LIBERATING BONDAGE:

Objects, Sexuality, and Desire in Yona Wallach's "Tefillin"

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I found myself in a classic situation of women who at one time or another, feel that it is not they who have produced culture . . . Culture was there, but it was a barrier forbidding me to enter, whereas of course, from the depths of my body, I had a desire for the objects of culture. I therefore found myself obliged to steal them.

--Heléne Cixous, "Entretien avec Françoise van Rossum-Guyon"[1]

Go steal something small maybe you'll calm down
Years later it will be easy to see that you can steal sex too
This too is quite a serious robbery if you take into consideration
That it's also possible to steal personality and spiritual things

--Yona Wallach, "He Stuffs the Bra That He Wears"[2]

In March 1982, Yaakov Besser, the publisher of *Iton 77,* printed the poem "Tefillin" along with three other poems by Wallach.

"Tefillin"

Come to me
Let me do nothing
You do it for me
Do everything for me
Everything I start to do
You do instead
I will lay tefillin[3]
I'll pray
You lay the tefillin on me

Bind them on my arms

Play with them inside me

Pass them delicately over my body

Rub them against me

Arouse me everywhere

Make me faint

Run them across my clitoris

Tie up my hips with them

So I can come quickly

Play with them inside me

Tie up my hands and legs

Do things to me

Against my will

Turn me over on my stomach

Put the tefillin in my mouth like reins

Ride me I am a mare

Pull my head back

Until I shriek with pain

And you are pleasured

Later I will pass them over your body

With unconcealed intention

Oh, how cruel my face will be

I will pass them slowly over your body

Slowly slowly slowly

Around your throat I'll pass them

I will wind one end a few times around your throat

And tie the other to something stable

Something very heavy perhaps rotating

I'll pull and I'll pull

Until your last breath escapes

Until I strangle you

Completely with the tefillin

That stretch the length of the stage

And into the astonished audience.

True, "Tefillin" can be read, and has conventionally been read, as an offensive attack on both Judaism and manhood — a "porno-religious-national poem" of "emotional abuse of the entire nation."[4] Considered on this level, the binding of the leather straps of the tefillin -- a ritual object in Judaism -- in an act of sexual violence becomes a scandalous act of malice. Such readings of the poem too easily reduce it to crude pornography.[5] In this article I offer an alternative reading of "Tefillin". I suggest that we shift our focus to the performative aspect of the poem and examine it in the context of theatrical performance. Wallach takes upon herself to highlight sexual difference in the problematic Israeli politics of gender, which explains her radical choice to use the loaded, highly visible object tefillin. Her innovative postmodern production of gender looks for unconventional cultural sites and objects in the attempt to rework old notions of female sexuality, identity, and ideology.

The public debates surrounding the poem became among the most heated and controversial in the history of Hebrew/Israeli literature. Even the well-respected poet Zelda, an orthodox religious poet and an intimate friend of Wallach, protested the journal's publication of the poem. Igal Sarna describes Zelda's response in his biography on Wallach, published posthumously:

> A thin envelope with a note written in pencil arrived in Besser's mail box. "When I saw Yona's poem" [wrote Zelda], "I thought, I wish I had died. I will not be able to touch a paper on which such a thing is printed." Zelda was a regular contributor to the periodical and a friend of Besser and her response was the only one that pained him deeply. During the two following years, until her death, Zelda never sent him another poem.[6]

Reaction to the poem might have been even more violently hostile were it not for the timing of its publication: it appeared on the eve of the invasion of Lebanon. Nevertheless, the poem had enormous repercussions, and within a year and a half its impact had reached far beyond the literary scene, igniting a public

scandal that engaged writers, journalists, and politicians. In an interview with Besser, Miriam Tasa-Glazer, then deputy minister of culture and education, reacted to the poem by saying: "Wallach is really disturbed . . . a horny beast (*behema meyuhemet*) who writes such a poem, and even publishes it . . . it is a foul wave . . . an anarchy." The Association of Israeli Writers reacted to Tasa-Glazer's inflammatory remarks by sending an acrid letter of protest to all the members of the Cabinet. Yosi Sarid, in a Knesset meeting, questioned Hammer, the minister of education: "The deputy minister's world is steeped in sex, and affected by incest. What does the Minister intend to do so that the deputy minister can find her full satisfaction in the vocation of education?"[7] The debate, in line with popular polemics, focused not on the poet's writing but rather on her personality (and her body). Tasa Glazer's remarks represent a perspective that viewed "Tefillin" as nothing but a depraved provocation, emblematic of the total breakdown that modern promiscuity brings in its wake. [8] Possibly response was so vituperative because "the puritanical quality of orthodox religious discourse preserves the possibility of shock in a way unavailable to hybrid heteroglossic vernacular discourses."[9] Rather than viewing "Tefillin" as a response to the limits of Israeli critical discourse on women, these voices viewed the poem radical aesthetics as proof of Wallach's pathology. Even for non-religious Israelis, employing tefillin to convey a sexual image meant to exceed the aesthetic, moral limits, threatening to contaminate the little that remained sacred in Israeli society.[10]

The representation of the poet, Yona Wallach, by herself and others was also problematic. On the one hand, the intimate self Wallach presented -- visibly different -- fueled the public fire that surrounded the overdramatized femininity and unconventional sexuallity of any expressive woman. ("As a woman, you are exceptional (*yotset dofen*)" the journalist Dani Dotan, stated while interviewing Wallach. She corrected him: "I believe that as a man, I am very exceptional.")[11] Wallach's struggle with breast cancer, and then her tragic death in 1985, no doubt added another dimension to the drama often associated with her and her poetry.[12] Wallach's readers, at least while she was still alive, were puzzled by the varying and seemingly contradictory characteristics of her work and personality.[13] For example, Wallach suggested to the organizers of a poetry reading that she be lying in a coffin on stage while the other poets read their work, and then rise dramatically from the coffin to read her own reading; this proposal was rejected.14 On another occasion she told her interviewer: "I prefer the company of hookers and pimps over that of literary critics. " This statement became the title of that article.15 Her eccentric presence and transgressive creativity inspired writers, artists, and gossip columnists who were often as beguiled, attracted and annoyed by her as they were by her poems. Obviously, these accounts of Wallach's personal and public life are themselves a social construct.[16] In order to understand these accounts, it is therefore crucial to examine their cultural context: namely, the limited and predominantly negative representation of women in Israeli

literature as well as the exclusion and problematic inclusion of women writers in Hebrew literary history.17 Wallach was represented primarily according to the prevailing cultural stereotype associated with this type of woman, further adding to her marginalization. These stereotypes, Homi Bhaba has suggested, are indistinguishable from the society's fetishistic desire to normalize and disciplinize its "deviant" subjects.[18]

In the following I will give a rather brief description of the ritual of tefillin that shows its central role within male Jewish culture. I will examine the concept of ritual space as it is created by the tefillin ritual, and then return to the discussion of the poem as a ritual theatrical performance.

Tefillin: An Object of Longing

> *Nashim va-'avadim pturim mi-tefillin.*
>
> (Women and slaves are exempt from laying tefillin.)
>
> -- Shulhan 'Arukh

> All rituals are paradoxical and dangerous enterprises, the traditional and improvised, the sacred and secular. Paradoxical because rituals are conspicuously artificial and theatrical, yet designed to suggest the inevitability and absolute truth of their messages. Dangerous because when we are not convinced by a ritual we may become aware of ourselves as having made them up, thence on to the paralyzing realization that we have made up all our truths; our ceremonies, our most precious conceptions and convictions -- all are mere inventions.
>
> -- Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*[19]

Physically, tefillin (phylacteries) are the two small boxes, containing scriptural texts, attached to black leather straps that religious Jewish men bind to their foreheads and arms as part of the Morning Prayer service. Originally, the material used in making tefillin was cut from the skin of a calf sacrificed at the Temple, as described in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 48b). Today they are made from the skins of "ritually pure" animals (that is, religiously permitted animals that have been slaughtered according to Jewish law). One of the two boxes of the tefillin is attached to the head (*shel rosh*) and the other is attached to the arm and hand (*shel yad*). The box strapped to the head consists of four compartments, each containing strips of parchment on which are written biblical passages that

relate man's relationship to God with the departure from Egypt, the dedication of all firstborn males to God, and the injunction to remember the origin of the covenant between God and man (Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21). The Torah commands, "You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deuteronomy 6:8). The ritual opens with a meditation, followed by a blessing while laying them on the left arm and the forehead, and another concluding prayer said while winding the straps three times around the middle finger, a reference to the symbolic marital relationship between man and God.[20]

