

# DINAH'S RAGE: THE RETELLING OF GENESIS 34 IN ANITA DIAMANT'S *THE RED TENT* AND THOMAS MANN'S *JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS*

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## 374 INTRODUCTION

It is commonplace to assert that the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament is based on an androcentric position. Although critics have tried to introduce some sort of female empowerment by reassessing various biblical stories (cf. Savina Teubal, 1984), Genesis remains a man's realm with only a limited female perspective. The case of Dinah's rape by Shechem in Genesis 34 illustrates the marginality of womanhood in the biblical world and theology. The pericope tells us that, while the Israelites are settled near the Hivite city of Shechem in Canaan, Jacob's and Leah's daughter Dinah goes out of the Israelite camp. She is raped by Shechem, the prince of the eponymous city, who then abducts her and makes her one of his household. A deal is concluded by Jacob's sons and the Shechemites, according to which the situation can be made legitimate through marriage if the men of Shechem circumcise themselves. While the Shechemites are weak after the surgery, the Israelites sack the city, kill all the males and take Dinah back.

Robin Parry, along with numerous biblical scholars, notes that Dinah's perspective is totally absent from the narrative (11) and goes on to point out that

if we grant the legitimacy of a female perspective, then we grant that there is more to be said about the incident at Shechem than is said by Genesis 34. This need not be a threat to Genesis 34, but it may point towards the legitimacy of some kind of re-imagining the story from the perspective of the women involved (Leah, Dinah and the Hivite women). (23)

This "re-imagining" is precisely what Anita Diamant does in her novel entitled *The Red Tent* which is a hypertext<sup>1</sup> of the Patriarchal Saga (Genesis 12 to 50) from the

female point of view. Diamant's narrator is Dinah, and the retelling of the Shechem pericope from Genesis 34 acts as the pivot for the entire novel.

The "definitive" hypertext of Genesis is of course Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers* which must necessarily be evoked when one looks at any other hypertexts, such as Diamant's. *The Red Tent* retells primarily the Jacob section of Genesis, which means that a comparison with the first part of Mann's tetralogy (*The Stories of Jacob*) is most appropriate here. In many ways both works are very much on the same wavelength, especially in terms of keeping God as an autonomous character out of the story and giving humans center stage. However, in terms of gender politics, Mann remains much closer to the ethos of the biblical hypotext than Diamant. As in Genesis, far more psychological depth and a greater range of action are given to the male characters than to female ones in *The Stories of Jacob*. Setting out to "correct" this imbalance, Diamant can be seen as engaging in debate not only with the androcentric position of the Bible's first book but also with that of her illustrious German predecessor.

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## IS IT RAPE?

In line with a view expressed by certain biblical scholars, Diamant and Mann undermine a key aspect of the Dinah pericope: the notion that Dinah is in fact raped by Shechem. Here is how the rape is reported in the Bible:

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her. His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife." (Genesis 34:1- 4)

At first glance—and this has been the traditional view—rape appears to be the central event in this passage. Indeed, a number of biblical scholars go along with this interpretation (cf. Peter Lockwood, Joseph Fleishman). However, there is a school of thought according to which the question of Dinah's violation is not as clear-cut as it might appear. Nicolas Wyatt, for example, considers the vocabulary used in this pericope and compares it to the wording of another Old Testament episode: the rape of Tamar by Amnon in 2 Samuel. In the latter case the Hebrew term for the sexual act conveys the notion of humiliation and sexual violation. But in the Dinah and Shechem pericope a different word is used, leading Wyatt to conclude: "Gen. 34:2 may therefore be understood simply as stating that Shechem *made love* to Dinah. We may even suppose that she was a willing partner, because far from possessing her out of selfish lust, we read [sic] immediately afterwards that he loved her and wanted to marry her" (436; my italics—V.T.).

