one who had been so defiled, albeit in an honourable cause.

I finally decided to set the scene as a court-case presided over by a less-than-impartial judge. By Draft 13, her character had become The Prosecutor, who is more mystified by the proceedings than judgemental of them, switching from melancholy contemplation to condemnation as she tries both Queen Esther and the nameless woman who came to a fiery end.

> **Prosecutor:** Sister, I have searched everywhere for your story. I have asked scholars and rabbis, sent letters and posted requests. I have searched Talmud and Midrash and found only the echo of an echo, a whisper that shivered on the wind and trembled. Yes, it is true. It happened. Where? When? It is not known. Just that it happened. It was a brave and noble thing, your surrender for the lives of others, but you should have lived in honour thereafter, not burned in flames as a sacrifice to modesty that was never more false.
>
> **Woman:** You do not understand. They came and they took me and they had me. Thereafter I did not want to live.

> **Narrator:** It could have been another way. Listen to the story of a woman in Persia, centuries ago, when the king made it a crime for the virgins of Shushan to hide themselves from the royal search for a suitable queen.

The scene played itself out, how the woman came to offer herself; how Esther, adopted by Mordechai, her uncle, at a very early age, grew up with him, studied Torah with him and learned from him the habits of obedience and love gently.

But then my research took me to strange, heretofore unvisited realms. I came across several opinions as to Esther's marital status, footnotes to footnotes, arguments among the rabbis. I read that she was a perfect saint and Mordechai wanted to marry her. Some say he refrained because he knew God would bring about a miracle through her which would require her to marry the king. Others say that Mordechai intended to marry her, but she was taken to King Ahasuerus before he had a chance. According to a third opinion, Mordechai actually did marry Esther, hoping that since she would no longer be a virgin, she would not be taken to the king.[21] These were hardly the tales I had learned at school.

Thus, when Mordechai directed her to the palace of the king, and subsequently to an audience with him for reasons totally unambiguous, I have her say:

> **Esther:** Mordechai told me I had no choice…he was my love and my husband, but he sent me to the king's palace, to the king's bed. I did my duty. I was accustomed to obeying him.
>
> **Woman** *(to Esther)***:** You cannot understand. You were a queen. Mordechai himself was a prince. All your life, Esther, you dealt only with royalty. I was the daughter of a rabbi. I was destined to marry the son of the rabbi from a neighbouring town. I was quiet, obedient. I

[21] Yalkut Me'am Loez – the Book of Esther: Megillah Chapter 1; Rabbi Elisha Gallico; Maamar Mordechai

bent my knee to God, it is true, but it is also true that every man in my family had dominion over me.

Prosecutor: How did we go from that to this? How is the power of the feminine squandered?

This recurring prosecutorial reflection leads the audience down a (garden) path intended to demonstrate the superiority of Esther's approach and outcome. It is true – within the canon, not necessarily within authenticated history – that the queen manages to convince the rabbis to include her saga in the canon. It is a late inclusion indeed, to say nothing of an unheard of course of action for a female to attempt successfully. Nevertheless, when the nameless woman pleads not to be forgotten in the glory of Esther's story and the prosecutor again contemplates the power of the feminine being so squandered, the drama takes an disquieting turn. I propel it in this particular direction based on my unearthing of two more Midrashim, provocative in the extreme, almost surreal. It was a case of now knowing where to look and finally understanding, with both triumph and profound regret, the difference between Hidden and hidden Torah as this latter pertained and still pertains specifically to women. The two Midrashim I translate as follows:

- She [Esther] would rise from the bosom of her [lawful husband] Ahasuerus, immerse herself [in the waters of the *mikveh*], [22] and sit in the bosom of [her true husband] Mordechai *(Megillah 13b)*

and

- She behaved modestly in the house of Mordechai for 75 years and did not look upon the features of any man except Mordechai (Targum Esther 2:7)

When I came across the above two commentaries, I was overcome by the both the risk, the bravery and the sheer sexuality asserted by the first, and made uneasy by the use of the