The instructions for putting on the tefillin are very precise. The Rabbis set the law of tefillin based upon a literal reading of the biblical verse, quoted above, which appears in four passages in the Bible (Ex.13: 1-10, 11-16; Deut. 6:4-9 and 11:13-21).[21] In spite of its literal origin, several variations emerged around the practice, evidence of its significance. [22] The male-directed imperative to touch (*lemashmesh*) the leather straps is an important part of the meditation -- a bodily interaction with the object that Wallach sexualized in her poem. Numerous instructions codify the ritual regarding the purity of the object, the male body, and the male mind. Religiously, the tefillin secures, most intimately, the ongoing renewal of human relations with God and the covenant.[23] It is a reference within a reference, the "sign of a sign," creating both the "interior space and time" of the humble, obedient Jewish subject and the abstract authority of God.[24] In fact, one can say that tefillin are, themselves, an object of authority, and that by binding his body and his spirit, the male performs an act of utmost humility. Yet, this positive symbol is also a site of intimacy and connectedness that, as Rachel Adler explains, serves to "hallow time, hallow his (man's) physical being, and inform both his myth and his philosophy."[25]

If tefillin constitutes the ultimate masculine space, a celebration of the relationship between the pure man and God, then women are necessarily excluded. In general, the more we understand the significance of tefillin as a monumental institution at the center of Jewish identity, and the more we realize the position of desire it constitutes for Jewish males, we also come to see that the ritual of tefillin holds out no room, no hope for women. It follows, then, that Wallach's "Tefillin" should be seen as an act by which she interjects herself into this male institution. [26] The "gender-blind approach to literature," about which Esther Fuchs agonized, can be addressed only through this poetic act.[27] Indeed, Wallach's poem attends precisely to this gender blindness; it produces its reversal by an exaggerated, overdramatization of sex and religion. By presenting the role of tefillin visually, Wallach utters a radical prayer against the exclusion of women in Jewish/Israeli ritual and culture.

The Feminist Space of Intertextuality

> Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest.
>
> -- Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel"

In "Tefillin," Wallach is also engaged in a dialogic relationships with her "anterior literary corpus."[28] In the poem's intertextuality -- especially with reference to biblical and other Jewish sources -- Wallach brings irony and depth to her subversive reading of the canon and at the same time expands the space of female presence in that canonic language. The expression, *ma'adanot,* for example, which I translate as "delicately," alludes to the biblical confrontation between Samuel and Agag, the king of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15: 32) and Agag's special way of approaching Samuel. Earlier, Samuel, who was angered by Saul's inability to kill the Amalekite king, asks that Agag be brought to him. "And Agag came unto him delicately," because he predicts a favorable verdict will be rendered on his behalf. Agag assumes that "surely the bitterness of death is past," whereas Samuel, whose anger is justified because Agag has killed women and children (*shisef*), tears Agag to pieces. Wallach plays with the ambiguity of this adverb, whose lexical meaning could refer to the tender feelings of the sexual act, but also invokes the tender delicacy before a brutal death.

Another term, *yatsiv,* alludes to the recited morning prayer, saying, *"'Emet ve-yatsiv ve-nackon ve-kayam . . . ha-davar ha-zeh 'alenu"* (True and certain and stable and enduring is this word unto us) and directly reflects Wallach's concern with tying the tefillin straps to stable, reliable posts. At the same time such stability is mocked because as it turns out, this pole is so stable that it endures the pulling of the straps, the strangling of the male. These examples indicate that for Wallach violence is not restricted to what one chooses to do with tefillin, nor to the production details. Violence is also established in the usage of language, existing on many levels coterminously.

The relationship between Wallach and a younger generation of Israeli women poets, of the 60s-80s such as Dalia Herts, Gavriela Ben 'Elisha, and Hedvah Harkavi, is obviously just as important, as her relationship to the poetic tradition of the older generation of poets, such as Rachel, Esther Raab or Dalia Ravikovitch. [29] Ravikovitch's poem "Kings' Gifts" provides us with an excellent opportunity to compare it with Wallach's erotic, performative text, and to examine issues of intertextuality between the two women poets.

Ravikovitch's (1936-) early poetry speaks directly to a female concern with powerlessness and violence as articulated through the body. Ravikovitch's writing addresses the crisis of the feminine and attracts attention to the

inferior position of women in an Israeli society controlled by adult males.[30] Ravikovitch's poem "Kings' Gifts,"[31] like Wallach's "Tefillin," introduces violent eroticism into negotiations of female power, but it is also an early dramatic text that uses destructive sexual dialogue centered on the object of desire, *Even Ha-roshah* (the head or foundation stone [of the Temple])[32]. The limitless passion surrounding the objects, and the ritualized metonymic relationship to the objects, are intensified by the erotic tone and lead finally to death.[33] It is important, thus, to read "Kings' Gifts" as an intertext to "Tefillin." Unlike Wallach, but typical of Ravikovitch, "Kings' Gifts" employs extensive layers of biblical allusions, archaic vocabulary, and conservative meter; in general it lacks the excessiveness and bluntness of "Tefillin." Yet, despite the apparent differences between these poems, the similarities are striking. Consider, for example, how Wallach evokes the Ravikovitch text in the offer of the male to do "things" for her: "I will build for you temples of prayers/I will say your prayer to God/Your prayer for you -- in my love" (initiated by the male in "Kings' Gifts") and "Let me do nothing/ You do it for me/ Do everything for me/ Everything I start to do/ You do instead/ I will lay tefillin/ I'll pray/ You lay the tefillin on me" (initiated by the female in "Tefillin"). Both place sexuality in a dramatic framework to varying degrees. Both poems also make reference to external authority: the *kahal* (audience, crowd) in "Tefillin," and the *makhelah* (chorus) in "Kings' Gifts," both from the same root, *k.h.l.* (to gather, convene), deploying the collective presence of an audience. In both poems, the *kahal* and *makhelah* provide a contextual, complimentary voice that highlights the power structure of the cast in the drama. Furthermore, the cyclical movement of female desire, expressed by the use of the root *s.v.v.* (to wind, to spin) in both poems, results in the death of the male actor. In Ravikovitch's poem,"Your head will spin on you like a wheel abundantly desired," or "my head goes spinning in my lust." In "Tefillin:" "I will wind one end a few times around your throat."

The dialogue of giving and receiving in "Kings' Gifts" motivates the narrative. Among the gifts that the narcissistic king will bestow upon the female once she descends with him to the bottom of the ship (a pre- or subconscious state) is *Even Haroshah*, which will arouse her passion. The Head Stone (a reference to conception) is the seal of a royal male (material goods, knowledge, love, prayer) that seeks to be imprinted on the woman's body. Yet, the material excess and the prospect of a gift as magnificent as the Head Stone inspire unlimited desire for control and destruction. This exaggerated enactment of a passion of mythological proportion, whose main historical prototype is King Solomon, prevents the genealogical movement that maps the economy of desire in terms of both gender and survival. If male power is manifested through female desire for the stone, then the female's response to the male's lavish gift is fatal.[34]

Clearly both poems deal with male, cultural objects. Kings' gifts are questionable as they are motivated by self-serving drives; being weapons of destruction, they end up destroying those who are engaged with them.

Ravikovitch explicitly laments the irony of receiving males' gifts, the gifts of culture, be they language, creativity, sexuality, or subjectivity. The inherited objects of the patriarchs, Ravikovitch learns, cannot fulfill her desire. In a wider sense, this impossible position embodies Ravikovitch's poetic stance vis-a-vis what the culture, at its best, has to offer her as a poet. As an ironic statement about her own intertextuality within the male canon, it draws the problematic space a woman can inhabit within this tradition.

Theater Ritual

Consider another scandalous text: *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. Shoshana Felman writes:

> What is perceived as the most scandalous thing about this scandalous story is that *we are forced to participate in the scandal*, that the reader's innocence cannot remain intact: there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text. In other words, the scandal is not simply *in* the text, it resides in *our relation to the text,* in the text's *effect on us,* its readers: what is outrageous in the text is not simply that *of which* the text is speaking, but that which it speaks *to us*.[35]

Felman's assertion that the reader inescapably becomes an active participant through the act of reading applies particularly to "Tefillin." Not only is the poem highly seductive, but a woman resides behind the text who cannot be separated from either the poem's composition or its enactment. Also, the critical responses to the poem become, themselves, additional performances imposed by the author.[36] Reading such a text redefine the reader as an actor or producer whose identity is inscribed by this text. Reading "Tefillin" inevitably turns the innocent reader into a sexual partner, which partially explains the anxiety the poem produces in a reader who cannot escape from the grasp of the tefillin on his/her now sexually engaged body.