Amnon, on the other hand, is an unambiguous rapist in that he merely uses his

victim and then casts her aside like a rag, saying the following to his servant after the rape: “Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her” (2 Samuel 13:17). Tamar’s reaction to Amnon’s behavior makes it just as clear that this is sexual abuse and nothing else: “‘Don’t, my brother!’ she said to him. ‘Don’t force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don’t do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of this disgrace?’” (2 Samuel 13:12-13; cf. Robin Parry 22). If we accept David Noel Freedman’s argument that the same author (Super-J) wrote both the Shechem/Dinah and Amnon/Tamar pericopes, the case *against* viewing Genesis 34:2 as rape becomes even more compelling (Freedman 54).<sup>2</sup>

These considerations can justify Anita Diamant’s decision to turn the traditional rape scenario into a love story in *The Red Tent*. The characterization of the love-sick Shechem in the hypotext is already unusually developed, providing Diamant with a good basis for her own version of the prince. As Joseph Fleishman points out with respect to Genesis 34:2-4,

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Shechem’s feelings following the abduction and consummation of the marriage are revealed by the words “Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly” (v. 3). This is deep penetration into Shechem’s feelings and it serves to explain his actions. Such penetration is not characteristic of biblical stories. (103)<sup>3</sup>

In order to turn the prince into a true lover, Diamant begins by reversing the sequence of events constituting the first encounter between Dinah and the prince. In the hypotext this sequence lends a certain ambiguity to Shechem’s feelings since Shechem has sexual relations with Dinah first and only then falls in love with her, which explains the traditional view that this is rape. In *The Red Tent*, the prince meets Dinah at the royal palace first, they fall in love and only then is their love consummated. Having “modernized” the chronology in question, Diamant places the story on a firm romantic footing and can proceed to explore the emotional bond between Dinah and the prince.

The term “romantic” is an appropriate anachronism here because Diamant’s prince is in many ways closer to today’s notion of the sensitive, enlightened man than what is typical of biblical males (Fleishman’s above-cited passage notwithstanding). Thus, as Dinah tells us, “he felt more than the simple stirring of desire, or that is what he said after we had redeemed our promise and lay in each other’s arms” (Diamant 184). This chivalric/romantic separation of sex from love is accompanied by another “modernized” aspect of the prince’s character in *The Red Tent*—the concern for the feelings of the woman during sexual intercourse, which again has nothing to do with sexuality in Genesis: “I did not cry out when he took me, because, though he was young, my lover did not rush. Afterwards, when Shalem lay still at last and discovered that my cheeks were wet, he said, ‘Oh, little wife, do not let me hurt you again’” (Diamant 190). The result is the idea of love as partnership—a concept particularly distant from the experience of Dinah in Genesis 34 where the woman remains an object even if rape is ruled out. It is no wonder that Diamant changes Shechem’s name

to Shalem—a word related to the Hebrew root for “peace” or “safety.”<sup>24</sup>

Thomas Mann's prince, on the other hand, is closer to his prototype in Genesis 34, appearing as a spoiled dandy rather than a romantic lover. Whereas Diamant's Shalem promises something very unbiblical to Dinah—monogamy (Diamant 191), Mann's Shechem views Dinah as one more prize for his harem and is not so much in love as in rut: “Her ungirded dress made of blue and red wool covered only one shoulder while the other, naked one was exceedingly lovely in its slenderness—the embodiment of love [...]. However, he thought of consummation immediately and then of nothing else” (Mann 124; this an all subsequent translations from Mann are mine—V.T.). And yet, this much more biblical notion of love in Mann's novel is far from the traditional view that Shechem rapes Dinah. Thus, when it comes to the consummation of Shechem's longing, Mann tries to downplay the violence inherent in the situation:

Sichem went straight to the coveted consummation with her, and she did not even raise any substantial objections. She was an insignificant thing, submissive and unable to judge or resist. When something happened to her clearly and vigorously, she accepted it as a given—as something natural. Besides, Sichem caused her anything but harm. His other little sisters, including Rehuma the first and preferred one, were also friendly to her. (Mann 128)

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Considering Mann's presentation of Dinah, it is noteworthy to read Robin Parry's assessment of Genesis 34: “The text is singularly clear in exposing the discursive economics of male sexuality, with its exchange of object-females among subject-males” (Parry 10). Mann fully adopts this position by turning Dinah into “an insignificant thing, submissive and unable to judge or resist” (see above), which makes Dinah's plight merely superficially dramatic. It is only thanks to the mental and spiritual emptiness of Mann's Dinah that the rape from the hypotext is turned into a form of “vigorous persuasion” in the hypertext. In essence, there is no rape because Mann, in line with Genesis 34, denies Dinah the completeness of character and the fullness of humanity. This is very different from Diamant's Dinah who is turned into a tragic heroine when her brothers kill Shalem.

