

From Named to Nameless, from Bad to Inspid: Eve between First Testament and Qur'an¹

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In this article I will present a comparison of the character of Eve as she appears in creation narratives both in the First Testament (Old Testament) and in the Qur'an.² My primary purpose is to bring to life the character of Eve in both texts and to examine how the Qur'an has adopted the narratives from the First Testament and what this has meant for the character of Eve.

As far as I can ascertain no scholar has produced a work solely on the topic I have chosen, but there are sections of scholarly works which relate strongly to the topic. Of the works which include a consideration of Eve in First Testament and Qur'an, three are worthy of note—Dorothee Sölle and Joe Kirchberger's (1994) *Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature*; the anthology *Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, edited by Kristen Kvam et al (1999); and John Phillips' *Eve: The History of an Idea* (1984).

In *Great Women of the Bible*, Sölle (1994) highlights individual women, including Eve (in Gen 1:26-29; 2:1-25; 3:1-24; 4:1-2), as the central characters of biblical stories. Extra-biblical materials from ancient, medieval, and post-medieval sources follow the biblical commentary. In this latter section of each chapter, Joe Kirchberger (1994) surveys the history of interpretation, including the Quranic references. Whilst Sölle (1994) adds insightful commentary that uses the biblical texts to draw out the meaning of the particular woman in the story, the same cannot be said of her co-author. Kirchberger (1994) paraphrases relevant Quranic passages on the women but, in an ironic twist, appears to maintain the silencing and exclusion of the women in these stories as we find them in the Qur'an.

In the anthology *Eve & Adam*, (Kvam 1999) primary documents about Adam and Eve are gathered from the three monotheistic semitic religious traditions within Chapter 1 (Genesis) and Chapter 5 (Qur'an), to examine the history of interpretation of the two figures, especially in relation to the assigning of gender roles. The readings presented can be divided into two broad categories: interpretations which consider that the story of Adam and Eve prescribes a hierarchical relationship between the sexes, and those who consider that the story shows an egalitarian relationship between

the sexes. Although this is more than a collection of sources, the chapters provide no sustained commentary on the character of Eve.

In *Eve: The History of an Idea*, John Phillips (1984) presents a study of Eve in Genesis, the Talmud, the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as the New Testament, to support his contention that the character of Eve has been misinterpreted within Western culture. He concentrates on motifs in art as well as the texts to provide a summary of interpretation. Thus his work on Genesis, "The Lady of the Rib", moves not so much from a reading of the text but rather from artistic representations of its events, such as the artwork of the Sistine Chapel (Phillips, 1984:25). His treatment of the Eve of the Qur'an, "Countertradition: Heretical Eve", rests on a reading of suras 7 and 20 only, ignoring the third key passage in sura 2, and moving from these two suras to outline from the Qur'an and Hadith the position or status of women in Islam (Phillips, 1984:150-2).

Works which consider Eve in the First Testament are far more numerous; in fact there are hundreds of works or sections of works currently available, mostly from feminist authors, on Eve in the First Testament. Perhaps the most comprehensive commentary on the Genesis passages is found in Athalya Brenner's (1993) *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, in which many of the leading feminist scholars are represented. Carol Meyers' (1988) *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* investigates the character of Eve as a symbol of women, and from this basis she interprets the way in which women in general are presented in the First Testament. Meyers (1988) regards Eve as a major character but she is not interested as I am in the detail of development of the character within the two Genesis narratives. For Meyers, Eve is a symbol and role model of the Israelite woman within the First Testament rather than Eve an active character in a narrative: "An important corollary of our goal in setting out to discover Everywoman Eve lies in the relationship of that woman to biblical women" (Meyers, 1988: 5).

Typical of the smaller sections within works on Eve is Alice Laffey's chapter "The Badly Maligned Eve (Genesis 2-3)" in her book, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Laffey, 1988: 21-7). From her reading of Genesis 2-3, Laffey concludes that "Eve has a minor role in the story as a result of the patriarchal culture in which the text was produced" (Laffey, 1988: 26). Eve is maligned in the story as the cause of sin in the world. While Laffey reads in a way similar to that in which I intend to read, her conclusions are somewhat overshadowed by her feminist perspective. Laffey's reading of Eve as a maligned woman and minor character is quite different from my reading of Eve as major character and "bad girl with attitude". Similarly, Beverly Stratton's "slow reading" of Genesis 2 and 3, although from a feminist literary perspective, treats Eve as a minor character, focussing instead on the figure of God (Stratton, 1995:17-66).

Not all scholars who work on Eve in Genesis provide their own reading of the text as a basis for their interpretation. Deborah Sawyer, for example, simply accepts the prominence of Eve that is the general result of the impact of feminist critical work

within Jewish, Christian, and biblical studies (Sawyer, 1992:273), and subsequently, rather than detailed work in the Genesis text, spends more time critiquing the works of others on Eve, especially Christian theologians like Tribble (1978), Clines (1978) and Daly. The focus is squarely on how various Christian theologians have reacted to the Genesis narratives rather than on the character of Eve herself.

Two works in particular consider Eve in the Qur'an—Barbara Freyer Stowasser's *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, and Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. In her chapter on Eve, Stowasser highlights the way in which women characters are not named in the Qur'an. While she notes this phenomenon in relation to Eve, as well as the fact that the Qur'an fails to indicate how Eve was created, Stowasser does not go further than raising this issue (Stowasser, 1994:25).

Amina Wadud includes comment on Eve within a small section of her book (Wadud, 1999:23-7). However, the book is not about the women *characters* in the Qur'an, nor about the texts in which women characters appear in the Qur'an, but rather it is about woman's role and status in society in relation to texts about woman's role and status in the Qur'an.