This sexual engagement must be understood in the context of performance. "Tefillin" demands close attention to the implied setting of a theatrical stage in order for the reader to understand the political and poetic strategy involved in

both writing and reading the poem. Therefore, the text must be read as a set of informal stage directions given by a female director/producer to a male actor in a one-act show -- the implied director also functions as both playwright and female lead.[37] Approaching the text as performance redefines the relationship between the text and its reader and introduces the fancy of drama. This paradigm disengages the reader and allows some relief from the anxiety the poem evokes. Seeing the poem as performance opens up the space of the poem to include the outside world: political, historical, and cultural all play a role in the realization of the text, and "are encouraged to assert themselves" on the stage.[38]

It is possible that Wallach kept the stage hidden until the last moment, explicitly introducing it only in the last two lines of the poem in order to culminate the shocking drama by the man's death, a climax heightened by the presence of a voyeuristic audience.

"Until I strangle you
Completely with the tefillin
That stretch the length of the stage
And into the astonished audience"

My reading of "Tefillin" actualizes the poem's casual mood as implied by the stage directions found in the poem. Practically, the poem is a text in which a female producer approaches a male actor. She speaks swiftly, excitedly, in broken sentences, giving directions to the actor and then to herself. At the same time, she pays attention to the setting, the lights, facial expressions and the audience. She is enthusiastic, as if envisioning the scene as she talks and becoming excited as she imagines the act. She repeats herself. Her verbs and adverbs mobilize this text as they provide optional space for action. More than any adjectives and nouns, the verbs are the key points in the "oral" script, highlighting the narrative structure of the instructions. The performance becomes more concrete with every imperative the director employs. As a good director, she verbalizes the many alternatives that will eventually constitute the actual performance. Taken as instructions for staging, I propose that one consider the verbs and the poem in its entirety in its most informal performative pose: spoken in an intense but colloquial tone:

Do *everything* for me (the word "everything" is stretched suggesting everything that comes to his mind)
Everything *I* start to do (a pose to emphasize the "I" and "You" contrast)
You do instead
I will lay tefillin
*I'*ll pray (as if she counts the possible actions)

You lay the tefillin on me

Turn me over on my stomach (she lays out the different actions she provides)

Put the tefillin in my mouth like reins (she invokes the image of the mare)

Ride me I am a mare

Pull my head back

Oh, how cruel my face will be (she anticipates her facial expression)

I will pass them slowly over your body

Slowly slowly slowly (could be said quickly)

Around your throat I'll pass them

I will wind one end a few times around your throat

And tie the other to *something stable*

(she might look around the room to find an example to this "something")

Something very heavy perhaps rotating (she speaks slowly, figuring it out)

I'll pull and I'll pull

Completely with the tefillin (stressed, emphatic)

That stretch the length of the stage

And into the astonished audience. (assertive, prompt)

Wallach clearly plays on familiar boundaries between theater and life, the mundane and the ceremonial, the public and the private. Through the stage and the public theater, which she constructs, we witness the two acts that are socially perceived as most intimate; the act of laying tefillin and the act of having sex. This act of sexuality gets confused with the daily, Jewish male, bodily ritual which is supposedly devoid of explicit sexuality. This conflation is a new language of subjectivity, for here the female speaker reverses traditional roles and invents new positions and dispositions. Her position as speaker and stage director redefines the possibility of female roles: she is on the stage, her body is dressed, her voice undressing. But appearing dressed further masks the language of instruction. The poem is less invested emotionally, and even the allusions to the official language of *halakhic* reality are teased by the temporal and spatial

casual framework. One of the defining characteristics of ritual is its highlighted, transcendent, and marked notions of time and space. Wallach reframes the ritual of laying tefillin on the stage.

Batya Podos, a feminist playwright and director in San Francisco, wrote, among other works, an adaptation of Monique Wittig's *Les Guérilléres* (1977). Her production introduced the concept of "ritual theater." More than other traditional theatrical experiences or other feminist or political theater, ritual theater is concerned with providing both a "transformative spiritual experience" and education to "an audience that has been denied knowledge of its own history and power." Aiming to reach the audience's subconscious, ritual theater tends to be nonlinear, transcending constraints of conventional order by introducing timelessness, mythic setting, and repetitive language and movements. [39] Wallach produces ritual theatrics through her poem. She lays on tefillin only to dismantle it.

The interplay between the stage and the poem drives the metaphorization of the characters and the event further forward. Laor emphasizes:

> The dramatic text offers points that have no reference in the world and the reference that is offered can be realized only on the stage, performed by real flesh and blood actors, with the support of real objects. Likewise -- real actors and real props acquire fictitious status and this is the paradox of the dramatic text before being produced on stage, and especially when it is produced on stage. The real existence of the actors gains its metaphoric status: "fictitious characters" acted by "real characters." [40]

Such a text reworks the relationship between signifiers and signified. Wallach is using the performativity of both the Hebrew language and the contextual stage she provides. As theater, "Tefillin" becomes metaphor, breaking out of the object's conventional meaning to accrue ambiguous meanings. This ambiguity rescues the text and the symbol from its literal meaning, or as Felman argues, from being "vulgar". "The vulgar is literal insofar as it is unambiguous: The literal is 'vulgar' because it stops the movement constitutive of meaning, because it blocks and interrupts the endless process of metaphorical substitution."[41] Although I have reservations about the general equation of vulgar with literal, in its semiotic economy between signifier and signified, the vulgar in poetry does indeed translate into an imposition. The stage alluded to, therefore, helps to convey the open space that such metaphoric articulation brings to "Tefillin." Wallach, in emptying conventional categories of time and space of their immediate sacred meaning, realizes their powerful potential during the

performance. As if the text, as text, is secondary; as if it serves primarily to precipitate the performance, and so results in a serious, yet theatrical act: one repetitive performance.

a. A New Sign: The Female Body

In Hebrew, transitive verbs require the use of the particle or preposition *et* when the object is definite. When joined with a pronoun suffix, the conjugation of et becomes *oti, otkha, and otakh* . . . "me," "you," "him," and so forth. The extensive use of transitive verbs in the poem, especially in reference to the tefillin straps, results in the repetition of *otam*, them (for example, *Kroch otam* (bind them) . . . *Sachek otam* (play them) . . . *Ha'aver otam* (pass them) . . . *Chakekh otam* (rub them) . . . *Alef oti* (arouse me) . . . *Ha'aver otam* (run them) . . .)

The Hebrew noun *ot* means either a letter (of the alphabet), or "a sign," "mark," "signal," "miracle," or "indication." The repetition of *otam* can thus be taken as a direct allusion to *ot,* "the sign," which is central in the tefillin instruction: *ve-hayu le-ot 'al yadekha,* "And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand " (Deuteronomy 6:8).[42] *Ot* meaning letter also appears in the ritual of tefillin. Arik describes: "During the practice of tefillin, a man forms with the straps of the leather, in different ways, the shapes of the letters *shaday* . . . You are supposed to write the name of God on your body, on your body with your body, *ot ot,* letter by letter, you utter the name of God."[43]

Wallach's reference to the *ot,* the sign and the letter, through the repetitive use of the preposition and the direct object pronoun cannot be read simply as a way to challenge the original *ot.* Rather, by designating the tefillin as the primary prop/object on stage, front and center, Wallach transforms the female body into a subject, an act that liberates it from its historical objectification. Female marginality can be reconsidered once the explicitly reduced body becomes the author. From another vantage point, if a woman is perceived as only a body, and if this body is reduced to its sexual zones, then indeed, the only level on which a relationship to the female can be reimagined is through her body. The poem, in its problematic use of symbolic femininity, exposes the limitations of feminine discourse just as it raises the possibility of a woman's breaking free through the very body that has traditionally been the locus of patriarchal homoeroticism. For Wallach, the constraints of the anatomic body become its autonomy.

***b. Dagdegan*: The Clitoris**

A close textual reading shows that Wallach's poetics are explicitly embedded in a strategy that clearly recognizes, as she has often stated, the multiple possibilities afforded by the richness of the Hebrew language. She crafts her language by

evoking several layers of meaning, often attaching them to the stage and theater, and shifting and subverting conventions of aesthetics, intimacy, class, gender, fiction, and reality. Wallach herself was explicitly concerned with gendered language, a subject she directly addressed in her poem "'Ivrit": "Hebrew is a sex maniac, Hebrew discriminates for and against. . . " (*Ivrit safa sex maniakit, 'ivrit maflah le-ra'ah ule-tovah).*[44] While it is not the only way in which identity is revealed, language does often assume certain aspects of the speaker's identity.