## DESTROYED PROMISE

Diamant builds her tragic heroine by “deobjectifying” her, i.e., by turning Dinah into a subject with a complex world of feelings: “I was happy to be alone, thinking only of my beloved, numbering his qualities, imagining his virtues. I stared at my hands and wondered what it would be like to touch his gleaming shoulders” (Diamant 185). Compared to the pragmatic, procreation-based sexual behavior of women in Genesis, the yearning of Diamant's Dina is much closer to *The Song of Songs* than to anything found in the first book of the Bible. And as for the sexual experience itself, Dinah in *The Red Tent* is worlds away from Mann's passive creature whose only sexual behav-

ior is *not objecting*: “We clung to each other until Shalem’s desire was renewed, and I did not hold my breath when he entered me, so I began to feel what was happening to my body, and to understand the pleasures of love” (Diamant 190). It is against this context of subjective emotional depth that we can measure the grandeur of tragedy created in *The Red Tent*.

Furthermore, Diamant makes sure that her heroine is full of young promise so that when the horrible events in Shechem take place and destroy that promise, we are left with a sense of wasted potential. Mann’s Dinah has no potential, which is why her subsequent fate appears grotesquely meaningless—a mere footnote: “As for her, she wasted and shriveled away long before her time” (Mann 136). Diamant, on the other hand, prepares the tragedy of Dinah’s life by stressing the young girl’s thwarted aspirations. An example of this in *The Red Tent* is the excitement experienced by Dinah at the prospect of joining the birthing cycle of life:

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I stared at the tiny buds on the baby boys who ran about naked, and spied upon mating dogs. [...] One night Inna caught me by the side of Judah’s tent, where he and Shua were making another baby. The midwife grabbed my ear and led me away. “It won’t be long now, my girl,” she told me, with a leer. “Your time is coming.” (Diamant 168)

The dramatic irony in Inna’s words is grim because we know that Dinah’s time is not coming. And this can be linked to the general dramatic irony inherent in hypertextuality as a genre. The difference between hope and reality in *The Red Tent* is particularly strong because anyone familiar with the Genesis hypotext can begin grieving for the heroine even prior to the actual tragedy.

Diamant keeps building up the notion of “waiting to live” throughout the first half of the novel. Particularly striking in symbolic terms is the attention given to Dinah’s first period. This event is perceived by the heroine as the most sought-after transformation in her life: “It seemed I had been waiting forever for womanhood [...]. My childhood is over. I will wear an apron and cover my head. I will not have to carry and fetch during the new moon anymore, but will sit with the rest of the women until I am pregnant” (Diamant 170). What follows is an elaborate initiation ceremony that underscores the life-giving powers of women and their connection to the earth (as opposed to the death-giving men of Dinah’s family): “She [Leah] arranged my arms wide, ‘to embrace the earth,’ she whispered. She bent my knees and pulled the soles my feet together until they touched, ‘to give the first blood back to the land,’ said Leah” (Diamant 172). The life-giving blood of menstruation on Dinah’s body is going to be pitted against the blood of Shalem spilled all over her when the prince is murdered in the nuptial bed (Diamant 203).

By ruling out rape, Thomas Mann increases the pathos associated with Shechem’s death. Although the spoiled and superficial prince is not presented as worthy of admiration in *Joseph and his Brothers*, he does not deserve to die. In Diamant’s case, the elimination of the rape scenario serves to *redefine* Dinah as a tragic heroine. Instead of drawing her pathos from having been the victim of sexual abuse, Dinah

in *The Red Tent* suffers a loss presumably even more catastrophic. The man she loves is murdered in her bed! The last part of Diamant's novel illustrates the magnitude of Dinah's plight in that the heroine never recovers from the events in Shechem, leading a life that is but a bleak shadow of what might have been had Simeon and Levi not committed their crime.