[22] Ritual bath

words 'behaved modestly' (haiytah tznuah) in the second. It was almost as if these were duelling Midrashim, the latter intended to cancel out the chutzpah of the former. Under Jewish law, modesty has multitudinous meanings, most of them repressive, to my mind, in the context of women. It is the abstract noun that justifies the covering of married women's hair, the silencing of their voices in song before men. It swathes them in unbecoming garments meant to conceal all suggestion of femininity and it is vaunted as one of the highest qualities to which a virtuous Jewish woman can aspire. My intuition, now honed on the study of other texts, went on high alert. The word tznuah had been elected neither arbitrarily nor lightly. Used in this context, it demanded I dig deeper still. Emails flew back and forth between rabbi and student. We discussed the laws of marriage, rape and infidelity; we engaged in conjecture and speculation as to the myriad shades and nuances modesty could comprise and all the while, a theory – born of this chance juxtaposition of Midrashim -was flowering within my brain. Finally I thought I understood what was supposed to be elucidated for me and consequently, I concluded the scene this way:[23]

> **Esther:** Do not speak to me of the power of the feminine. It is true. I would rise from the bosom of the king to go to the mikveh and then lie in the bosom of my husband, Mordechai, whenever I could. It was not a desecration of the marriage laws. The Torah says that a woman who is raped, who is forced into relations with a man, is not forbidden to her husband. The rabbis decreed that this so-called marriage to Achashverosh was, in fact, a condition of perpetual rape. Thus it was no crime for me to return to my husband.
>
> **Prosecutor:** But the day Esther *chose* to go to the king at the behest of Mordechai – albeit to save her people, and not out of desire – but she chose to do so nevertheless – the rules changed. It was no longer considered rape.

[23] Scene VII *A Celebration of Women*

Esther: Do not speak to me of the power of the feminine. The Sages have written of me that I behaved modestly in the house of Mordechai for seventy-five years. Do you know what that means? Eventually I returned to him, to my husband, my first and only love. But I had been known, by my own consent, to the king while I was still married. Never again would we – Mordechai and I – be allowed to one another. That is the law. For seventy-five years I desired my mate and I was forbidden to him and he to me.
I behaved modestly in his house.
Each day was a burning.

Prosecutor: So a queen burns and lives **(***down-light on* **Esther** *is extinguished***),** the daughter of a rabbi burns and dies **(***down-light on* **Woman** *is extinguished. Now only the spotlight remains on* the **Prosecutor):** For the sake of their people, it can be said that both forfeited life. About one, there is a scroll, about the other there is but a whisper that shivers on the wind and trembles when women try to remember.

iii

I am the mother

who, in great hardship,

raised sons to be righteous men.

Before discussing this scene, first a word about stage and set design. To begin, chairs were strategically placed around and across the stage. After the first scene, the players moved constantly to different positions, utilising different chairs when required. They were in continuous flow around the stage, moving backwards and forwards in time and space just by the use of this device. The stage directions will perhaps give a clearer picture.

> *Chairs are set before curtain rises. Each actor, except* ***Evelyn****, enters carrying a plastic washing basket containing her props & costumes. All place their baskets beside their chaisr, do some warm-ups, chat to the other women. At back of stage, a washing line is strung with miscellaneous items including a tallit,*[24]*a challah cloth and sundry items of underwear. Once props are finished with, they will either be placed back in relevant baskets or hung on the line.*

The actors robed and disrobed in front of the audience, always retaining a basic black combination of leggings and T-shirt beneath whatever other costume requirements were designated. This act of dressing and undressing was in itself provocative, as was the hanging of a prayer shawl on a washing line, particularly in close proximity to under-garments. These were decisions taken by the director. When I first heard about, and again, when I finally saw them made real, I once more experienced fear. I was not sure if it was more or less intense than when the actor explained to me her vision of Rabbi Akiva's male physicality, but it was certainly

[24] prayer shawl

acute. I gave myself no choice but to let go, watching in a combination of dread and restless exhilaration as the sacred and profane jostled for primacy.