Apart from the books mentioned above, some general works consider aspects of women in First Testament or Qur'an relevant to my topic. Again, there are numerous books devoted to the First Testament from both Jewish and Christian writers; far fewer are devoted to women in the Qur'an. Two books in particular are important among the latter—Fatima Mernissi's (1991) *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, and Leila Ahmed's (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*.

John Rogerson lists some of the various disciplines from which First Testament studies have borrowed over the last twenty years or so: "modern literary theory, sociology and social anthropology, such approaches as structuralism, close reading and a renewed interest in the social background to the Bible" (Rogerson, 1991:14). While it has been mostly Western Christian and Jewish biblical scholars who have developed modern academic critical methods of reading the sacred texts,³ there have also been some recent attempts on the part of Muslim scholars to bring critical methods to bear on the text of the Qur'an and Hadith. Among those who have been recently prominent are a number of Muslim women such as Amina Wadud, Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, and Barbara Freyer Stowasser, who have obviously taken a keen Muslim feminist interest in the stories of women in the Qur'an and Hadith. Needless to say it is mostly within these works that I have found studies on the character of Eve in the creation stories of the Qur'an.

In this article I use a narrative critical reading method to study the character of Eve. This is first and foremost a literary critical method in which the scholar is interested in the development of the narrative as it appears in its final form in the text—the focus is on the text itself rather than on the community or historical situation that stands behind the text (Kingsbury, 1997: 1). As Mark Powell (1997) points out,

the critical methods of biblical scholarship in the past have often been used as a resource for historical reconstruction. Now the newer literary criticism has shifted the focus to the text as a work of literature in its own right, in other words this criticism approaches the text as literature rather than investigating it for historical or theological concerns. Not that the latter are held as unimportant by the narrative critic; it is simply that the study of the literary dimension of the text produces insights that are relevant for understanding the historical and theological dimensions of the text (Powell, 1997:9). This kind of reading is the first of three critical processes identified by Brett. First, there is the attempt to establish from the text itself what it is trying to convey. Second, there is the study of the text primarily from the point of view of its motivation within a presumed political and social setting. Third, there is an attempt to put the text in the wider context of ideas known from extra-biblical material to have existed in the ancient Near East (Rogerson, 1991:48). Rogerson sums up succinctly, “[L]iterary interpreters are concerned with the inner dynamics of the text itself, and not necessarily with reference to reality outside the text” (Rogerson, 1991:16). In this article, my primary interest is the dynamics of the text itself, although I may make reference occasionally to the broader context of the text.

The narrative critical method is interested in the structure of the plot and how that unfolds for the reader/listener, characterisation, climaxes and their resolution, the act of narration itself, and so on. Since this method is applied to texts in their final form, the critic is not concerned about possible sources of the narratives, as the practitioner of the more traditional historical critical method would be. As Gottwald comments: “New literary criticism, however, looks at the rhetorical texture of the work as a finished whole rather than viewing it along a chronological line of development from small units through larger cycles to the last stage of composition” (Gottwald, 1985:23).

This method is also not concerned for the chronological placement of narratives within the complete corpus of scripture. This is especially relevant for the Qur’an, where the order of the suras is not based on the chronology of the revelations to Muhammad but rather on their relative length, beginning with the longest sura after the first ‘credal’ sura.

The narrative critical method is complex in its interests. Eagleton sums up the categories used by Gérard Genette: *récit*—the actual order of events in the text; *histoire*—the sequence in which those events ‘actually’ occurred; and *narration*—concerning the act of narrating itself (Eagleton, 1983:105). In this article I work with all three categories, although my use of the category of narration will be done very simply. The category of narration is very complex since it involves both narrators and readers. Beverly Stratton, for example, when reading the Genesis creation stories, identifies a multiplicity of readers and levels of reading—the first time contemporary reader, the experienced contemporary reader, the early Hebrew listener to the “history”, the Hebrew reader familiar with biblical narratives, the feminist reader, white reader, male or female reader, academic or student reader, educated or confessing reader

(Stratton, 1995:23-4). On the other hand, Scullion identifies a three-fold role for the author/narrator—the role of receiver, transmitter, and contributor (Scullion, 1992:34). In this article, I will be referring quite simply to the narrator within the text.

Of course the narrator cannot be ignored, and much of my reading will flow as a result of letting the narrator guide me—from the very positive view of the garden to the very negative view of the conversation between the serpent and the woman, so that at least with the latter what one would normally see as positive (the desire for insight, for understanding, for the knowledge of good and evil) is judged negatively.⁴ However, it is also possible to read against the narrator to some extent, “reading against the grain” as many feminist biblical critics put it, so that the narrator is not necessarily the most powerful figure in this process—at times the reader may be. And within the tradition of reading these stories over many centuries, it may be that particular readers become all-powerful, like Augustine within the Christian tradition, who has left an indelible stamp on the interpretation of the Genesis stories in light of his theology of the Fall and original sin.⁵ Commentaries may in fact ignore the narrator in the text in favour of a powerful reader like Augustine. Narrative critical reading can be one way of reading texts again with a fresh perspective so as to hear the narrator and to avoid possibly entrenched theological misconceptions about the text.