In Wallach's poems the gender of the actors is not always explicit; rather, they are often defined ambiguously. The first person in Hebrew, for example, conceals the gender of the speaker. While this identity can be codified through the grammatical morphology of verbs, adjectives, prepositions, and the occasional piece of clothing or body part, Wallach is very selective in her choices. In fact, the assumed sexual identity of "'atah," masculine "you" in Hebrew, and "'at," feminine "you," are often disguised. The poem "Berries" is a good example of such a strategy that goes beyond the gender paradigm to reveal its power dynamic. [45] The strong male presence contrasts with an absent female, who is referred to only through grammatical references, a description of the feminine addressee's outfit (a black dress and black hat), and her voice. The male, on the other hand, the inviting voice of the first person, is represented by the penis. The poem ends with the woman landing on the penis, but the impression created by lack of references to the woman's body is that under her outfit, the woman's nakedness is actually her absence.[46]

In contrast, in "Tefillin," the gender of the female speaker is never marked by a grammatical reference (given the length of the poem, an amazing excursion), nor even by the ambiguous signifier *shadai* (a reference to God but also, in modern Hebrew, "my breast"), whose letters are inscribed on tefillin, but rather by the *dagdegan,* the clitoris. The speaking "I" reveals its feminine identity solely through reference to this sexual body part. "Arouse me everywhere Make me faint Run them across my clitoris." The mention of this specific body anatomy amplifies the contours of the female body. *Dagdegan* replies to the historical construction of the female body centered on her reproductive organs, relocating her locus of pleasure. In a fascinating poetic construction of the female presence, Wallach gives rebirth to the female body through the clitoris. A woman's pleasure, she asserts, is attainable only through the once-erased body part. *Susah,* the mare, also marks the actor as a female who is being ridden. These two references, *dagdegan* and *susah,* both have phonetically duplicated syllables, thus multiplying the female's ability to symbolically reproduce herself. In any case, *dagdegan* as the only gender marker in the poem brings to mind that the Hebrew root *dgdg* means, after all, to tickle or to titillate, emphasizing the association of the clitoris with pleasure and joy (*jouissance*).

The Body as a Stage

In her poem, with the clitoris as the single reference to the female body, Wallach reestablishes the primacy of the female body over that of the male as an authentic referential system.[47] By highlighting sexual differences within the parameters of the binary opposition of male and female bodies and roles, Wallach poses a new anatomical model. Irigaray, along with other French feminists, has been dealing with the question of how to invent and speak a language other than the 'old' male language, urging that "if we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized." [48] Wallach's invented language of female sexuality and female pleasure speaks directly to the recognition of the specificity of writing women's eroticism. As Irigaray articulated it: "The problem of 'speaking [as] woman' is precisely that of finding a possible continuity between the gestural expression or that speech of desire -- which at present can only be identified in the form of symptoms and pathology -- and a language, including a verbal language."[49] In other words, woman's sexuality and eroticism is the site of culture that, once written, can lead to the visualization of the female body as discursively and ontologically different from that of the male. Wallach's new anatomical model of the female body challenges the Freudian-Lacanian models, which excluded the female body from the discourse of sexuality and pleasure.

The poetic discourse encodes the performed intercourse. Yet the contextual stage emphasizes the language of the text and brings it to life. A two-layer discourse intertwines the seriousness attached to the donning of tefillin and the anxiety aroused by the erotic act, shifting from the text to the public stage and from the stage to its precursory verbal representation. Yet the loaded signifiers keep overwhelm the theatrical scene as the ritual performance re-creates and reinvents the new materials; repeatedly canonizing, producing, and reproducing on stage. *Bamah* -- the sinful, erotic stage -- also alludes to both the biblical sacrificial altar and the prayer platform in the synagogue.[50]

Although in "Tefillin" the stage does not appear until the end of the poem, in a later collection Wallach devoted an entire poem to the subject of the stage.[51]

"I Have a Stage in My Head"

I have a stage in my head
And it is more real than any other stage
And when I descend from the stage
I reach down to the bottom step
I have a whole theater in my head
In it I am the hero

And when I turn off the light

I am finished

And when I stop playing

My life stops

When I let the curtains down

Behind my eyelashes

All my friends, my lovers

Are lost.

My memories

My colors

My magic

My fears are coming

My anxieties

My corpses

My abuses.

Wallach's theatrical position intensifies here: the concealed stage gives life to the real world. A stage in the head is a metaphor within a metaphor, or rather, the literalization of metaphor. Being internalized -- a resource for vitality and creativity -- it becomes an *emotional* framework. At the same time, relationships between writing and reality are problematized and complicated as the aspect of a play is invoked. Wallach's internalized stage is also a metaphor of "coming out" to encounter life. Stage and acting, she confesses, become her strategies for woman's survival. In this poem the self perceives itself through the close relationship between the real and the acted. But through the complicated way in which the body becomes Wallach's precursive interactor, one could say that Wallach perceives the body as a stage, an intimate platform which not only protects one's interior, but helps to suspend her torment and misery through its performance.

"When You Come to Make Love to Me . . . "

> The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.
>
> -- Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

Many of the poems in Wallach's *Or Pere'* collection (published in 1983) allude to erotic role playing, theatrical acting, and inversion and subversion of identities through sex and the exhibition of the body. Consider the series of poems which begin: "When you come to make love to me". As the following lines indicate, fragments of clothing, voices, words, and positions all play important roles in these arrangements. "Tefillin" is the first poem to address the sexual act, followed by "Berries," which, as I discussed, is an invitation to a female addressee by a male speaker. Four poems than open with this repetitive pattern, found in their titles (*kshe-tavo li-shkav 'iti...*) "When you (masculine, singular) come to make love to (literally to lie down with) me."[52]

> When you come to make love to me
> Wear a policeman's uniform
> I will be your little criminal. ("When You Come," in *Or Pere'*, 54)
>
> When you come to make love to me
> Wear a judge's robe
> I will be the little delinquent. ("When You Come to Make Love to Me Like a Judge," in *Or Pere'*, 56)
>
> Come to make love to me like God
> Only in spirit. ("When You Come to Make Love to Me Like God," in *Or Pere'*, 58)
>
> When you come to make love to me
> Come like my father
> Come in the dark time

Speak in his voice . . . ("When You Come to Make Love to Me Come Like My Father," in *Or Pere'*, 60)

Many literary critics insist on depoliticizing Wallach's position by attributing it to her mystical, otherworldly concerns.[53] Lacking critical distance, Helit Yeshurun, an editor and publisher of one of today's leading poetry journals, takes these poems as obvious references to Wallach's attitude toward God, and places God at the center of Wallach's sexuality. Relying on an interview with the poet and on other personal communications, she concludes that "sex in Yona's poems is, essentially, an act of reception of mystical power." Yeshurun develops her argument, saying that "he (God) forces her to have sex (*bo'el otah*),[54] takes her over, and she surrenders and allows all the things to be done (with) in her. Because she is a vessel that denies her own desire, she has no other desire. Her self disappears and this loss of personality and the devotion to supreme power appears as the ultimate way of life." [55]

Yeshurun's position is perhaps not so surprising given the affection for "secular mysticism" in popular Israeli culture.[56] To insist that God forces himself on her (bo'el 'otah) is to diminish Wallach's political stance. Mythologizing the poems and the poet removes them further from their contemporary context. Such a position not only precludes the possibility of "reading as women," but also reinforces old cultural and ideological paradigms concerning gender. I argue that these poems set new terms of "intercourse" which unravel the ideological obligations and assumptions of the players (as much as of the language) in favor of new ones. Wallach, like other earlier American feminists such as Audre Lorde and Judy Chicago, is well aware of the power of the erotic to constitute a new site of radical women's aesthetic and political praxis.[57] Within the sexual interplay with patriarchy, these contextual postures critique those in authority who turn social, religious, and paternal power to their sexual advantage. When challenged in an interview that a policemen, a judge, God and a Father are all stereotypes of authority, Wallach approves: "Right. They have the power to hurt me. Probably it goes well with oedipal complex, a tendency to surrender to authoritativeness and too strong attachment . . . one gets liberated by writing poems."[58]

Wallach's purpose, in general, was not to establish a "new order" that reverses the pattern of relations with men, but to reconstruct, in an almost utopian way, a new emotional, philosophical and political position that corresponds to the oppositional paradigm of relations in which the power play between genders will be actualized. From this position the female is able to exercise alternative power positions.[59] David Gurevitch examines the juxtaposition of postmodernism and feminism, arguing that Wallach's poetry exemplifies the poetics of such a site and thus aims to blur boundaries between theory and text. He writes:

> Words, one could say, are fetishistic objects of voyeurism . . . . Sometimes they are used as mobile initiators through which the world is perceived in its exposed, naked, almost pornographic condition . . . . Wallach knows that words have a long history of "mutual voyeurism." Words have obligations and they are context dependent. Words play a role in the power game in the world, a role in the gender power game. Mixing sexual poetics with the poetics of power positions her poetry in the center of the heterogeneous reality of the postmodern world.[60]

Wallach's theater pieces, among which the poem "Tefillin" is obviously prominent, ironically critique male power to redefine the female subject. A striking staging of an alternative to this negative identification thus results from the powerful speech acts which she, the female, constructs. In her newly negotiated gender politics, Wallach asserts that what is at stake is not the sexual act itself as much as its imagined antecedent. Power relations of gender, class, religion, or social position as well as politics, biases, and awareness all indicate that what we bring with us to the sexual act determines the act itself. One could argue that as long as it is possible to narrate these heterosexual terms, a mental collaboration -- orgasmic and productive -- is possible. Obviously, her mentally active role neutralizes her role as body qua body, the objectified position of the female body.