## THE PATRIARCH

At the center of Genesis 34 is a treacherous genocidal event—the sacking of a whole city—which necessarily raises questions of basic good and evil. This is important because a towering figure, such as Jacob, ends up drawn into the drama surrounding the bloodbath. The question of how well (morally-speaking) the patriarch performs under the circumstances may be merely a thematic undercurrent in the hypotext, but in *Joseph and his Brothers* and in *The Red Tent* the assessment of Jacob's behavior is crucial. If we consider Jacob in Genesis 34, the patriarch appears in a generally positive light. On the basis of “Jacob's silence while his sons agreed in his presence and in his name to Dinah's marrying Shechem,” we can comfortably assume that nothing in Genesis 34:5-17 indicates any objection on Jacob's part to the marriage of Dinah and Shechem (Fleishman 107). This is further supported by any lack of evidence that the patriarch of Genesis is part of the circumcision trick set up by his sons.

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Still more compelling is the fact that Jacob berates the murderers for sacking Shechem in Genesis 34:30. On his deathbed Jacob even curses Simeon and Levi for what they did in Shechem: “Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly [...] Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!” (Gen. 49: 5-7). If we go beyond Genesis proper and consider the historical context of the text's composition, then it is fruitful to consider Peter Lockwood's hypothesis regarding Jacob's conciliatory attitude toward Shechem:

Genesis 34 is a socio-political document, presenting in an even-handed manner both sides of an on-going debate in Israel about the preferred manner of dealing with people of other faiths and cultures. Within the story, Jacob represents the broader and more pragmatic approach of tolerance, assimilation and cooperation, whereas Jacob's sons represent the religious passion (one might almost say fanaticism) of those who are willing to pay whatever it costs to take a stand on matters affecting orthodox worship and practice. (99)

Thomas Mann and Anita Diamant chose to imagine a Jacob with a heavy conscience based on the patriarch's awareness of his sons' terrible designs. The Jacob of *The Red Tent* is seen through Dinah's accusatory eyes, which makes him appear as an absolute moral failure. To begin with, Diamant's Jacob adopts the position of Simeon and Levi from the Bible where the brothers say the following in justification of their treachery: “Should [Shechem] have treated our sister like a prostitute?” (Genesis

34:31). The traditional idea that a woman's sexual life must be regulated by the males of the clan is voiced by Diamant's Jacob in a manner that does nothing to improve the hypertextual patriarch's character: "The prince of Shechem has claimed her. His father comes to pay the full bride-price of a virgin. And so I assume that she was until she went within the walls of that dung heap of a city.' Jacob was bitter. 'She is of Shechem now, I suppose, and of no use to me'" (Diamant 195). In contrast to the biblical Jacob, here the father has virtually thrown away his daughter, thereby giving tacit consent to the massacre.

This consent is evident in *The Red Tent* from Jacob's behavior in the face of Dinah's wrath after the sacking of Shechem: "He blamed Simon and Levi and turned his back on them. But I saw full understanding in his clouded eyes as he stood before me. I saw his guilt before he had time to deny it" (Diamant 206). Although there is no reason to assume any hypocrisy in the hypotextual patriarch's rebuke of Simeon and Levi (Genesis 34:30), Diamant's Jacob admits his insincerity by not even answering **380** Dinah when she curses him. Since Diamant is concerned with gender politics, the vilification of Jacob serves her purpose of increasing the scale of Dinah's prototypically female tragedy, i.e., the suffering of womanhood in general at the hands of men throughout history. Dinah's agony becomes greater by association with someone as epically magnificent as the third patriarch of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is instrumental in transforming Dinah from a biblical footnote into a central character with whom so many can identify.