A number of scholars have already used a narrative critical method on the Genesis material relevant to my study. There has been work on characterisation to some extent, for example in Athalya Brenner’s (1985) typology of female narrative types within the First Testament—queens, wise women, women poets and authors, prophetesses, magicians, sorcerers and witches, female prostitutes, mothers of great men, temptresses, foreign women and the ancestress. Carol Meyers has also provided Genesis paradigms for female roles (Meyers, 1998:72-121). An actual narrative reading, similar to what I propose to do, has been done by some of the scholars mentioned above, such as Phillips, Laffey, van Wolde, and Stratton, although their reading is not always specifically limited to the two creation stories in Genesis.

While I have outlined above some critical work, especially by Muslim women, on the text of the Qur’an, there has been virtually no systematic approach to a critical reading of the Qur’an by Muslim scholars. That situation is beginning to be addressed to some extent now, but the same method of narrative critical reading has not been applied to the Quranic suras. The method of narrative criticism applied to Genesis and the Qur’an may appear straightforward enough, but the fact that these texts are by their nature theological raises complex issues.

There are a number of other methods which can be quite successfully applied as a complement to the focus on plot and character development within narrative criticism. Structuralists like Edmund Leach and Claude Levi-Strauss, or structural readings from scholars such as David Clines (1978), would take the discussion of the creation narratives in Genesis a step further to look for the deeper structures, commenting on themes like chaos and ordering, or creation, destruction and recreation.⁶ While such studies can be helpful, they tend to ignore the detail of plot

and character development to concentrate on the grand sweeping and overarching themes of what the scholars seem to see essentially as primal epics. In focussing on the grand themes, the smaller characters and twists in the plot tend to become lost. For this reason, and because the women characters must already struggle lest they become invisible in the stories, I concentrate on a very simple narrative approach and leave aside other complementary methods such as structural criticism.

While I am doing a narrative reading on both the Genesis material and the Qur'an in this article, I am going one step further to compare readings. While the focus is on the character of Eve, I am not concerned only for her character but move further to question ideology and the anthropological bases for positions taken about Eve in the narrative. It is an attempt to critique ideology that is basic to the very structure of the plot itself in certain narratives—"interpretative narratives" as Paul Ricoeur characterises them (Ricoeur, 1990:237) – of which the creation stories are examples. Clines and Exum see this as the fourth characteristic of the new literary criticism on biblical texts—that they "press beyond 'interpretation' to 'critique'" (Clines and Exum, 1993:14).

In my critical approach, while I am focussed on female characterisation, I am not undertaking the work from a feminist standpoint, although my reading has been informed by feminist viewpoints as one subsection of the scholarly works consulted. Alice Laffey presents a good example of the types of issues that one finds in the present multitude of feminist readings, providing an introduction to First Testament themes from a feminist perspective—patriarchy, men's history, men's language, women as men's possessions, and so on—and more specifically on the theme of "the badly maligned Eve" (Laffey, 1988:8-27).⁷

It would be naive to suggest that the stories of the First Testament as we know them in their present modern setting were adapted by Muhammad into the Qur'an. We have very little knowledge of either the Jewish or Christian communities with which Muhammad was in contact in Mecca and Medina, although we know they were highly influential in the early stages of the foundation of his new religion. I would expect that Muhammad's knowledge of the creation stories might have come to him partly via their rabbinical midrashic form, especially from *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, better known as *Genesis Rabba*, which came to completion sometime between 350 and 450 CE (Neusner, 1991:3). How else would one explain the extra details one finds in the Qur'an such as the demand by God that the angels bow down before his new creation of Adam, in which situation Iblis refuses? It would seem to me to be a conflation of two stories in *Genesis Rabba*: first, the contention between two parties of angels who are either for or against the creation of the first man (VIII.V.1.A); and second, the story of the angels who bow down to the first man, saying "Holy", mistaking him for the Holy One, since he is made in the image of the Holy One (VIII.X.1.A) (Neusner, 1991:61-3).⁸ J. Eisenberg comments that later Muslim legend about Adam and his wife draws on both rabbinical sources and the Syriac "Cavern of Treasures" (Eisenberg, 1971:295b). George Sale too mentions Jewish tradition behind

the story of the angelic prostration (from the Talmud) and Adam's naming of all things, without stipulating the exact sources (Sale and Wherry, 1896:vol 1, 301).

One further point should be noted. I am attempting here a critical reading in an academic sense. Not all of the secondary literature relevant to this study approaches the texts from the same academic viewpoint, some presenting a difficulty when confessional stances overwhelm the critical enterprise. Of course there is no way of avoiding even implicit confessional aspects in the reading when scholars from all of these traditions engage in critical reading. However these aspects may be viewed as either having potential or limitation depending on the degree to which they may aid the interpretive exercise or be allowed to overwhelm it. When contemporary ideas about temptation and the strength of belief are allowed to overwhelm the exegesis of passages, then this cannot be regarded as critical academic work. Thus, Sale comments on the description in sura 7:16 of Satan's temptation/attack on Adam and his wife from every side, that Satan's power is limited over true believers because he is not said to attack them from above and below; the commentary seems to be overly influenced by a contemporary view of what Satan and his power represents (Sale and Wherry, 1896:vol 2, 206).

The text of the Qur'an itself is held to be directly from God and cannot therefore contradict itself. This belief influences the exegesis of Ahmad, who uses other verses in the Qur'an to counter what appears to my reading to be at least self-evident. Thus, he writes that the angels could not have been ordered to prostrate before Adam because another verse in the Qur'an says that believers may only prostrate before God (41:38) and that Iblis could not have been an angel since angels do not disobey God (66:7) (Ahmad, 1988:83-4). Yusuf Ali seems not to have the same difficulty with apparent discrepancies, commenting that the verses about the disobedience of the angels or Iblis should be read as written, pointing out that the problem for commentators is that the theory of the fallen angels is not usually accepted in Muslim theology (Ali, 1983:25).