Although the subjects of sex, sexuality, and the female body appear in Wallach's earlier collections, their presence is much more strongly felt in *Or Pere'*. Wallach's stance in this collection is that a woman's relationships with the world are possible only through her body, through physical discourse as the medium of existence. This space of sexuality alone enables her to clearly make "discriminatory markers." In this body politics, Wallach explores relationships of power, especially those of gender, but also those of different authorities. This examination results in a new political dictionary of sexual behavior. *Lishkav 'im*, "to make love to or with," is an act always attached to its language practice, an authoritative power position (policeman, God, father, judge) that can redefine its epistemological and topographical ends. The female body emerges in these poems as multidiscursive and accessible, capable of playing a wide variety of roles. The fact that the female voice choreographs these episodes indicates that it is the female author who exerts freedom in imagining the performativity of the body. An inventive mind gives birth to an inventive body. As such, it emerges as an intelligent, conscious being, capable of reversing its historical prototype. As Simone de Beauvoir articulated this prototype: "She (a woman) is Other, she is body. Consciousness resides outside of her." [61]

It is possible that what Wallach attempts in this political dictionary is to create a nondiscriminatory code of sexual interaction in which the other is no longer marked, and in fact would reach what Derrida calls "the multiplicity of sexually marked voices."

> The relationship (to the other) would not be asexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition masculine|feminine, beyond bisexuality as well, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing. As I dream of saving the chance that this question offers I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexuality marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, the mobile of nonsexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each "individual," whether he be classified as "man" or "woman" according to the criteria of usage.[62]

Not only does the female body assert its authority on stage, but being her "discursive agent" (to use Kaja Silverman's term),[63] it enables the woman to become the author as it provides her with a voice. Remaining in the physical realm, Wallach reverses the relationship between the mouth and sex, with sex that speaks and reproduction that occurs through the mouth.[64] Relations between sex and mouth are interchangeable: the female voice resides in female sexuality, and writing sexuality is a production that rethinks female subjectivity in terms of body language. As a result, the female body is transformed into a site where physical differences negotiate symbolic differences. Women produce through verbal conception: Wallach's conception rearranges the female's spatial and physical relations and in so doing decodes the physical and religious being of the male.[65] Although this point has already been extensively discussed among feminists, my specific question concerns the discourse of sexuality within poetic writing. Wallach's seductive and feminine poetics reaches beyond its materiality; it becomes a feminine subversive cover for a discussion of gender politics. Writing and having a voice are fully verbal, sexual, and political acts. Violence is only one alternative strategy of this prefigured relationship to female expression; with the leather straps of tefillin, the woman lays down the text, the woman whips male tradition.[66]

Conclusion

The implication of having a stage set is essential for an adequate rendering of Wallach's poem. The conventional private male gaze, in the poem and of the reader, is replaced by the public arena. The sensational performance draws on the ritualistic daily activity of laying tefillin; it also encourages repetition, legitimizes and canonizes the sexual act as a planned, designed piece of acting rather than an impulsive one-night stand. The violence is also framed and reduced to a controlled, carefully directed performance. The result is that the continual production of "Tefillin" on stage promises the endless renewal of the female body, while it prohibits the reproduction of the male body. On that stage, Wallach's female body emerges not as biographic, literal, or metonymic but rather as a liberated agent capable of exploring its reproductive potential.

The shift I am describing must therefore be seen as a shift from utterance to practice. Now the female speaker's body is set to be the mirror and the guiding voice of a radically different scene. Indeed, now he will do for her that which he had so far done while excluding her.[67] The verbs, loaded signifiers, are speech acts that kill in every performance. With the killing of the male body, the historically narrow site of femininity is now expanded. Diverting our attention from the semantic depth of the poem to its performative element, Wallach extends the reader/spectator's gaze to its full potential.

More than that, the proximity of the text of sexuality to the text of physicality is also indicated by the inseparability of the text from the body. Following Mieke Bal's discussion on the book of Judges, the poem is not read; it is done. [68] Bal demonstrates the enactment and capacity of the voice to shape the physical matter of the female body. In the narrative of Judges, this voice permits the conversion of words into speech acts, or of language into violence. The language of performance/sexuality makes a strong claim for its correspondence with the material world. Wallach's language is obviously loaded with "referential obligations,"[69] as it touches upon the physical, tabooed body, the instructing texts and the coded rituals.

Surely, this one-act play (there is no punctuation except for the final period at the end of the poem) performs a new body praxis in which the sacredness of the tefillin is displaced onto the female body, while at the same time the objectification of the body shifts back to the tefillin. The tefillin, the stolen object, is deployed to act as an object of desire. A toy, a whip, its dramatic omnipresence underscores the absence of the penis. In this contextual void the *dagdegan* (clitoris) emerges as the only gender marker of the female body, a new signifying reference to female subjectivity. Indeed, it is only against the background of another clearly defined object, the sacred tefillin, that the female body can rid

itself of its marginality and become the center from which the female speaks. This stage becomes a radical site on which the female body is redefined and de-objectified. The sacredness of the tefillin now resides in the female body.

Rather than offensive or pornographic provocation, then, "Tefillin" is an attempt to create new poetics and aesthetics of difference and marginality. "Tefillin" embodies Wallach's attempts to write a text of female sexuality that replaces female sex as tied to reproduction and erotic display. The poem thus emerges as a sociopolitical antidote to the traditional treatment of the woman's body and its subjection. And to those who charge that Wallach is a "horny beast" and presume that the heat of her body is her author, I would respond -- if such a poetic body is in heat, then its poetry is endlessly reproductive.

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[1]. Cf. Susan Suleiman "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Erotism," in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 18.

[2]. All translations are the work of the author unless noted otherwise.

[3]. Tefillin are a ritual object worn by Jewish men during the morning prayer service. For a fuller discussion, see the section "Tefillin: An Object of Longing."

[4]. See Eliyahu Amikam, "The Libido of Education and Culture: A Jewish Soul - The Porno-religious-national Poetry," *Zehut*, 1983; Halevi rejected "Tefillin" as "shitting and pissing." See Ratson Halevi, "'Igeret Shluchah Le-Shulamit Har'even," *Afikim*, June 1984. Sarna describes: "Threatening letters were received along with a package containing tefillin that were brutally cut with a knife. 'Use it to fuck yourself in your ass,' wrote the sender... " Sarna, *Yona Wallach*, 275.

[5]. For the sake of this study, however, pornography -- distinguished from eroticism -- is understood in a reductive sense that does not allow the poem to be read as a poem.

[6]. Igal Sarna, *Yona Wallach: Biography* (in Hebrew) (Yerushalayim: Keter, 1993), 275 (my translation). For a response on Sarna's book see Meir Wieseltier, "Her Mouth was Filled with Blood and She Died," *Ha-'Aretz* (July 9, 1993), b8-b9; Eyal Dotan, "A Picture of a Powerful Person Comes into View," *Ha-'Aretz* (July 9, 1993), b8.

[7]. Sarna, *Yona Wallach,* 288

[8]. See, for example, Agassi, "The Status of Woman," in *The Double Bind; Women In Israel* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me'uchad, 1982), 210-216.

[9]. Katharine Young, U.C. Berkeley, personal communication, May 1996.