However, given all these arguments, it is also possible to turn around and posit that Jacob's negative presentation by Diamant is not without connection to Genesis 34 after all. Although the hypotext's patriarch does castigate his sons for what they have done in Shechem, the wording of this condemnation is worth looking at closely: "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed" (Genesis 34:30). What exactly is Jacob condemning here? The murder? He will certainly do that on his death-bed (Gen. 49:5-7), as has been pointed out earlier. However, in this case something else is at issue. A genocide has just taken place and "Jacob's daughter has just been raped and abducted, yet the 'born-again' patriarch can only think about his own status and safety" (Peter Lockwood: 98).<sup>5</sup> This biblical Jacob is in a way not too far removed from Diamant's Jacob who appears equally self-absorbed when he says that the non-virginal Dinah is of no use to him (above). The Jacob of Genesis 34 can be seen as an egoistical character who sees not only his daughter but also everyone else as a function of his special status.

The awareness of that special status determines Thomas Mann's picture of Jacob's guilt in the Shechem massacre. Jacob's notions of Judaism are virtually absent from *The Red Tent*, leaving only a human being to act out human motives and passions. Mann's Jacob, on the other hand, is a mythical-religious mind first and an individual second. He sees himself, as well as his clan, as a spiritual elite and seeks to fit all his

actions into patterns established by illustrious patriarchal precedent (cf. Raymond Cunningham 55-56). The result is that “Jacob’s awareness of imitation, and his active seeking of it, are of fatal consequence in the Shekem episode” (Charlotte Nolte 81). Placing himself in Abraham’s role (Genesis 17:23), Mann’s Jacob sees the circumcision of the Shechemites as a bond with his tribe: “He had remembered Abraham and the way he, following the Lord’s command and seeking to ally himself with Him, one day had circumcised the flesh of his entire household” (Mann 131). However, whereas the Jacob of Genesis 34 appears to know nothing of his sons’ wicked plans, Mann’s Jacob only *pretends* to be blind: “More than once he wanted to raise his hands and beseech them; but he feared the superior strength of their outraged brotherly pride, their justified right to take revenge” (Mann 132).

The notion of “their *justified* right to take revenge” rules out any true blindness on Jacob’s part. Therefore, I cannot agree with Charlotte Nolte, who argues that in *Joseph and his Brothers* “it is Jacob’s pleasure in imitation which allows him to be deceived about the brothers’ true intent (81; my italics—V.T.). What partially redeems Jacob in Mann’s novel is the narrator’s attitude of indulgent understanding. The patriarch’s mythic thinking, which perceives the world in terms of fulfilled promises and eternal return, is made responsible for Jacob’s tolerance for his sons’ violent intent: “To put the question delicately, was he even secretly a little grateful to them for not making him privy to their plans [...]? Hadn’t God, the King, called out to the sound of harps that he, Jacob, would take possession of the gates of his enemies?” (Mann 132).

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Diamant denies Jacob even this partial shifting of responsibility, holding him fully accountable for his actions. The Jacob of *The Red Tent* is just a rotten human being rather than a mythic dreamer. The difference between Mann’s and Diamant’s presentation of Jacob’s guilt is to a large extent determined by the question of perspective. According to Wayne Booth’s classic contention, an external point of view applied to a character who does something wrong increases the character’s negative presentation. This happens because no redeeming characteristics or considerations within the character’s thought process are available to mitigate the reprehensible action (cf. Booth 245-49). Thus, given that the point of view in *The Red Tent* is Dinah’s, her horror comes to the fore, turning Jacob into a despicable villain and nothing else. Mann, on the other hand, can adopt his indulgent position precisely because he does not bother with Dinah’s point of view and her anguish, delving instead deep into the recesses of Jacob’s mind.

The consciousness of Mann’s patriarch appears to combine two mutually exclusive (from a modern point of view) positions: “He [Jacob] could not sleep anymore from the horror, anguish and the profoundly secret pride generated by the sneaky manliness of his offspring” (Mann 132). In fact, one is faced with two Jacobs here: the moral individual (“horror, anguish”) and the supramoral mythic thinker (“pride generated by the sneaky manliness of his offspring”). One Jacob seems, in a way, to absolve the other or, to quote George Bridges, “[Mann’s] Jacob is a gentle man who hates violence and at the same time a man who sees the necessity of a warrior’s aggressive response

to life” (39).