Christian writers may fall into the same trap. Meredith Kline, for example, attempts to read the creation of the woman from Adam in the light of Pauline theology from the New Testament and from later Christian ideas about marriage:

The *deep sleep* was not so much an anaesthetic for the man as a veil about the woman until she was prepared to be led as a bride to her wedding. Paul understood this record of the woman's origins as straightforward history, observing that 'man was not made from woman, but woman from man'. (Kline, 1970:84)

In what follows I will present a narrative reading of the first two creation stories in the Book of Genesis in which Eve figures as one of the key characters. I will present a similar reading for the character of Eve within several suras from the Qur'an which also deal with the creation story.

Eve in the First (Old) Testament: a first reading

Eve appears in the First Testament, for the most part, in the two creation narratives in Gen 1-3. We know of her first as “the woman” or Adam’s “helpmate” (Heb. עֵרָה *‘ezer*), “his partner”, “his woman” or “his wife”, and it is only at the end of the second story that she is finally named in Gen 3:20, after the crucial activity has taken place.

After a short introduction which describes the state in the beginning (Gen 1:1-2), the first creation story (Gen 1:1-2:4a) is structured into small sections which describe the work of the creator God on a particular day (numbered 1 through 7) and which conclude with the refrain “And there was evening and there was morning, the ... day”. Within the section devoted to the creation on the sixth day, a male person (we assume the later Adam) and a female person (we assume the later Eve) appear within the category “humankind” (Heb. אָדָם *‘adam*) in Gen 1:26, where God signals the intention to make humankind in God’s image and likeness. It is the climax of the narrative, since this is the final act of creation and within it all the previously created things will be placed under the dominion or care of the human couple. It is also the climax, since we move afterwards to the “rest” of God, a clear anticlimax after his magnificent cosmic creativeness.

The deed of creation is carried out in 1:27, and humankind is created in its two sexes of male and female. In 1:28 God blesses them and gives them a number of commands: that they must multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing that swims, crawls and flies. Finally, God gives them and the animals the gift of plants as food in 1:29-30.

In this first story Eve appears as one of the pair of humans, created as the male is in the image and likeness of God, and addressed by God together with the male in the commands.

In the second story (Gen 2:4b-3:24), we have a much smaller cast of four (or five?) main characters—God, the earth creature, the man (Adam), the woman (later named as Eve) and the serpent. The story is divided into a number of dramatic scenes rather than into small formal liturgical subsections as in the first story. Eve does not appear until the third scene, but the first two scenes must be considered to some extent for what they imply about her by default.

Only two characters play in scenes one and two—God and the earth creature. The character of God is a much more “vividly anthropomorphic” deity than in the first story (Alter, 1996: 7). In scene one (2:4b-14), God forms a creature (Heb. אָדָם *‘adam*) from the ground (Heb. אֲדָמָה *‘adamah*), and breathes the breath of life into his nostrils (2:7). He also creates a garden and its vegetation into which he puts the creature. In this scene the earth creature should be thought of as sexless and androgynous. Tribble suggests that he is “neither male or female nor a combination of both” (Tribble, 1978:98). Scullion calls him “everyman” (Scullion, 1992:35). It is this earth creature (whom we shall call Adam) who eventually becomes the male character in Gen 2:22-23, that is, the man differentiated from the woman who is created from

him.

The narrator commences scene two (2:15-17) by repeating that God puts the creature/Adam into the garden. This is a small scene but of great importance to the plot, for it is at this stage that God commands Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil although he may eat of everything else in the garden (2:16); to eat of it will mean death (2:17). Very few commentaries discuss the latter verse. Of these few, only Gunkel muses that perhaps we are meant in the first instance to interpret that the fruit itself is poisonous and only secondly to interpret that God will punish any transgression by death (Gunkel, 1997:10).

The woman makes her first appearance in scene four (2:18-25), along with a first appearance for animals. The scene contains four small subsections, all focussed on the need that God perceives for a helper or partner for the man so that he should not be alone.⁹ First God creates living creatures in an effort to find a helper (2:19). Adam names them (2:20), and his naming is definitive and authoritative. When the animals and birds are not found to be satisfactory (2:20), God puts the man into a deep sleep and creates a woman from him, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”, as Adam exclaims in delight (2:23).

The man, his body, is the centre and the first human from whom the woman is drawn. She is led to him (2:22), much as the animals have been led to him to be named earlier (2:19). In fact, Adam names her as well, “this one shall be called woman” (2:23). In this action of naming is his power over her. The partnership between the man and the woman, too, is seen in terms of a man’s development in life. In the conclusion of the scene, the narrator tells us that a man leaves his earlier home with parents and becomes one with his woman. The narrator appears to share automatically the perspective of the man (Van Wolde, 1996:59-60).¹⁰ We are not told what is the woman’s development up to the point of joining with her man.

With scene four (3:1-7), we begin the second major section of the story. Here the action centres on the woman and the serpent, who, the narrator informs us, is the most cunning or wise of the creatures in the garden (3:1). The Hebrew term ערום *‘arum*, meaning “crafty”, “cunning”, “shrewd”, or “sensible”, should not be taken in a negative sense; the same term is used, for example, in Prov. 12:23 for a shrewd or sensible man (Brown et al, 1978:791a). The man is present as well, but we are not told this fact until 3:6 (“her husband who was with her”). The serpent has been turned into Satan through later Rabbinical and Christian exegesis of the story, but there is no hint of this in the original narrative. Interestingly, the craftiness or cunning of the serpent is tied lexically to the nakedness of the human couple mentioned in the previous verse, for the Hebrew word which we translate as “naked” (עֶרְמוּם *‘erumim*) comes from the same root (Heb. עָרַם *‘arum*) which is used to form the Hebrew word for “cunning” (עָרוּם *‘arum*).