[10]. Fifteen years after the publication of the poem, the passion surrounding it is still strong. In February 1997, the Museum of Art in Ramat Gan was organizing an exhibit devoted to Yona Wallach that would include, among other pieces, Mikhah Kirshner's 1983 photographs of "Tefillin," that were inspired by the poem. (see note 12) The religious members of the municipal coalition of Ramat Gan threatened to leave the coalition if the photographs were exhibited. Meir Aharonson, the exhibit's curator, refused to exclude the photographs, and the exhibit was canceled. I thank Meira Weiss for this information.

[11]. Sarna, *Yona Wallach,* 285.

[12]. Many popular magazines, newspapers, and television programs documented Yona Wallach's death with pictures, poetry, and interviews with those who knew her. Earlier, *Khadarim*, a poetry magazine devoted a whole volume to her work, including an interview with the poet by the editor, Helit Yeshurun (1984: 4). The radio program "The Sweet Voice of God," on Wallach's poetry and personality, was produced and reported by Ilana Tsukerman, on *Kol Yisrael,* October 1986, and was published in *Proza* 100, 28-35. Other responses include Adam Barukh and Irit Nahmani, "Yona Wallach -- *Every Word Is Truth*," *Lady Globes* 23 (June/July 1993): 12-18; Ilan Schenfeld, "A Pure, Isolated Pain," in *'Al Ha-Mishmar* (October 2, 1985) 6; Yaron Golan, "Yona Wallach: The Passion and the Alarm," in *Ha-'Aretz Supplement* (October 4, 1985), 11; Hedda Boshem, "Death in the Family," *Ha-'Aretz*(October 8, 1985), 7; Beni Tsipper, "The Glass Bell: the Death of the Poet Yona Wallach," *Ha-'Aretz* (October 4, 1985), 16; Michael Hendelzaltz, "The Death of the Artists," *Ha-'Aretz* (October 17, 1985), 8; Hadari Ramag Yona, "Tropic of Cancer," *Ha-'Aretz Supplement* (October 11, 1985), 14-15. See also Sarna, esp. chap. 39-41.

[13]. Ravikovitch's poem, "At Last I am Speaking," is one attempt to sum up society's wide range of feelings toward Wallach: *Kol Ha-shirim 'ad Koh* [The Complete Poems So Far] (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me'uchad, 1995), 217-218. Dorit Zilberman devoted a whole article to other poets' works on Wallach: Zilberman, "Pray for the Peace of

Yona: Poets about and following Yona Wallach. Five Years after her Death." *Yedi'ot 'Achronot* (October 3, 1990), 30.

[14]. Sarna, *Yona Wallach* 236-237.

[15]. Ibid., 235.

[16]. Lily Rattok's recent book *Mal'akh Ha-'Esh: 'Al Shirat Yona Vollach* [Angel of Fire: The Poetry of Yona Wallach] (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbuts Ha-Me'uchad, 1997) is a good example of a reductionist reading of Wallach. Rattok resorts to uncritical and simplistic psychologizing about the poet, rather than exploring the meaning of the text itself. One is therefore not surprised to encounter vague statements, for example, that the reality within Wallach's poem "The Islands of Life" "is so absolute that one does not need words." (42) Beyond her thematic treatment of Wallach, I would argue, Rattok's attempt to read Wallach as a mystical poet is also problematic.

[17]. See, for example, Esther Fuchs, *Israeli Mythogynies: Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987); Michael Gluzman, "The Exclusion of Women from Hebrew Literary History," *Prooftexts* 11 (1991): 259-78;

[18]. Fetishism, according to Homi Bhaba involves "a disavowal of difference" -- an inability to grasp anything that violates the established order of "wholeness" or "similarity." Homi Bhaba, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66-84.

[19]. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), 89.

[20]. Summarized from Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Tefillin,"," in *Judaica* pp. 898-904.

[21]. It is interesting that Karaites, who are known for their otherwise literal reading of the Bible, insist on the metaphoric meaning of this verse, saying "how can one bind words on hand and eye." The Samaritans also do not wear tefillin.

[22]. Jewish legal debates still surround the issue of a woman laying tefillin. A few women, in Jewish tradition, such as Michal, daughter of King Saul, and the daughters of Rashi', the great medieval commentator, are known for their attempts to lay tefillin. Recently, women in the Conservative movement who started to lay tefillin have met with opposition from those who argue that women looking for a public way to assume religious/communal leadership roles should not commit themselves to the *mitzvoth* that are incumbent on males; rather, those critics argue, women should be free to invent their own practices.

[23]. Modern patriarchy keeps finding new roles for the ritual. Ideologically, the act of laying tefillin became the ultimate act that can bring a nonpracticing male Jew back to his Judaism (God) in times of crisis. During Israeli wars, for example, Hasidic Jews offer the straps to soldiers at the front as a good omen, using the symbol as a marker between life and death.

[24]. "The arbitrary nature of the sign may hold within the relation of word and thing, but it is transformed into a nonarbitrary relation by social praxis." Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 17. In this fascinating book Stewart examines cultural objects (the souvenir, the collection) and their narratives with relations to language, body, and experience. Whereas the "miniature" constitutes a metaphor of interiority, the "gigantic" is a metaphor of the exterior world.

[25]. Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halakhah and the Jewish Woman," in *On Being A Jewish Feminist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 12-18.

[26]. Jewish social practices in which men, and a male's perspective, encroach upon the domain of a woman's body are common in Jewish law. One need only recall the subject of *niddah* (the laws of female ritual purity concerning menstruation) and its attendant classification of blood color and size of blood spots.

[27]. Fuchs *Israeli Mythogynies*, xxx

[28] . Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in *The Kristeva Reader*, Edi. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 39.

[29]. For example, on the relationship between Wallach's first poem collection *Dvarim* [Words], and Dalya Herts' *Margot* see Raffi Vierecht *Moznayim* 10 (1992), 33; and Ratok, *Mal'akh Ha-'Esh*, 43-49.

[30]. See also Ravikovitch's short story ""Ichur Katan" (A Short Delay) which addresses the subject of female physical abuse in the army base. *Death in the Family*, 26-33.

[31]. First published in *'Ahavat Tapuach Ha-Zahav*, 26-29, and later in *Kol Ha-shirim 'ad Koh*, 31-33. Following is my literal translation of the poem.

<u>Kings' Gifts</u>

The king descended with his beloved

To the bottom of the ship

To the bottom of the ship

To choose for her from amongst his treasure a present.

--I will give you riders and attendants

I will build for you temples of prayer

I will say your prayer to God

Your prayer for you -- in my love.

I will bring you ivory and parrots.

Elders and wise men will wait upon you.

And all that I scrutinized and concluded wisely

I will reveal to you -- in my love.

I will bring you midgets and Negroes

And the chariot of Shiva and her overseer and her charioteer

Your head will spin on you like a wheel abundantly desired.

I will bring you the Head Stone.

Chorus

The Head Stone, The Head Stone

Blessed is the one who takes and inherits it.

-- I inherited the Head Stone

And the chariot of Shiva and her overseer and charioteer.

My head goes spinning in my lust

To touch the Head Stone

To lick the Head Stone

To shatter the Head Stone.

I took all my passion

The more my passion grew

The more my passion was insatiable.

I want the Head Stone

To touch the Head Stone

To lick the Head Stone

To gore with my head the Head Stone.

My passion will be my stumbling block

And the day of my death is certain and not far

I will pronounce all my passion openly --

I want the Head Stone

To touch the Head Stone

To lick the Head Stone

On me and on my head

On me and on my head

    And on my shoulders

I knew that my passion would be my stumbling block.

The King is the Head Stone.

From the bottom of the ship to the ends of the earth

Bad is the thing that his servants are blind every one

Won't they see the fire

The fire coming from the thornbush

Ablaze in their king?

The king is the Head Stone.

Chorus

The Head Stone, The Head Stone

Woe unto the one who takes and inherits it.

[32]. A deeper analysis of Ravikovitch's language and the poem's extensive biblical allusions could enhance Wallach's intertextual depth, especially regarding the subject of violent, sexual language.

[33]. I have not seen any reference to "King's Gifts" in the critical literature concerning Ravikovitch's writing, nor did the translated English collection of Ravikovitch poetry include this poem.

[34]. The metonymic/metaphoric movement from the body to the Temple (in the expression *Even Ha-roshah* and from the temple to the body (in the poem) emphasizes that in this hierarchy the axis of transference is through the head. Yet the Head Stone becomes poisonous and reverses the biblical prototype which Zechariah's prophecy ("Not by might, nor by power but by my spirit") intended. As informed by the stone of Abimelech, it is full of the irony of destruction and death. The intensified desire spiralling around the Stone is demonstrated by the extensive use of infinitives. *Larotz*, to shatter, or crush, is inseparable from the pathetic death of Abimelech who, once hit by the "piece of millstone" thrown by a woman, asked to be killed twice, "Draw thy sword, and slay me, that man say not of me, A woman slew him" (Judges 9:53-54). Note the meaning of other infinitives: *Lamush*, to touch, to feel; *lalok,* to lick; *nageah rosh*, goring with (one's) head.