If memory serves, it was the researcher's notion to illustrate the verse about 'mothers raising their sons in great hardship to be righteous men' with the story of Glückel of Hameln. Glückel was a German diarist in the latter part of the 17th century, a time when literacy of such calibre among Jewish women was a rarity. She began to write following her husband's death, when she also assumed sole responsibility for the family's financial matters. A mother of thirteen, she was, moreover, a successful businesswoman and merchant. Hers is the only complete memoir written by a Jewish woman prior to the nineteenth century.

Radical though she was by the standards of the time, her ideas about Judaism, prayer, the study of Torah and religious comportment were firmly in the Orthodox camp. Ethical business practice was a primary concern of hers as was her belief in the sanctity and value of marriage. She spent a great deal of time arranging appropriate matches for her children.

But it was her high regard for literacy that allowed an idea, which had haunted me to include it from the start, to be created and placed in a scene I had been looking everywhere to anchor.

Perhaps one of the longest strides Orthodox women have made in recent decades is learning to read from the Torah scroll and then actually doing so in public. More recently, women have also been reading in mixed congregations, not in women-only settings: another stride. The difficulty (with the actual reading – not the be confused with rabbinical obstructionism and the multitudinous sanctions effectively banning women from such an act) lies in that the scroll itself contains only the letters of the words – no vowel markings and certainly no indication as to the musical note required for each syllable. Reading, therefore, requires an ability not only to decipher and learn by heart the musical values of the cantillation

marks (found above the letters in various editions of prayer books and printed Bibles) but also necessitates the reader to be able to recognise each individual word without its vowels.[25]

I gave Glückel the following words to say:

> But the fact that I could read and I could write gave me an edge – which I passed on to my children. I did not want a single one of them – male or female – to be strangers to the words of our God.

after which, one of her children climbed the stairs to the platform, above which the washing line was suspended, to illustrate the matter. The point was this: whether the child was male or female, the entire cast was female, playing male roles when necessary. When it came time for Glückel's child to demonstrate his/her literacy, it was inevitable that the most effective method would be to have him/her read a passage from the Torah, within the appropriate musical constructs. It would require a woman from the cast to perform the passage. There was no other way. And this time I felt no fear. It was precisely the point I wanted to make – ideologically and theatrically.

We hit an obstacle when we discovered that the only woman in the cast who knew the technique was our musical director and pianist. She was indispensable in that role and, although she did leave her post to articulate the odd line every now and again, a whole scene was out of the question. This was especially so as a song requiring her accompaniment followed this scene and would entail her performing an undignified sprint back to her grand piano after having solemnly read from the holy scroll. It is true that we had some remarkable singers in the troupe, all of whom could probably have mastered the art, learning it by ear, but all were strangely unwilling. Something rankled in each of them, making them increasingly resistant, progressively more reluctant. Neither the director nor I could convince them. In the wings, I was sure I heard a sighing and a rustling as the sacred and the profane again jostled for ascendancy.

---

[25] In Hebrew, vowel values are not expressed as letters between consonants but as symbols beneath the letters

I would not delete the scene, let alone change my vision of how it needed to be staged. Neither would any of the actors alter her stance. We had reached an impasse.

Until the director looked at me and said simply, 'You know how to do it. And you can sing. You want the scene? You do the scene.' And before I could object, the clamour of assent and relief from all the other actors rose in unruly delight and above it I could hear the director meditating aloud that I could climb the stairs to the platform, take the prayer shawl from the washing line, wrap myself in it and recite the lines. I shuddered at the thought of such public appropriation of male sancta in a public, albeit profane space and I drew a line in the sand. We settled on having the character – yes, of course it was Rabbi Akiva – who used the shawl in an earlier scene, hang it back on the line, wide and spread out. With a down-light focussing on the tallit and me, the rest of the stage in darkness, I would stand in front of its black stripe-bordered bright whiteness and pray.

And that is how it was. With the help of the musical director, I found a voice I had never sung with before. Instead of its emanating, high and pretty, from my head and throat, it emerged in a deep melodiousness from somewhere beyond my solar plexus. She called it belly. Wherever it came from, as I heard myself soar through the notes, I knew that I was the first woman in my survivor family – Hassidim on both sides before Auschwitz – who had ever raised her voice in public to sing to the glory of God. I had done so in a synagogue and now I had done so upon a stage before nearly one thousand people. To this day, I am unsure which occasion held the greater sacredness. Our sages teach us that our foremost concern must always be our intention. That brings me some measure of solace.