The scene focusses on the lengthy conversation between the woman and the serpent. The serpent lives up to its reputation for craftiness and cunning. Von Rad describes how he opens the conversation in a very cautious way with a “masterpiece

of psychological shading”, posing an interesting and quite general question which cunningly distorts the truth (Von Rad, 1973:88). The conversation turns on the command not to eat of the tree and on what it means, both *for God* and *for the woman*. How does the woman or the serpent know of the command since neither existed when it was given? Both the serpent and the woman presume that she (the woman) is included in the commands about what might and might not be eaten in the garden. While the woman tells the serpent that the tree is not to be touched, this was not part of the original command. The serpent suggests to the woman that the command not to eat of the fruit rests on God’s wish not to share everything with the humans; eating of it will make her like God, knowing good and evil. Moreover God has lied: they will not die but will live (3:3).

The woman sees that the tree is good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desired so as to make one wise. She eats and then gives some to her husband who is with her and he eats (3:6). Scullion asks why one creature would entice another from the creator, a question which the text does not address (Scullion, 1992:38). Throughout this scene in the garden, the man is very much a secondary character somewhere in the background. It is the woman who has been the active participant and her husband the passive participant, Adam Tag-along as Westermann names him. “He falls into transgression by joining in” (Westermann, 1987:23).

As a result of eating the fruit, they realise that they are naked (3:7). The realisation appears to be tied to the concept of what it means to know good and evil, so we are left to presume some kind of shame about sexuality, or at least physical nakedness tied to the act of disobedience/defiance/desire in eating of the fruit. We have already noted the lexical connection between the serpent’s cunning nature and the nakedness of the human couple.

Scene five (3:8-24) incorporates, generally speaking, several smaller sections: interrogation, judgment, and expulsion from the garden. Having seen their nakedness, the man and the woman hide when they hear the voice or sound of God in the garden (3:8). When God finds them, he calls to the man and interrogates him about the act of disobedience (3:9-12). Once again, even though the woman is present, and the serpent too, the interaction takes place only between God and the man. The man too speaks only for himself when answering to God (the Hebrew forms are all singular and masculine). The man blames *both* the woman and God for what has happened (3:12), and it is only at this point that God speaks to the other two characters: to the woman, to interrogate her but in much less detail than the man; and to the serpent, to pronounce judgment without the benefit of interrogation first. Judgment follows for the woman and then for the man. In a pattern typical of Hebrew writers, judgement on the trio moves in the opposite order (serpent, woman, man) to their interrogation (man, woman, [serpent]).

God separates the man and the woman in the decrees, in the same way as he separates the former allies, the woman and the serpent. Perhaps it is a plan of divide and conquer against those who may have formed a cunning pair against God. In 3:16

God decrees pain for the woman in childbirth, and a place of subordination beneath her man who will have power over her. It is essentially her desire that will be her undoing. She will desire her man, and he will rule over her. The man will also have painful labour (the same Hebrew noun עֲצֻבֹן *'isabon* is used for the pain/pangs of the man and the woman) (Alter, 1996:14), but within a different context.

It is clear here that desire takes a central place in the narrative. The woman's first desire was for knowledge and the result of this knowledge is a sexual knowing (nakedness). The punishment for this is that she will desire her husband.¹¹ The man's punishment, unlike his wife's, is not linked to desire. Rather, he is punished because he listened to his wife's voice and ate the fruit. The blame is squarely on the woman, and yet there seems no logic to place it there rather than on both—if the woman has a fatal flaw (i.e. desire) then how has this been acquired without reference to the man, from whom she was created? The story does not tell us. Neither does it tell us how the man has acquired his passivity in relation to the woman.

Finally, in Gen 3:20, Eve is named. We have waited until now to know the name of the woman, and the significance of her name. Eve (Heb. חַוָּה *hawah*) is the mother of all the living (from Heb. חַיָּה *hayah* “to live”), the human race to follow her. This will be significant further in the story in chapters four and five, concerning her sons. Adam “knows” Eve (but does Eve know Adam?) and she bears sons, becoming the first mother (4:1). At least with one of her sons, Seth, she has the authority (only in the version of the story in chapter 4) to name him.

From 3:22, we discover that there are two important trees, not one: first, the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and second, the tree of life (3:22). We realise that God has indeed lied to the human couple. The tree of life could provide immortality and God expels them from the garden, before they can recognise the tree for what it is and eat of the fruit (Gen 3:22). We also learn that eating of the first tree has had the effect that the serpent promised—they did become like God. Here again we have an intimation of divinity for the human couple.

What can we conclude briefly about the two creation stories in Genesis and of Eve's place in them? In the first story, the formal liturgical setting limits the extent to which the narrator provides a dramatic plot. In the small section devoted to the creation of humankind, we learn briefly that the woman (we presume Eve) is one member of the pair of humans, created equally in the image and likeness of God, and addressed equally by God. There is no development of her character, but neither is there any development of the man's character. The approach to the woman (Eve) is inclusive with the man.

In the second story, it is obvious that *God has a relationship only with the man*. Even when driving the human couple from the garden, God ignores the woman. This appears to suggest that all along the woman is subordinate and not to be dealt with directly. However, the woman does not hide in the shadows but rather initiates action with the serpent and provides her own story, albeit a “naughty” one. If she has been ignored, then it seems of little consequence to her, until she must face the judgment

of God for her initiative. Indeed, we need to consider whether the woman is actually a threat to God (and thus deliberately ignored by him) because he knows that she will gain some measure of divinity. Even without the possibility that “image and likeness” in the first story might denote a certain divinity, the second story may imply it for her, not only in her role as helper for Adam as God is so often helper for Israel, but also as a result of her eating of the tree that would make her like God.