## THE BROTHERS

If Mann’s and Diamant’s respective presentations of Jacob’s guilt diverge, when it comes to the attitude toward the murderous brothers, *The Red Tent* and *Joseph and his Brothers* adopt similar positions. Genesis already views Simeon and Levi in extremely unflattering terms. The genocidal scale of their revenge appears disproportionate to the original offense—especially in light of the discussion that Abraham has with God about the impending doom of Sodom. When Abraham asks God, “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (Genesis 18:23), God replies in the negative, setting a moral standard which Simeon and Levi violate by killing all the men of Shechem. Then, once the deed is done, the brothers refuse to accept their moral failure, arrogantly rejecting Jacob’s criticism after the massacre (Fleischman 111). Finally, the cursing of Simeon and Levi by Jacob in Genesis 49:5-7 makes the brothers’ guilt in a way eternal since now the tribes stemming from the two murderers have to bear the stigma in the future.

However negative this presentation of the killers may already be in the hypotext, Diamant’s and Mann’s respective retellings paint an even more villainous picture. If Jacob in *Joseph and his Brothers* can look the other way on the pretext of sincere mythic thinking or eternal return, “myth and ritual here are clearly not sacred to [the sons] but are used as a means to an end [revenge]” (Charlotte Nolte 81). The sons are genuinely outraged in the hypotext (Genesis 34:7), which somewhat mitigates their guilt—in the same way as manslaughter is different from murder. However, Mann transforms the real outrage of the hypotext into *fake anger*—an artifice which is by no means hidden by the brothers’ claim that “they glimpsed in [the genocide] a battle with a dragon—the victory of Marduk over Tiamat, the chaos worm” (Mann 133).

The hypocrisy of the murderers is exposed in *Joseph and his Brothers* through two chronological reversals. First, the brothers’ desire to sack Shechem in Mann’s novel precedes the abduction of Dinah by several years. In the passage where the arrival of the Israelites at Shechem is described, we read:

However, the unease of the city-dwellers would have been even greater if they had overheard the conversations among the older sons of the approaching chieftain [...]. Dan was the first who proposed under his breath to descend upon Shechem by means of a ruse and plunder it. (Mann 115-16)

The second reversal has to do with the issue of Shechem’s circumcision. As opposed to what happens in Genesis 34, Simeon and Levi in *Joseph and his Brothers* resort to the circumcision trick before their sister’s virginity has been taken (Mann 126). Thus, according to Mann’s narrator Shechem first asks for Dinah’s hand in marriage. The brothers reply that he can have her only if he circumcises himself. He follows their

instructions, but they refuse to uphold their part of the bargain, resorting to specious arguments: Shechem didn't use a stone knife and Dinah would be only a concubine which would degrade her. It is only at this point that Shechem has Dinah kidnapped in Mann's novel, turning the brothers into nothing more than sadistic schemers. The result of these two changes in the sequence of events by Mann is a shift in emphasis. Genesis 34 presents brothers who react, whereas Mann's brothers manipulate.

In *The Red Tent* Levi and Simeon go yet one step higher than do Mann's characters on the scale of cynicism. Here is what we read about the brothers' reaction to Dinah's relationship with Shalem and the couple's wedding plans:

When they [Simon and Levi] heard that Hamor had offered my father a king's bride-price for me, they raised their voices against the marriage, sensing that their own positions would be diminished by such an alliance. Jacob's house would be swallowed up by the dynasties of Shechem [...] they and their sons would remain shepherds, poor cousins, nobodies. [...] Simon raised his fist and cried, "Revenge! My sister has been ravaged by an Egyptian dog!" (Diamant 198)

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This is cold calculation—even without the flimsy veil of mythology found in Mann's novel. The brothers do not bother with the divine realm or Dinah's honor in *The Red Tent*. They are out for their personal advantage and draw their swords on the basis of realpolitik.

