

# Mad Max Fury Road

## Escaping the Phallic Economy of the Exodus

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### Abstract

The relationship between the film *Mad Max Fury Road* and the biblical text of the Exodus is explored via Hegel's first man of history and Hélène Cixous's polemic against the Hegelian model "Le sexe ou la tête".

### Key words

Hélène Cixous; Book of Exodus; Mad Max.

*L'enfer, c'est les Autres.*<sup>1</sup>

The contours of the Mad Max universe are iconic given the franchise's cult status. The grotesquely violent spectacle is synchronous in each endowment. Max Rockatansky began as a policeman in a dystopian, pre-apocalyptic Australia. He is reborn as Mad Max when he loses his wife and child to a depraved motorcycle gang. This initial crucible takes Max's innocence, sanity, and humanity in one swoop and he becomes the lonely antihero characterized in subsequent films. *The Road Warrior*, *Beyond Thunderdome* and the latest film, *Fury Road*, are set in a post-apocalyptic desert milieu. Summed up in the words of the quasi-biblical narrator of *The Road Warrior*:

In the roar of an engine, he lost everything and became a shell of a man, a burnt-out desolate man, a man haunted by the demons of his past, a man who wandered out into the wasteland. (Hayes et al. 1981)

Max's only ambition is survival and that is embedded in despair. He lives by the Sartrean anthem, "L'enfer, c'est les Autres" (Sartre 1947, 92). The world is absurd and worse, "a maelstrom of decay." Even so, each time that he is reluctantly pulled from his shell shock by another human being, his humanity temporarily returns to Messianic proportions. In this, he plays the role of the lonely prophet, trapped and tormented by his own good faith in a blighted and meaningless world—"a white-line nightmare" (Hayes et al. 1981).

Certainly, the Mad Max franchise's links with Judeo-Christian myth and associated biblical narratives are routinely attested in film reviews such as Nick Pinkerton who notes of *Fury Road*, "the flight across the desert, replete with a sandstorm whipped up by a freak cyclone, evokes the Old Testament shock and awe that evaded

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<sup>1</sup> From the Jean-Paul Sartre play *No Exit*: "hell is other people" in *Huis clos suivi de Les mouches* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 92.

Ridley Scott's *Exodus: Gods and Kings*" (Pinkerton 2015, 81-2; also Kain 2015). Nathan Abrams (2015) declares it outright as a Jewish Odyssey, while reviewers like Klawans of *The Nation* offers unconscious offhand allusions:

It's like a simoom, a conquering Amazon, a burning bush. You don't so much watch it as enter its presence—and once there, you find that it does not stoop to explain itself. After all of 30 seconds' worth of introductory voice-over, which is not so much an exposition as a groan of despair from Max, the action starts and the guidance ends. (2015, 35)

In the context of film studies, Mick Broderick sees the franchise within the frame of traditional action film housing an evolution towards "a recasting of the Judeo-Christian myth of a messianic hero-saviour annihilating an oppressive tyranny, and liberating an elect into a new reign of communal harmony" (1993, 362). This theoretic is deeply embedded in Joseph Campbell's (1949) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Broderick finds that "the journey of Max throughout the trilogy as an idealized everyman symbolizes the 'necessary' path of the collective social process toward rebirth and renewal after the hero's successive trials by entropy, deprivation, and nuclear war" (1993, 363).<sup>2</sup> Katherine Biber (2001, 33) and Christopher Sharrett (1985, 80-91) also find Miller's Mad Max universe rife with biblical and mythic resonance in a pastiche of cinematic genre including biblical epic, science fiction, and horror. Biber sees the franchise as "loaded with citations" that sweep the breadth of the western canon from the Old Testament to *Hamlet*, *Lord of the Flies* to Hobbes, Rousseau to Nietzsche (2001, 33).

*Fury Road* readily evokes Exodus wilderness mythology, heightened by the breathtaking cinematography of the Namibian desert and overlaid by themes such as slavery, journeys to freedom, the mythos of the Promised Land, and stunning scenes such as the spectacular burst of water from within the rock face as if from Horeb itself (Exod. 17:6), the chase sequences on V8 chariots, "Pharaoh's" war boys and Pharaoh himself as Immortan Joe, replete with armour and face mask and regaled as a living god. George Miller's Mad Max desert imaginary is inhabited by lost tribes and warring city-states. The cinematic extravaganza of the massive sand storm conjures up a biblical memory of chariots swallowed up by a red sea, as if taken by the voracious mouth of the Hebrew God himself. It is a fiery cloud that accompanies the flight of the freed female slaves led by Furiosa. The imagery of the Hebrews fleeing from the apocalyptic conditions of Egypt and then lost in Sinai's wastelands in search of God is evoked at every turn.