Eve in the Qur’an: a first reading

The second creation story from the First Testament (Gen 2:4b–3:24) appears in a number of suras in the Qur’an, although in a significantly shorter, or possibly paraphrased form. It is within these narratives that Adam’s wife (Eve remains unnamed throughout the narratives) appears principally in the Qur’an. In this section I will concentrate on the creation story as told in suras 2, 7 and 20. The creation of humankind is mentioned briefly elsewhere (4:1, 39:6), but I will focus on suras 2, 7 and 20 since, individually, they give the most detailed accounts.

The cast of characters in all three suras includes four individuals—God, Iblis/Satan, Adam, Adam’s wife—and the group of the angels. The major characters in each sura are God and Adam, with Adam’s wife only mentioned in passing. Iblis/Satan is a pivotal character but only briefly mentioned in suras 2 and 20. He has a larger part to play in sura 7. In all three accounts, God takes centre stage, the scenes of greater relative weight linked with his appearance and activity. Among the other characters, prominence is given to Adam and Iblis/Satan. The prominence given to Adam is much greater than in the Genesis narratives. This is reflected in the commentaries which concentrate on Adam with very little to say about Adam’s wife. For one attempting to study the character of Eve, there are real difficulties in the commentaries with this almost exclusive interest in the character of Adam.

In sura 2, the story is divided into four scenes or narrative actions, some of these no more than a verse in length. Scene one begins with a discussion between God and the angels concerning God’s intention to create Adam as his viceregent on the earth (2:30). The angels disagree with God’s intention to create Adam, but God goes ahead with the creation, although the text provides no details of the act. In the following verses we are told that God teaches Adam the names of all things, something not given to the angels themselves (2:31–32). In fact, when challenged to name what they know, the angels admit that they have no knowledge of the names but only the knowledge that God is all-knowing and wise, the only knowledge given them by God (2:33). God subsequently commands the angels to prostrate before Adam, and one angel, Iblis, refuses to do so because of his pride (2:34).

Scene two begins with the command to Adam and his wife to dwell in the garden in 2:35. We are not told how Adam’s wife is created; she appears suddenly in the narrative at this point. In 2:35 both humans are commanded not to eat from “the tree”. Scene three includes the temptation by Satan. In 2:36 there is a brief reference to Satan who makes Adam and his wife “slip from the garden” by means of the tree.

Iblis appears to undergo a change of name to Satan at this point. Ahmad considers that Iblis (for him, a jinn rather than an angel) is not identical to Satan, but all other commentaries consider this to be the case (Ahmad, 1988: Vol 1, 83-8). In scene four, we are told of the banishment of Adam and his wife from the garden, but not before Allah has spoken words of inspiration to Adam in 2:37, perhaps by way of compensation for banishment. Iblis/Satan too is banished with them to a lower place, earth, where all three characters become enemies of each other.

Sura 7 gives by far the most comprehensive account of the creation of Adam and his wife, although it relies on sura 2 for the main detail. It also incorporates an extra scene between God and Iblis. Scene one covers the creation of Adam, although with more detail in 7:11 that Iblis has been made from fire, whereas Adam has been made from clay. Iblis considers that his origin from fire makes him better than Adam, and gives him the grounds for refusing to prostrate before Adam (7:12). Once again there is no mention of how Adam's wife was made, although elsewhere (4:2; 7:190; 39:6) we are informed that she was created "out of Adam", out of the same human stuff as the first person, from the spirit of God.

In this account, much more is made of the character of Iblis/Satan and his role in the action, and this seems to be the basis for the extra scene included at this stage of the narrative in which there is a conversation between God and Iblis. It is clear that Iblis, after failing the test of prostration before Adam, is waiting to take his revenge on Adam and his wife and even accuses God of misleading him (7:16).

Scene three repeats the description of Adam dwelling with his wife in the garden and the command to them not to eat from the tree; God warns them that they will run into harm and transgression if they do (7:19). In scene four, Satan speaks with both Adam and his wife, convincing the pair that he is their friend and adviser, and he succeeds in tempting them to eat of the tree by saying that they will become angels and immortal if they do (7:20-21). Shame comes even before they eat of the fruit, as Satan whispers to them "all their shame that was hidden from them" (7:20). Sale translates this verse as "their nakedness which was hidden from them", as if they are given a prior glimpse of their nakedness which will result from their eating of the tree (Sale and Wherry, 1896: vol 2, 207). Whichever way one translates the verse, the action of feeling shame or of viewing nakedness comes prior to the action from which the feeling is meant to come. The actual eating of the fruit takes place in 7:22. Both eat the fruit, however there is no mention of Adam's wife eating it first or enticing Adam to eat, and the blame for the transgression is laid wholly on Satan.

At the end of the account, in scene five, the human couple is able to ask for forgiveness and neither tries to put the blame on the other. Nevertheless they are "demoted", sent down for a time to live and die on earth, which implies that after death they may return to the heavenly garden (7:24-25), a fact borne out in suras which describe heaven for believers as a garden of delights (13:23, 16:30, 19:16). Life outside of the garden will be characterised by enmity between the two (7:24).