In both novels a contrast is achieved through the intensification of the brothers' guilt. Without absolving Jacob entirely, Mann makes the hypertext's patriarch look better by juxtaposing Jacob's genuine mythic thinking with the abuse of myth by the brothers. Diamant, for her part, uses the contrast to emphasize the peaceful nature of the city sacked by Simeon and Levi. Hamor, the king of Shechem, his queen Re-Nefer, the gentle Shalem and the whole atmosphere of the little town evokes a sense of harmony and natural calm in *The Red Tent*. This is a city not of warriors but of merchants and colorful crowds which fascinate Dinah on her first visit to Shechem: "I saw my first jugglers. I ate my first pomegranate. I saw black faces and brown faces, goats with impossibly curly coats, women covered in black robes and slave girls who wore nothing at all" (Diamant 180). It is especially the tolerant attitude toward the love between Dinah and Shalem on Re-Nefer's part that appears so different from the brutal intolerance characterizing the brothers' reaction (Diamant 193).

## THEOLOGY OF CIRCUMCISION

The circumcision trick in Genesis 34 is more than just a war tactic if we take the religious context into account. As Nicolas Wyatt argues, "given the significance of circumcision as already treated in the covenant story of Genesis 17, Simeon and Levi were now murdering fellow Israelites (even 'Jews')" (434). Diamant turns this into a major issue when making the case against not only the brutality of Simeon and Levi, but also their *irrationality*. In fact the mouthpiece of this position in *The Red Tent* is

the other villain, Jacob, who points out the theological and ethnic issues involved in the mass circumcision: “If the men of Shechem agree to this, none could say that our daughter was injured. If the men of the city make such sacrifice to the god of my fathers, we shall be remembered as makers of souls, as gatherers of men. Like the stars in the heavens, as it was told to our father Abram” (Diamant198). The fact that Jacob points this out is surprising given Diamant’s obvious intention to make the patriarch look very bad indeed. However, the point here is that the author of *The Red Tent* increases the scale of the crime committed by the Israelites since now the sacking of Shechem is an offense against God Himself!

384 Although this notion can be glimpsed in Genesis, given that Jacob curses Levi and Simeon on his death-bed, Diamant adds an important element to the crime against the divine project of enlarging Israel’s numbers. In the hypotext we are told that the Shechemites agree to the circumcision as a one-time concession: “But the men [Israelites] will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are” (Genesis 34:22). There is no indication that subsequent generations in Shechem will be brought into Abraham’s covenant. Future circumcisions may be implicit, to be sure, but the biblical text does not say it directly. Diamant takes that step explicitly: “Hamor promised that every son born within the city *from that time forth* would be circumcised on the eighth day, as was custom among the sons of Abram. Hamor also pledged that *the god of Jacob would be worshiped in his temple*, and the king went as far as to call him Elohim, the one god of many gods” (Diamant 200; my italics—V.T.). There is no doubt here that this constitutes a major contribution to Yahweh’s plan from Genesis 17 to increase the seed of Abraham. And the very descendants of Abraham in *The Red Tent* thwart divine intention for petty, selfish reasons.

Thomas Mann appears to be doing something essentially similar. Here is what the brothers require of the Shechemites in *Joseph and his Brothers*: “Just as Sichem, praised be he, had himself personally circumcised, *from now on* everyone possessing a male name in Shechem must do the same—old men, men and boys—three days from now” (Mann 131; my italics—V.T.). The phrase “from now on” suggests the notion of bringing in converts in line with Genesis 17. However, unlike Diamant, Mann does not indicate the explicit willingness on the part of the Shechemites to join Israel’s religious enterprise. In Mann’s novel the Shechemites view the circumcision as merely an easy way of settling the Dinah question: “The condition seemed extravagant but was at the same time easy to carry out” (Mann 131). Mann’s Sichem and Hamor seem to care nothing about theology, i.e., the meaning behind what they are about to do. At least theologically speaking, this reduces the extent of the offence committed by the brothers since God loses far less through the Shechem massacre in *Joseph and his Brothers* than in *The Red Tent*.