[35]. Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 94-207, quote at 97, emphasis in original.

[36]. Ibid., 101.

[37]. Indeed, in 1983, Mikhah Kirshner for the magazine *Monitin,* shot a series of photographs based on the poem, with the poet appearing in the pictures in the role of the female subject. Sarna describes the occasion: "They continued to the studio of the photographer, Mikhah Kirshner. Dani Dotan's younger brother, a handsome young soldier, took off all his clothes. Yona didn't want to undress. 'I am crazy for clothes,' she said, 'Nudity takes experience.' They wound the tefillin around the soldier's arm and he placed it (the arm) on Yona's body. Kirshner began to shoot. The camera clicked; the naked man twisted around Yona. The photos were filled with sensual scenes. But when the printout arrived at *Monitin,* the assistant graphic editor, a religious man, threatened to resign if the erotic photos of "Tefillin" were chosen for the Magazine. They cut the body of the soldier and the tefillin, only the hand of the man on Yona's stomach remained as a kind of hairy sexual body part," Sarna, *Yona Wallach: Biography*, 285-86, my translation.

[38]. Henry Sayre, "Performance," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 94.

[39]. Batya Podos, "Feeding the Feminist Psyche through Ritual Theater," in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*, ed. Charlene Spetnak (New York: Anchor Press, 1982), 305-11.

[40]. Laor, "The Work of Literature as Theater," 249-50.

[41]. Felman, "Turning of the Screw of Interpretation," 107.

[42]. Also recited in the Morning Prayer service.

[43]. At an early stage of this study I conducted a small-scale ethnographic study, asking several men in Berkeley to describe the ritual of tefillin in general and also the personal experience. The description of Arik, a reform rabbi in his forties, is relevant here.

[44]. The poem "Ivrit" appeared first in Wallach's collection *Tsurot* (Forms) (Tel Aviv: Siman Kri'ah, 1985) and later in the collected poems, *Tat Hakarah Niftahat Kmo Menifah: Selected Poems, 1963-1985*, 180-82.

[45]. **"Berries"**

When you come to make love with me
Wear a black dress
Illustrated with berries
And a black wide brimmed hat
Decorated with berries
And hold a basket of berries
And sell me berries
Tell me in a high sweet voice
Berries berries
Who wants berries
Do not wear anything underneath the dress
Later
Strings will lift you up
Invisible or visible
And bring you down
Straight onto my prick.

In *'Or Pere,* 52.

[46]. In fact, a female can turn into a man in a linguistic expression and play with the notion of having a penis. Nor is the male body, in "Berries," fully present; the ambiguity of the expression *al ha-zayin sheli*, which literally means "on my penis," in colloquial Hebrew indicates highly impassioned disregard, as in the expression "I don't give a damn." See also Ben Amotz and Ben Yehuda, *Milon Olami* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1982), 1:169. Wallach constructs here a male poetic body and extends the meaning of the sexual interaction, underplaying the role of the Phallus in favor of its "mindful" mood.

[47]. Ilan Schenfeld correctly observes that tefillin and the *dagdegan* are the "two articles of reality" that are confronted in this poem, linguistically and narratively. However, he does not make clear how this confrontation indicates that Wallach "did not intend to destroy the sacredness but to intensify it." Ilan Schenfeld, "A Pure, Isolated Pain," 6. In this short article, "Tefillin" is used to demonstrate Wallach's poetic stance. Despite of the article's brevity and occasional lack of clarity, Schenfeld does demonstrate Wallach's contribution to Hebrew poetry.

[48]. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trs. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 214.

[49]. Ibid. 137.

[50]. I am thankful to Chana Kronfeld for pointing this out to me.

[51]. *Tat Hakarah Niftachat Kmo Menifah*, 239. Also in *Mofa'* (Appearance) Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me'uchad, 1985)

[52]. "Come to Me as a Capitalist, " which was published in *Mofa* and in *Tat Hakarah Niftachat Kmo Menifah*, 226, could also be included in this group of poems.

[53]. Along these lines, Miri Kubovy concludes her study on violence in Wallach's poetry by saying, " The religious violence in Yona Wallach's poetry is the violence of God." In "Violence in Yona Wallach Poetry," *Proceeding of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1993), 237-244. See also Aharon Shabtai, "The Sweet Voice of God," 33; and "On Yona Wallach," *Khadarim* 5, June 1985.

[54]. *Ba'al* as husband was one of the first words that feminists aimed to remove from the vocabulary of modern Hebrew. Originally the noun *ba'al* was a proper name in the Bible that referred to a specific deity, Hadad, the West Semitic storm god, the most important deity in the Canaanite pantheon. God was the "master" and "husband" to

Israel, and already in Hosea (2:16) it gains the meaning of husband. In its verbal form, however, *liv'ol* gained strict sexual connotation meaning to make love forcefully or from a position of power.

[55]. Helit Yeshurun, "The Sweet Voice of God," [Hebrew] 35. Although I am aware of the argument that, following Lacan, God is *jouissance* and sexual relations with God can be seen as a celebration of poetry, it seems to me that such a construction of Woman remains grounded in phallic subordination. See Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trs. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 137-148.

[56]. I am referring to the overwhelming response of contemporary Israelis to cultic, religious, metaphysical movements which are thought to provide satisfying answers to everyday difficulties.

[57] . Rather than accepting it as a sign of female inferiority, Lorde calls to bring the erotic back to female consciousness as part of a political and spiritual position. See Audre Lorde "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984) pp. 53-59, and Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975)

[58] . Sarna, *Yona Wallach* 285.

[59] . David Gurevitch, "Feminism and Postmodernism," *Alpayim* 7 (1993): 51, my translation.

[60]. The common objectives of feminism and postmodernism, according to Gurevitch, are articulated in terms of the notions of difference, allegory and deconstruction. Although Gurevitch does not discuss or even mention the poem "Tefillin" or, in fact, the *'Or Pere* collection, I find his discussion of Wallach's poetry relevant and important. Gurevitch, "Feminism and Postmodernism," 51.

[61]. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). In the Israeli gender dichotomy men are associated with public/spirit/culture, whereas women are analogous to private/nature. The female body, accordingly, is a metonym of domesticity. Whereas nationalism and heroism are identified with masculinity, women are trivialized to physical matters. Fuchs, *Israeli Mythogynies*

[62]. Jacques Derrida and Christie MacDonald, "Choreographies," *Diacritics*, 12, Summer 1982, 76.

[63]. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1988), 42-71.

[64]. On giving birth through speech in Judaism see Rachel Adler, "A Mother in Israel: Aspects of the Mother Role in Jewish Myth," *Davka* 17, 20-28. On the relationship between language and violence see Bal, "The Rape of

Narrative and the Narrative of Rape: Speech Acts and Body Language in Judges," in *Literature and the Body*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988) 1-32.

[65]. Woman's ability to speak stands in stark contrast to the traditional Jewish construct of the female voice, which claims that *"Kol be-'ishah 'ervah," hearing* a woman's voice is indecent, for one must not read the Shema', one of the core prayers in the morning and evening Jewish worship services, while a woman can be heard singing. Consider Wallach's treatment to the mouth/sex articulation in her short poem "A Crocodile Woman:"

His incisors are the parting of her legs

Her stomach -- his eye

He can be anything this crocodile (*Tat Hakarah Niftachat Kmo Menifah,* 238)

[66]. In another poem, "My Body Was Wiser Than Me" (*'Or Pere*, 22), Wallach sets this parameter of body over mind. The ability of the body to set its own measures for enduring pain forces Wallach to abandon the notion that she is limitless.

[67]. The demonstrative significance of laying tefillin is explicitly articulated in the Bible. "Tefillin," in Aramaic, from the Hebrew root *f.l.l.* means to pray but also *f.l.h* .to discriminate. See Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, 902.

[68]. Mieke Bal, "The Rape of Narrative and the Narrative of Rape," 1-32.

[69]. Elaine Scarry, "Introduction," in *Literature and the Body*, ed. Scarry, viii.

תנין אשה

מַלְתְּעוֹתָיו הֵן פִּשְׁקֶת רַגְלֶיהָ
טַבּוּרָהּ עֵינוֹ
הוּא יָכוֹל לִהְיוֹת כָּל דָּבָר הַתַּנִּין הַזֶּה.