VII

AFTERMATH …

At the play's conclusion, there was a standing ovation, some cheering. I remember wanting that part of it to last forever. There were reviews. The Jewish press, with its unerring ability to reflect the prevailing mood of the community, particularly in all matters concerning feminism – condescending and somewhat disapproving – had sent a reviewer, who knew little about theatre and less about Judaism, to write up the show. She damned us with faint praise. The following week, the paper had the good grace to publish several protesting responses. Ameliorating, though never quite erasing the slight, our city's only morning newspaper, *The Age* (secular, disinterested), published a review that warmed the cockles of twelve exhausted hearts.

Most difficult to swallow was the show trial, or what the Jewish Museum called a 'panel discussion' which followed some weeks after the fact. A goodly number of the Museum's patrons come, as it happens, from the Orthodox side of town and had been more than somewhat put out by my interpretation of the way I felt women in Judaism should be celebrated. They – and by they, I mean the Orthodox women, the wives who humbly bend their heads and pale at the Sabbath lights – wanted a right of reply, wanted to put their side of the story. It would have been less absurd, I suppose, if any of them had even attended the show. As it was, I was obliged to lend at least one of them my DVD of the event in order to assist her in mounting her attack. I drew the line at acceding to her demand for a copy of my working script.

The panel was presided over by a noted lawyer and community leader. 'What we will see here tonight,' she began by remarking, 'is what I like to call "civilised Judaism" – a singularity whereby everybody is permitted to express her opinion and everyone else is obliged to listen politely." And thus indeed it appeared to proceed. The apologists even claimed later that only women could be broad-minded enough to sit at the same table altogether – the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Orthodox – and discuss such issues in harmony; but they were, as I said, the apologists.

I will always feel that in that night of the panel discussion lay the true profanity. With a limitless sense of fascination and enchantment, with no little anger, resentment, antipathy and some fury, and also, as it transpired, with a great deal of love, the actors, the director and I had crafted a play which attempted to remove the sacred from its guardians and expose it to the bright lights of stage and the scrutiny of audience. For the first time I felt I had been able to write, and have spoken on my behalf by actors who knew well how to speak, those words closest to and most deeply within my heart. I could say on the stage all that had been silenced, that could never be said in a synagogue and I had indeed said it. It had been honoured by applause and by a full house rising to its feet but, after all was said and done, the same organisation which had facilitated that experience now had me standing before a different audience, justifying my stance to people who would as lief have silenced me then as they would have prevented others – as they had themselves – from attending the play.

With a smile on my face, so that it could pass for "civilised Judaism," I heard myself declare, "None of this is really about religion. It is about the freedom to speak and write our truth. And my truth is that your truth angers me but I have neither ability nor desire to silence you. I do, however, desire most strongly to be left alone by you. You hold your truth, on the other hand, to be absolute and unarguable. And while you do not have the power to silence me, I feel compelled to ask whether you would if you could."

These words were not met by a standing ovation but I said them and I knew they had been heard and understood. I would settle for that.

In the aftermath, the desire to be heard "in my truth" does not, in all truth, wane. I am as confused as ever about matters of the profane, of chaos and of exile. From my ergonomic chair behind my ergonomic desk I can only watch as they are all forced to coexist alongside the phenomena of the cosmos, the in-gathering and the sacred. I cannot know the true dwelling places of these eternal antagonists, just as I cannot know which will gain ultimate ascendency or which, in fact, can lay the greater, more righteous claim to doing so. I do know, however, that taking the scolls out of their arks and opening them to the gaze of women, does not profane them. I know, too, that taking the black fire from the white and placing it in the hands of a

director and on the tongues of actors so that it may be seen and heard by many more people than would otherwise have even suspected its very existence, also pays it high tribute.

The words and the tradition are strong enough to bear such exposure. They were extant long before my pen sought to play with their many-facetedness, creating from them what I could, and they will survive me by at least as many millennia again.

For now, it is enough to know just that.