### Max as Hegel's first man

"Where must we go ... we who wander this Wasteland in search of our better selves?"—*The First History Man*.<sup>3</sup>

In the narrative of Exodus 13, the crossing of the Red Sea by the fleeing Hebrew slaves becomes Broderick's kind of rebirth and renewal of Hebrew history. It is a "collective social process," post the entropy caused by the ten plagues of Egypt. An environment of conflict is portended as Hebrew society transforms.<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly in *Fury Road*, a

<sup>2</sup> *Fury Road* is now the fourth film in the Mad Max franchise.

<sup>3</sup> From the screenplay by George Miller, Brendan McCarthy, and Nico Lathouris, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Broderick, "Surviving Armageddon," 363.

reliance on the violent Hegelian conception of historical progress is more than evident in the director's construction of the Mad Max world and further implied in the epigraph that concludes the film: "Where must we go ... we who wander this Wasteland in search of our better selves?" This epigraph is attributed to an imagined future history called *The First History Man*—a ready reference to Hegel.<sup>5</sup>

In *Fury Road*, nuclear desolation of the earth has been the end result of the Oil Wars and Water Wars:

Mankind has gone rogue, terrorizing itself. The earth has gone sour. Our bones are poisoned. We have become half-life. (Miller et al. 2015)

Humankind in the Mad Max universe is entangled in an animalistic struggle for survival with respect to food, fuel, and shelter. Mimicking Hegel's political schema, combatants have arisen, craving recognition, which is what Hegel discerns as the essential accoutrement of humanness and human dignity: "The essence of spirit, then, is self-consciousness" (2010, 51). As Fukuyama describes it, "the stakes in this bloody battle at the beginning of history are not food, shelter or security but pure prestige" (2012, loc. 210). This desire for prestige is core to Hegel's figuring of the human distinction from animals, and precedes that first "glimmer of freedom" as per Fukuyama's reading. For Hegel, freedom is experienced at first only by the one and that for all to experience freedom is the end of history, not the beginning: "One is free ... some are free, and finally ... all men as such are free, and that man is by nature free" (2010, 54). These first degrees of freedom according to Hegel are arbitrary, savage, brutish and despotic. Freedom in its further degrees is transient, limited and undeveloped, relying on the servitude of the masses. In its final incarnation, Freedom, though it remains according to Hegel indefinite and open to interpretation, is an actualization of human consciousness, self-knowledge, and self-realization, "the sole end of the spirit":

The substance of the spirit is freedom. From this, we can infer that its end in the historical process is the freedom of the subject to follow its own conscience and morality, and to pursue and implement its own universal ends; it also implies that the subject has infinite value and that it must become conscious of its supremacy. The end of the world spirit is realized in substance through the freedom of each individual. (54)

Fukuyama describes this first man of history as only distinguishable from the animal in his "desire for desire," that is, "desire for recognition" (2012, xviii). Civilization then devolves into a class society of masters and slaves. There are those few who achieve prestige through acts of violence, such as the villainous *Fury Road* character Immortan Joe and his sons, and those who submit in fear of death and thus remain unfulfilled, such as the War Boys and even more so, the thirsting, raggedy populace. However there remains inherent dissatisfaction for masters who must struggle to maintain their lordship in the face of other masters, and frustration for slaves who do not derive any pleasure of human recognition or dignity at all in their state of bondage. For Hegel, it is this dissatisfaction and consequent drive for dignity that propels history.

Religion is co-opted in the film and made to work to maintain the social order of master and slave. Immortan Joe has the service of a throng of kamikaze "dead-white, half naked, shave-skulled youths" (Travers, 2015, 66). Mouths sprayed white. Shouting

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<sup>5</sup> A similar theoretical connect underlies Jean-Bernard Pouy's cyberpunk novel *Spinoza encule Hegel* (1996).

blindly, “Witness me!” as they jubilantly embrace violent death (Miller et al. 2015). The religious vision consists of an eschatological Valhalla, a “fanatical and erotic fantasy of an afterlife” according to Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* (2015, 66). “I live, I die. I live again.”