## CONCLUSION

The key difference between Thomas Mann's and Anita Diamant's respective retellings of Genesis amounts to focus. Mann certainly pursues a humanistic agenda quite at odds with much of the dogmatic spirit characterizing the Old Testament. However, his focus is still bound up with the patriarchal experience, i.e., his protagonists are Jacob and Joseph—exactly as they are in Genesis. Diamant focuses all attention on Dinah and the female experience in the biblical world. And this has interesting implications with respect to the grand plan of the male Israelite deity. In the Old Testament, the fate of Israel stems from its contracts with God—from Abraham's covenant to Mt. Sinai. The function of the Shechem pericope is at most a minor etiology that explains the marginalization of two tribes within the Israelite federation: Levi and Simeon (David Noel Freedman 58). In *The Red Tent*, however, the importance of Genesis 34 is not only magnified far beyond the hypotext's intentions, but the etiological direction is changed entirely. A huge span of Hebrew history and theology comes out of the curses shouted by the outraged Dinah after the sacking of Shechem.

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Thus, Dinah curses her father and predicts that all his hardship will be a punishment for being a tacit accomplice to the genocide: "Jacob shall never know peace again. He will lose what he treasures and repudiate those he should embrace. He will never find rest, and his prayers will not find the favor of his father's god" (Diamant 206). This implies that the loss of Rachel, Joseph's sale into slavery, the famine in Palestine, exile in Egypt—all originate with Dinah's tragedy. As a result, Dinah becomes the engine that drives much of the Patriarchal Saga.

Even more significant is what Diamant does with the renaming of Jacob: "Jacob cowered and took a new name, Isra'EL, so that the people would not remember him as the butcher of Shechem" (Diamant 208). The change from Jacob to Israel in Genesis 35:9-10 is absolutely fundamental to the vision of Judaism since this pericope constitutes the transformation of the patriarch into a people, i.e., a handful of disparate bedouin tribes into a confederation. By making this name change a function of Dinah's story, *The Red Tent* in a way usurps the masculine ideology of Judaism and subjugates it to the entirely different goal of putting the Bible's women on the map. If the name Israel carries with it Dinah's curse and the blood of Shechem, and given that Israel encompasses all the Jews, their scripture and even their God, *The Red Tent* puts an very original spin on the Bible. Under Anita Diamant's pen, Dinah's anguished voice is heard through every word in holy writ.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Gérard Genette's definition of hypertextuality is as follows: "I use this term to indicate any connection between text B (which I will call hypertext) and a pre-existing text A (which I will of course call hypotext). Text B is grafted onto Text A in a way that goes beyond mere commentary [...]. Therefore, I will call hypertext any text derived from a prior text" (11-14; my translation—V.T.).
- 2 Joseph Fleishman adopts a different approach. He allows for the possibility of force used by Shechem

against Dinah but goes on to suggest that kidnapping for the purpose of marriage may have been a legitimate practice in sedentary Canaanite society. The nomadic Hebrews would have seen this, however, as an affront (105). Fleishman bolsters this argument as follows: "Hamor, the father of Shechem, who negotiated with Dinah's family in order that they agree to marry her to Shechem (v. 8-17), did not ask Jacob or Dinah's brothers for forgiveness" (104). Thus, even though force would have been used, according to this interpretation, it was still not a crime—at least in the eyes of the Shechemites. In the case of Tamar and Amnon, there is no doubt that an outrage has taken place—from any point of view.

- 3 Joseph Fleishman even argues that the use of the term "young maiden" ("girl" in the New International Version of the Bible) in reference to Dinah is an indication of Shechem's feelings of love (104).
- 4 In fact this word is used in the hypotext (Genesis 34:21) where Shechem explains the circumcision requirement to his people and argues that the Hebrews are safe—"shelemim." (Peter Lockwood: 101)
- 5 It is possible to shift the focus of Jacob's concern from himself to the entire clan, which in fact does come through in Genesis 34:30. However, even in that case, as Richard J. Clifford and Roland E. Murphy point out, "Jacob's rebuke considers only the safety of the community" (35). The word "only" is important here because the patriarch is still unconcerned with the tragedy of Shechem or his daughter's experience. So either way, whether it is egoism or ethnocentrism, Jacob's position is morally weak. In fact he admits this indirectly by cursing Simeon and Levi for "killing men in their anger" in Genesis 49:6. The sons are no longer seen in the death-bed episode as those who endangered the safety of the clan at Shechem but as murderers. And if Jacob failed to point that out right after the massacre, some of the spilled blood soils his hands too.