יש לי במה בראש

יֵשׁ לִי בָּמָה בְּרֹאשׁ
וְהִיא מְצִיאוּתִית יוֹתֵר מִכָּל בָּמָה
וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי יוֹרֶדֶת מִמֶּנָּה
אֲנִי יוֹרֶדֶת לְשֶׁפֶל הַמַּדְרֵגָה
יֵשׁ לִי תֵּאַטְרוֹן שָׁלֵם בְּרֹאשׁ
וַאֲנִי בּוֹ הַגִּבּוֹר
וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי מְכַבֶּה אֶת הָאוֹר
אֲנִי גָּמוּר
וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי מַפְסִיק לְשַׂחֵק
מַפְסִיקִים חַיַּי
וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי מוֹרִיד אֶת הַמָּסָךְ
מֵאֲחוֹרֵי רִיסַי
אוֹבְדִים כָּל יְדִידַי
אֲהוּבַי.
זִכְרוֹנוֹתַי
צְבָעַי
קְסָמַי
בָּאוֹת בַּהֲלוֹתַי
חֶרְדּוֹתַי
גְּוִיּוֹתַי
עֶלְבּוֹנוֹתַי.

תותים

כְּשֶׁתְּבוֹאִי לִשְׁכַּב אִתִּי
תִּלְבְּשִׁי שִׂמְלָה שְׁחוֹרָה
מְאֻיֶּרֶת בְּתוּתִים
וּמִגְבַּעַת שְׁחוֹרָה
מְקֻשָּׁטֶת בְּתוּתִים
וְהַחֲזִיקִי סַלְסִלַּת תּוּתִים
וְתִמְכְּרִי לִי תּוּתִים
תַּגִּידִי בְּקוֹל דַּק וּמָתוֹק
תּוּתִים תּוּתִים
מִי רוֹצֶה תּוּתִים
אַל תִּלְבְּשִׁי כְּלוּם מִתַּחַת לַשִּׂמְלָה
אַחַר כָּךְ
חוּטִים יַעֲלוּ אוֹתָךְ לְמַעְלָה
בְּלִתִּי נִרְאִים אוֹ נִרְאִים
וְיוֹרִידוּ אוֹתָךְ
יָשָׁר עַל הַזַּיִן שֶׁלִּי.

כשתבוא

כְּשֶׁתָּבוֹא לִשְׁכַּב אִתִּי
תִּלְבַּשׁ מַדִּים שֶׁל שׁוֹטֵר
אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה הָעֲבַרְיָן הַקָּטָן
אַתָּה שׁוֹטֵר
תְּעַנֵּה אוֹתִי
תּוֹצִיא מִמֶּנִּי סוֹדוֹת
אֲנִי לֹא אֶהְיֶה גֶּבֶר
אֲנִי אוֹדֶה
אֶשָּׁבֵר
אֲזַמֵּר מִיָּד
אַסְגִּיר אֶת כֻּלָּם
תִּירַק עָלַי
תִּבְעַט בְּבִטְנִי
תִּשְׁבֹּר אֶת שִׁנַּי
הוֹצֵא אוֹתִי בְּאַמְבּוּלַנְס
אֶל הֶעָתִיד
אֶל הַמָּחָר.

אִם אַתָּה לֹא תָּבוֹא אֵלֵינוּ
מִי יָבוֹא
כְּלוּם אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁבִּקַּשְׁנוּ: בּוֹאָה!
וְלֹא יָבוֹא?

ב

לַיְלָה תָּמִים חִכּוּ עַל פִּתְחָם
מָשִׁיחַ לֹא בָּא אֲלֵיהֶם לַנְחוֹתָם,
שֶׁמָּא מָשִׁיחַ כְּכָל הָאָדָם
יַעַן הָפַךְ דִּבּוּרוֹ וְנִחָם.

המאמינים:
כְּלוּם שָׂדֶה שֶׁל מֵתִים לוֹכֶדֶת
אֶת הַחַי?
כְּלוּם שָׂדֶה שֶׁל מֵתִים בּוֹלַעַת
אֶת הַחַי?
הִנֵּה בָּתֵּינוּ מְכוּרִים
וְרֹב הוֹנֵנוּ לָאֲחֵרִים
וּמְקוֹמֵנוּ כִּשְׂדֵה־מֵתִים
הֵם הָרַבִּים וַאֲנַחְנוּ הַמְעַטִּים.

כְּלוּם שָׂדֶה שֶׁל מֵתִים לוֹכֶדֶת
אֶת הַחַי?
כְּלוּם שָׂדֶה שֶׁל מֵתִים בּוֹלַעַת
אֶת הַחַי?

מתנות מלכים

הַמֶּלֶךְ יָרַד עִם אֲהוּבָתוֹ
אֶל תַּחְתִּית הַסְּפִינָה
אֶל תַּחְתִּית הַסְּפִינָה
לִבְחֹר לָהּ מִבֵּין גְּנָזָיו מַתָּנָה.

– אֲנִי אֶתֵּן לָךְ פָּרָשִׁים וּמְשַׁמְּשִׁים
אֲנִי אֶבְנֶה לָךְ הֵיכָלוֹת תְּפִלָּה
אֲנִי אֹמַר תְּפִלָּתֵךְ לֵאלֹהִים
תְּפִלָּתֵךְ בִּשְׁבִילֵךְ – בְּאַהֲבָתִי.

אֲנִי אָבִיא לָךְ שֻׁנְהַבִּים וְחֻכִּיִּים.
זְקֵנִים וַחֲכָמִים יְשָׁרְתוּנָךְ.
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר חָקַרְתִּי וְאִוַּנְתִּי בְּחָכְמָה
אֲגַלֶּה לָךְ – בְּאַהֲבָתִי.

אֲנִי אָבִיא לָךְ נְגָסִים וְכוּשִׁיִּים
וְרֶכֶב שְׁבָא וּנְגִידָה וְשָׁלִישָׁה
רֹאשֵׁךְ יָסֹב עָלַיִךְ כַּגַּלְגַּל בְּרֹב חִשְׁקִי.
אֲנִי אָבִיא לָךְ אֶת הָאֵבֶן הָרִאשָׁה.

מקהלה
הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה, הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
אַשְׁרֵי נוֹטֵל אוֹתָהּ וִירֵשָׁהּ.

– אֲנִי יָרַשְׁתִּי אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
וְרֶכֶב שְׁבָא וּנְגִידָהּ וְשָׁלִישָׁהּ.
רֹאשִׁי סוֹבֵב הוֹלֵךְ בְּאַוְתִי
לָמוּשׁ אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
לָלֹ֫ק אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
לָרֹץ אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה.

אֲנִי נָטַלְתִּי כָּל תַּאֲוָתִי
כְּכָל אֲשֶׁר רָבְתָה תַּאֲוָתִי
הָיְתָה תַּאֲוָתִי לְאֵין־שָׂבְעָה
נָטַלְתִּי חֵלֶק לְשִׁשָּׁה וְגַם שִׁבְעָה.
אֲנִי רוֹצָה אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
לָמוּשׁ אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
לָלֹ֫ק אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
נִגַּח רֹאשׁ אֶל הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה.

תַּאֲוָתִי תִּהְיִי לִי בְּעוֹכְרַי
וְיוֹם מוֹתִי אָשׁוּר וְלֹא רָחוֹק
אָשִׂיחָה נֶגְדָּה־נָּא אֶת כָּל תַּאֲוָתִי –
אֲנִי רוֹצָה אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
לָמוּשׁ אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
לָרֹץ אֶת הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה

עָלַי וְעַל רֹאשִׁי
עָלַי וְעַל רֹאשִׁי
וְעַל צֶאֱצָאַי
יָדַעְתִּי שֶׁתַּאֲוָתִי תִּהְיִי לִי בְּעוֹכְרַי.

הַמֶּלֶךְ הוּא הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה.
מִתַּחְתִּית הַסְּפִינָה וְעַד קְצָווֹת עוֹלָם
רַע הַדָּבָר שֶׁמִּשְׁרָתָיו עוֹרִים כֻּלָּם
הַאִם לֹא יִרְאוּ אֶת הָאֵשׁ
יוֹצֵאת מִן הָאָטָד
בּוֹעֶרֶת בְּמַלְכָּכֶם?

הַמֶּלֶךְ הוּא הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה.

מקהלה
הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשׁ, הָאֶבֶן הָרֹאשָׁה
אֲבוֹי לַנּוֹטֵל אוֹתָהּ וִירֵשָׁהּ.