Where do they come from, all these dead-white, half-naked, shave-skulled men? Why is it a form of blessing for them to have their mouths sprayed with aerosol paint, while their leader intones, “You will ride eternal, shiny and chrome”? ... What makes you think you’ve got time to ask? Unlike action directors of the plodding sort, George Miller doesn’t ask you to understand the deliriously strange world into which he throws you headlong. He just wants to change the parts you recognize. (Klawans 2015, 35)

This is the fervent religiosity of those who know they are about to die, who are almost already dead anyway from radiation poisoning. Riddled with tumors it is an ugly mortality and one in which they are owned body and soul, furthering the warlord’s cause in the hope of a better next life. The inclusion of Nordic eschatology removes the film from too close a mimicry of the Semitic biblical analogy, but re-aligns it as a post-colonial and European dystopia.

Max in *Fury Road* is tormented by this Hegelian economy. “My world is fire and blood,” he mutters in the soliloquy of the opening scene, “Each of us was in our own way broken. It was hard to know who was more crazy—me or everyone else.” He alone, out of all these creatures, seeks to avoid civilization at all costs. He is tormented by the innocent dead, “worming their way into the black matter of [his] brain” inch by inch (Miller et al. 2015). Max has the potential to become a Hegelian master yet this character has played more than once a reluctant Moses, leading the weak and vulnerable, rescuing them from servitude and worse, escaping Pharaoh and all his chariots. He has crossed the Red Sea again and again. In *Fury Road* it could be said that Mad Max stands on the edge of the Promised Land, but refuses to enter. Perhaps it is not Max then who wanders the wilderness in search of his better self. Alone, in despair, tormented by ghosts, questioning his sanity, he is the tool of capricious gods and for Hegel, “it is the mission of the gods to humble the great” (2010, 38).

In *Fury Road*, the tomblike silence of Max’s desolate wandering is punctuated by his capture. In the first scene Max is bearded and mute, a prophet-hermit wrapped up in dusty leather, surveying the land. In a dramatic change of scene he is at the citadel, brutally clipped and tattooed then strung up, upside-down and cruciform, as a living blood bag for the corpse-white war boy Nux<sup>6</sup> who is rapidly approaching the end of his half-life. In a parallel narrative the viewer is introduced to Imperator Furiosa, the first of her kind in Mad Max, a female general of warlord Immortan Joe who is about to flee into the desert with the warlord’s five wives. It is notable that in the depiction and story arc of the five wives, Eve Ensler, famed feminist creator of *The Vagina Monologues*, was consulted by Miller for her human rights work regarding wartime sexual violence against women (see Dockterman 2015a; 2015b). For the first time in the Mad Max series, there are two protagonists in the film and necessarily, their stories will shortly collide. In terms of the weighting of these lead roles, it is Furiosa who drives a compelling narrative and Mad Max who is swept into her story.

Furiosa is a stunning character, discordant with the typecast female action hero in

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<sup>6</sup> Nux in Latin means “nut”—a worthless thing of no real value.

popular culture. Her hair is clipped to her skull, her forehead painted with grease. She is more Ripley of *Aliens* than Black Widow of the Avengers. She is not a *femme fatale* in that her character is not laced with expected sexual spectacle that often accompanies the female action hero (e.g. Black Widow, Wonder Woman, Lara Croft). She is an amputee with a steel prosthesis. She is an older woman, not a nubile ingénue. In contrast to the prized fertility of the five wives, she is presumably barren. She is tall and strong, enlightened and burdened, regal, stoic and resilient—a survivor. She appears to have a hard-won independence as opposed to the sexualized vulnerabilities that frame her charges. Like Max, she is more warrior priest/prophet than sexual object and does not function in any typical way as a visual promise of pleasure and yet she sustains intrigue and appeal. There is no undercurrent of desire between Max and Furiosa and this is perhaps because sex equates to violence in this dystopia. They are both clearly sickened by it. While a kind of intimacy develops, it is recognition of the other rather than sexual desire that is foregrounded. Unlike the slave wives of Joe's harem who feature as victims and innocents, Furiosa seems to carry with her some undisclosed blood guilt from which she seeks redemption, and unlike the War Boys, she does this in good faith and with an enlightened knowing that is not blinded by the phallic halo surrounding Immortan Joe. She has hidden within herself hope that is as fledgling and futile as a seedling in the irradiated desert, a utopian memory of her matriarchal tribe, and the Green Place. In comparison to Max she is terribly sane, maintaining her grievous sanity in the face of her apparent knowledge of good and evil, while he seems to exist on the very edge, his fragile grasp on sanity punctuated by hallucinations symptomatic of severe post-traumatic stress.