Sura 20:115 introduces the narrative about creation with a summary sentence

concerning the covenant made by God with Adam. Adam breaks that covenant through forgetfulness and a lack of steadfastness, even though God has warned him about the dangers of Iblis. There follows a repetition of the same set of scenes as in sura 2.

In scene one, we are given the account of Iblis's refusal to bow down before Adam (20:116), but without the detailed discussion between Iblis and God that we find in sura 7:11, concerning Iblis' reasons why he should not bow down before Adam. As in previous accounts, Iblis' name is changed to Satan once this scene ends (presumably because of his falling out with God).

Scene two takes place in the garden, although we are not told that God has placed Adam and his wife there. God warns Adam and his wife of the danger of Iblis, that if he lures them out of the Garden, they will live in misery (20:117), a state which would be in direct contrast to their life in the garden which provides everything they need—food, clothing, water and shelter.

In scene three Satan tempts Adam (only Adam) with the tree of eternity, promising him a kingdom of immortality (20:120). What was previously called only "this tree" in suras 2 and 7 is here named explicitly as the tree of life (immortality). Adam and his wife respond by eating of the tree, and they see that they are naked and begin to sew coverings of leaves for themselves. However, in scene four, only Adam is named as being disobedient to God and seduced by Satan (20:121).

Despite his disobedience, God has mercy on Adam and gives him guidance (20:122), although he still punishes both Adam and his wife with expulsion from the garden. They are told by God that there will be enmity between the two or "both of you" (presumably between Adam and his wife, or perhaps between them and Satan), and also "all together" (presumably between Adam and his wife, and also between them and Satan) (20:123).

There follows a repeated promise of guidance from God (20:123). God warns them that if they (humans in general) do not follow this guidance they will be brought blind before God on the Day of Judgement (20:124-125). This link between blindness and disobedience brings the reader back to a consideration of the way in which being disobedient led to Adam and his wife's eyes being opened. Perhaps this opening of eyes was not real sight after all but a kind of blindness. Yusuf Ali comments in a slightly similar way, "Because God gave him [Adam] physical sight in this life for trial, he thinks he should be favoured in the real world, the world that matters! He misused his physical sight and made himself blind for the other world" (Sale and Wherry, 1896:vol 3, 817).

Where desire was a central concept in the second story of Genesis, here it appears that shame becomes the central concept.¹² It seems that the shame is sexual (as the desire in Genesis is sexual) and passed on from one generation to the next (7:26). In 7:27 the children of Adam and his wife are warned of their parents' seduction by Satan, with the example of the expulsion of Adam and his wife from the garden, and again the word "shame" is central to the admonishment.

In sura 20 there is also a connection made between nakedness and shame.

After Adam and his wife eat from the tree, they see that they are naked and begin to sew coverings of leaves for themselves. Commentators like Phillips make a connection to sexuality, suggesting that the story explains for the reader why genitals, and therefore sexuality, are shameful (Phillips, 1984:150). For Phillips, the proper state of the couple in the garden is to be clothed and at this stage of the narrative, their clothes are removed, perhaps making a connection with 20:118-119, which promises that the couple in the garden will not go hungry or naked, and so on. Although made in relation to sura 7, Wherry's comment is relevant here that the couple in the garden may have been thought to be clothed in light, or garments of Paradise, or enrobed by their long hair (Sale and Wherry, 1896:Vol 2, 207). Yusuf Ali considers that they were clothed in "the garb of Innocence" (Ali 1983:816).

Although desire is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'anic narratives, it is implicitly there in Adam's (in sura 20) or the couple's response to Satan's tempting. Here though the desire is for life or immortality rather than for knowledge as in the Genesis narrative. According to Yusuf Ali, the impetus for dissatisfaction with what the garden could provide in terms of spiritual good (20:118-119; physical needs should be read as standing for spiritual needs in this context) comes from "extremes of passion or emotion", perhaps a comment that implies some part of desire (Ali, 1983:815). Eve shares in this implicit desire only as one part of the human couple. It is not surprising that the emphasis in the Qur'an shifts away from the central point of Eve's desire in Genesis. Eve's personality as displayed in the Genesis accounts is taken from her in the Quranic accounts. Where there is no personality there can be no desire.

What can we say about the character of Eve in these accounts? Certainly less blame for the disobedience is apportioned to her, and though the two humans are punished for their transgression, as in the Genesis account, the punishment is not gendered, nor linked to the desire or action of Eve. Equal punishment is pronounced with a different emphasis: they fall from heaven or some extramundane place to earth.

While it may be a positive step that there is less blame, and that the punishments are not gendered, Eve is less active as a character in her own right. She remains unnamed throughout the accounts. She has no pivotal role in the conversation with Satan; she does not make the decision to eat of the fruit; she does not give the fruit to her husband to eat. Needless to say there could be no question that there be any measure of divinity for Eve in these accounts. In fact, sura 7 has reworked the temptation to eat of the fruit in this regard—they will not be like God but rather like angels.

Eve is not named in the Qur'an. She appears only as Adam's wife. It is not until the post-Quranic Hadith and later Muslim literature that she is named. Eve is not alone in not being named in the Qur'an. Every First Testament woman who appears in the Quranic narrative is known only by her relation to some male relative. These women are never named; they are simply Adam's wife, Abraham's wife, Moses'

sister, Lot's wife, and Potiphar's wife. Even the Queen of Sheba has no name. In the Genesis accounts, Eve goes unnamed until almost the very last moment. She is named almost as an afterthought in Gen 3:20. While both Eves remain unnamed, at least for most of the story, much is made of Adam's naming of animals or his knowledge of the names of living things, both in Genesis and the Qur'an.