### **Furiosa as Cixous's first woman**

The realm of the proper, culture, functions by the appropriation articulated, set into play by man's classic fear of seeing himself expropriated, seeing himself deprived ... by his refusal to be deprived, in a state of separation, by his fear of losing the prerogative, fear whose response is all of History. Everything must return to the masculine. "Return": the economy is founded on a system of returns. If a man spends and is spent, it's on condition that his power returns. If a man should go out, if he should go out to the other, it's always done according to the Hegelian model, the model of the master-slave dialectic. (Cixous 1981, 50)<sup>7</sup>

It is against a Hegelian economy that Cixous rails in her 1976 essay "Le sexe ou la tête" and begins by reflecting on Sun Tse's *Manual of Strategy*. In response to a dare, Sun Tse is tasked with turning the King's 180 concubines into soldiers. When the women failed to respond to his orders Sun Tse stands on his principles and decapitates the two women he had set as commanders. The shock of the order has a profound effect on the remaining women. They marched in absolute silence, and absolute passivity then, all afraid of losing their heads. As Cixous claims, it is the keeping of one's heads whilst simultaneously and figuratively losing them that is at stake for women. She then explores the various myths and metaphors where women are confined to this kind of passivity:

Women don't wake up by themselves: man has to intervene ... caught in a chain of metaphors, metaphors that organize culture ... ever her moon to the masculine

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<sup>7</sup> All English quotes from "Le sexe ou la tête" are from the 1981 translation of this essay, which appeared in the journal *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, translated by Annette Kuhn.

sun ... concavity to masculine convexity ... while man is obviously the active, the upright, the productive ... (1981, 43-4)

It is nothing new to say that the Bible very much affirms and maintains this kind of culture, a chain of metaphors that echo so seamlessly in dystopian films like *Fury Road* and fuels the violent images such as the scene where Immortan Joe holds aloft the distended pregnant body of beautiful Angharad weeping not for her tragic death but that the son she bears him is dead. She was nothing more than an organic vessel upon which rests Immortan Joe's ambitions for mastery. Her body is co-opted to serve his ambitions and need for recognition not unlike the kings and warlords of Israel. As the dead child is pulled from Angharad's/Tiamat's carcass this patriarchal litany is again uttered by Immortan's son Rictus Erectus who chants, "I had a baby brother. I had a baby brother and he was perfect in every way" (Miller et al. 2015). As Exum writes in *Fragmented Women*, biblical women are utterly subject to the androcentric agenda of scripture: "victims of male rivalry" (2016, loc. 1850), bent under the phallic law of death, replaceable, abandoned, "in literature as male constructs", formed in the "fears, aspirations and prejudices of their male creators" (loc. 433). Inscription features tangibly as a life and death tool of the Hegelian dialectic in *Fury Road*, and is a core concern for Cixous in "Le sexe":

For as soon as we exist, we are born into language and language speaks (to us), dictates its law, a law of death: it lays down its familial model, lays down its conjugal model, and even at the moment of uttering a sentence, admitting a notion of "being" a question of being an ontology, we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire, the desire that mobilizes philosophy discourse. (1981, 45)

Old Miss Giddy, a literal history woman in *Fury Road*, has the chronicles of the citadel tattooed on her body. In an extraordinary scene Max himself experiences this weight of the Word in the initial beats of the film. When Max is bound and clipped, he is also tattooed with the law of the master. Against his will he is inscribed with the specifics of which of his body parts can be put to use: blood type, organs and genitals, as well as the admonition "keep muzzled" (Miller et al. 2015). It is a short visceral experience of utter enslavement. It is an embodied and dehumanizing experience in which he steps profoundly into the place of the other. Nathan Abrams (2015) connects the death law of language in *Fury Road* to Kafka's short story "In the Penal Colony":

While incarcerated, Max's back is tattooed in a manner reminiscent of the Jewish author Franz Kafka's bodily-inscription-as-execution as recounted in his short story *In the Penal Colony*. Of course, the tattoo also suggests the numbers on the arms of Holocaust survivors.

It was clearly the groan for freedom that drove Immortan Joe's wives to plan an escape. The walls of their boudoir were also covered in inscriptions but those that contravene the law of the master: "Who killed the world?" "We are not things." This groan for freedom also marked much of the writing of French Feminism:

I would like so much to be a woman without giving it a thought. I would like so much to be the freest of free women: so free that I would even be liberated from the painful sensation of being-liberated. I would like to be so freely free that I would never even think to say to myself: "How free I am!" because it is just something I would be. (Cixous 1994, 10)

Of course the experience of being freed can be just terrifying, that is, going from the known of enslavement to the precarious unknown of freedom. In the Hebrew experience, desert elation rapidly turned to fear and uncertainty, which compared unattractively to the familiarity and constancy of cruel captivity.

Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger (Exod. 16:3).

In *Fury Road*, even having witnessed the violent death of Angharad, Cheedo the Fragile, the youngest wife, is not able to survive her freedom, and seeks to be returned to the security of the warlord's cage.

For feminist readers of the Hebrew Bible, one antidote to the relentless patriarchy of the text has been to locate a biblical Furiosa, that is, a woman who escapes the scene of castration by breaking the patriarchal mold, a "one-armed Emperor Furiosa, [who] overthrows the war-loving, Earth-devouring patriarchy" (Klawans 2015, 35). And certainly, the weaponized, monster-killing woman warrior Furiosa may be a satisfying antidote for that reason. She takes upon herself the rape-revenge of Angharad and the other four wives. When looking for Furiosa in the biblical text, as evident in Nathan Abrams's (2015) review in *The Conversation*, it is a facile step to overlay this character on Jael in the book of Judges. Jael does stand out in the Hebrew Bible as the only named woman to kill a warrior, a general at that, by her own hand (Jdg. 5:24-7). There is also a reference to another remarkable woman, unnamed in Judges, who drops a millstone on an enemy general's head (9:52-3). Given the prohibition in Deut. 22:5 against women putting on a man's (warrior's) garb, it is not a surprise that, even including the actions of Jael and the woman-with-millstone, there is not a single scene in scripture where a woman holds an actual weapon of war. Jael kills Sisera with a domestic instrument and thus avoids this abomination proscribed in Deut. 22:5. A tent peg is not a dagger. So, while the sword is used against women in scripture, not a single woman picks one up until the apocryphal book of Judith that describes what is in essence a retelling of the Jael and Sisera tradition. In this instance, Judith draws Holofernes' own sword and hacks off his head in two brutal strokes.

She went to the bedpost near Holofernes' head, and took down his sword that hung there. She came close to his bed, took hold of the hair of his head, and said "Give me strength today, O Lord God of Israel!" Then she struck his neck twice with all her might, and cut off his head. Next she rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts. Soon afterward she went out and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag (Jud. 13:6-10).

In both the Judith and Jael tales, sexual entrapment seems to be part of the mise-en-scène (Niditch 2008, loc. 1231). Between the lines in each story, and certainly according to tradition, the antagonist's sexual desire becomes his weakness facilitating the opportunity for slaughter. In this, Judith does not resonate with Furiosa in important ways. Certainly, the acts of Judith and Jael serve to facilitate the salvation of the nation against its enemies, serving also to heighten the humiliation of their enemies. But it is all finally in the name of the Father. In a rare understatement, Exum writes in *Fragmented Women*: "In androcentric texts like the Bible, women are often made to speak and act against their own interests" (2016, xxiv). Abrams (2015) also seeks to link Furiosa to Queen Esther, but yet again the resonance is only slight. Angharad, the most queenly of

the concubines, is more Esther than Furiosa. In fact, searching for Furiosa amongst female characters in biblical narrative is futile and unsatisfying. She simply doesn't exist or perhaps only in the most tenuous of ways.<sup>8</sup> However, if Furiosa could be read as a re-inscription of the character of Moses (contra Abrams), there could be vastly more with which to engage.