Feminist writers question whether the lack of a name detracts from the development of a personal identity for Eve and other Quranic women. Does a woman's classification only by relationship to a husband or brother weaken the characterisation of the women in these stories? How could the role and nature of women have been differently understood had they been identified and named?

The questions are interesting in the light of the experience of Eve in the Genesis accounts. Here is a woman who has no name until the very end of the story and yet she is a marvellously vibrant and powerful character in the story, even though she acts in opposition to the one who should be the major character in any theological work—God. In this case at least the lack of a name appears to be no hindrance to character development and significance.

The Quranic narratives also have taken out the anthropomorphic details of God, so there is less detail of conversation and activity with the human pair as in the first section of the story in Gen 2. Moreover, the only dialogue in the Qur'an takes place between Satan and Adam and his wife. As a result there is little development of the characters, except perhaps for Iblis/Satan in a limited way.

The major characters of the stories of creation from the second account in Genesis and the three Quranic suras are similar, the only difference being between the use of the serpent in Genesis and Satan in the Qur'an. The settings too are similar: a heavenly God who debates the creation of humankind, the garden in which humankind live and are tempted, and the earthly context of subsequent human existence as punishment for transgression. There is a similar large plot structure: creation, a testing, an act of disobedience, and punishment. The Qur'an may make more of Adam's status above the angels and his knowledge of the nature of things, as well as the heavenly role of Iblis/Satan, but the major features of the plot that involve the human couple are similar. As far as the humans are concerned, the greatest difference in the detail of the plot hinges on the use of Eve as the major character with the serpent in the climactic scene of temptation in the second Genesis account.

While there is not an enormous difference overall in the detail of events, the differences that relate to the character of Eve are significant for my study. While the reader may find some positive aspects in the Quranic adaptation of the Genesis accounts, for example, that Eve is not held to blame for the entire incident, and the punishments are not in reference to her desire which is seen as an inherent flaw, nonetheless, there are also some negative aspects. Perhaps most importantly there is the lack of real characterisation for Quranic Eve. In comparison to Genesis Eve, she has become a fairly insipid character, all the spark and activity gone from her. She is not a bad girl any more, but she is certainly not interesting either. As I wrote above,

“Where there is no personality there can be no desire”. I could add, where there is no personality, there is not much of anything at all.

Of course being written up as a major character, especially if you are a woman, may mean that you attract far too much attention in the story and have to contend with certain prejudices, like a God who simply does not want to talk to you. The Eve of Genesis is writ large by the narrator – but then written off and written out as the scapegoat in the subsequent history of interpretation. In the end if we were to ask Eve who she would rather be, Genesis Eve or Quranic Eve, I have a feeling that she would rather be Genesis Eve, would rather be lively and alive in her own right than forever to be her husband’s shadow – no matter what the consequences.

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Notes

1. This article was presented as a paper at the AASR Conference in Brisbane in June, 2000.
2. I follow the recent scholarly convention of referring to the so-called Old Testament as the "First Testament". I do this out of respect for Jewish believers for whom the Testament is not "old" in relation to the more recent revelations that Christians regard as "new".
3. For a good summary of the history of biblical textual criticism, see Chapter 1 in Norman K. Gottwald, N K. 1985 *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 5-34, and Schwartz, R M. 1990 Introduction. In *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory*, edited by R M Schwartz, 1-15. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. For a more feminist-focussed concise introduction, see Meyers, C. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. Oxford University Press, New York, 3-23.
4. As van Wolde (1996:61) writes, "Not only does [the narrator] speak and act, but he also adds a dimension of judgment everywhere, passing a value judgment on it all. He then guides the reader to pass a positive verdict on certain things and a negative verdict on others".
5. See, for example, Augustine of Hippo. 1995 *De Gratia Christi, et de Peccato Originali, contra Pelagium (passim)* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5 Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, edited by P Schaff. Peabody, Hendrickson, Massachusetts; and Augustine of Hippo. 1998. De civitate Dei 12.8, 14.13 In *The City of God against the Pagans*, edited and translated by R W Dyson, 508-9, 608-10. Cambridge University Press, New York.
6. For a good summary of the rise of structuralism and its major features within literary theory, see Eagleton (1983:103-4). As it is applied to First Testament study by scholars like Clines, see Rogerson (1991:16).
7. For an overview of feminist issues, especially in relation to the work of Tribble and Meyers, see Rogerson (1991:35-41).
8. For more specific work on the character of Eve in rabbinical texts, see Bronner (1994:22-41).
9. An investigation of the term within the First Testament shows clearly that more often than not the term is used for God as the helper of Israel—and thus, cannot be taken to denote an inferior position. See, e.g., this argument in Otwell, J. H. 1977 *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Woman in the Old Testament*. Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 17. As Alter (1996:9) comments, "help" is too weak a translation for this term, because "it merely suggests an auxiliary function, whereas 'ezer elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms".
10. Van Wolde tells us that this is the only part of the story in which the "omniscient" narrator intrudes. Not so—the narrator tells us in the very next verse that the serpent is "more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God has made".
11. Various Gnostic systems take up the theme of desire as the fatal flaw in the heavenly Sophia in their explanation of the beginning of the material world; see, for example, Mortley, R. 1981 *Womanhood: The Feminine in Ancient Hellenism, Gnosticism, Christianity, and Islam*. Delacriox Press, Sydney, 63-6.

¹² There is a considerable contemporary literature dealing with the concepts of desire and shame, although there is not the space to deal with it here; see, for example, Zornberg, A. Gottlieb. 1996 *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*. Image Books Doubleday, New York; Wurmser, L. 1981 *The Mask of Shame*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.