Furiosa is a "prince" raised in the house of Pharaoh. Immortan Joe names her in the opening of the film, his "Imperator" (or general). She apparently has his regard. She appears burdened by her past like Moses in Exod. 2:12. She is solemn and weighted down by the ramifications of her actions, but determined. While raised in the house of Immortan Joe, her genealogy is other and belongs in the Green Place with her originary matriarchal tribe. She is not caught up in the War Boys' frenzied belief in Valhalla. Furiosa, the new woman of history, draws her enslaved and stubborn sisters out to an idea of freedom, out into the desert, and in search of the promised land of her childhood memories. This is the same one who at the end of the film will become the new leader of the Citadel and will command water to burst forth from a mighty rock (c.f. Exod. 17:6). Abrams (2015) of course sees Max as the Moses of the film:

Joe sends his post-apocalyptic equivalent of Pharaoh's chariots to recover his harem and to bring back Furiosa. Although the women eventually find freedom, Max leads them back to the "promised land", that is, an unguarded Citadel which, if they can make it back alive, is theirs for the taking. When they do, images of the heroic Max among the starving and thirsty slaves evoke those of the biblical Exodus.

In a way, these thin allusions hold, however it is Furiosa who leads, not Max. Max is more like an angel, or demigod, a reluctant tool of the gods. These gods have looked upon Furiosa with favour and sent him to her. In the end, however, it is her story, not his.

It is a refreshing exercise to re-inscribe Moses of Exodus as a woman. In the same way that Cixous re-inscribed Prometheus as Promethea in her 1983 novel *Le livre de Promethea*, the act of re-inscribing Moses here might lead to a subversion of the phallic economy that surrounds the Exodus.<sup>9</sup> It might stand for the liberation of women for themselves, as well as for a people. It might also stand as the possibility of a new relation. It could revalue the role sexual difference plays in the Exodus, that is, a reinscribing of the values and symbols of callous economy such as those Cixous calls, "a tooth for a tooth ... a gift for a gift ... the system of absolute equivalence" and transforming them into a "love that was more than merely a cover for, a veil of, war" (1981, 48). Already in *Fury Road* we see this possibility of a different relation, for example, when the possibility of escaping the vicious and violent debt cycle of the Proper Order begins to be spoken aloud. The third wife, The Dag, speaks to the old matriarch called Keeper of the Seeds in a fascinating snatch of dialogue:

The Dag: [to her belly] Stay right where you are, little Joe. Kind of lost its novelty out here.

Keeper of the Seeds: You're having a baby?

The Dag: Warlord, Jr ... It's gonna be so ugly.

Keeper of the Seeds: It could be a girl!

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<sup>8</sup> Deborah (Judges 4-5) is a possibility, for example.

<sup>9</sup> The contribution of Judith Plaskow's classic, *Standing again at Sinai* (1991) is seminal here.

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[Pauses, checks out her gun]

The Dag: You kill people with that, do you?

Keeper of the Seeds: Killed everyone I've ever met out here. Headshots all of, snap! Right on the medulla.

The Dag: I thought some of you girls were above all that.

Keeper of the Seeds: [after a pause] Come here. Take a peek. [Opens a medicine bag full of seeds, and even a sprout]

The Dag: [gasping] Seeds.

The Dag: These are from home. Heirlooms. The real thing. I plant one every chance I get.

The Dag: Where?

Keeper of the Seeds: So far nothing's took. Earth's too sour.

The Dag: Ah! So many different kinds.

Keeper of the Seeds: Trees, flowers, fruit. Back then everyone had a field. Back then there was no need to snap anybody. (Miller et al. 2015)

The question that the dialogue above raises is that, in celebrating the female action hero or violent *femme* in film, are we simply “persistently and perversely transgendering [women] as men?” Are we repeating, reworking, and recycling “the violence done to men by women” in that we simply recreate the Proper Order, evolving only in that now women collude in the violence and participate in their own enslavement? (Heathcote 2000, 204) Is it progress to see this false agency in a character like *Furiosa*? And whose gaze and whose desire does it satisfy? Is it right that in film, “women are still only allowed to be violent within certain parameters largely proscribed by what men are willing to tolerate”? (Mencimer 2001, 15) Mencimer of the *Washington Monthly* goes on to claim that:

To achieve box office success, the new action babes have to celebrate women's power without being so threatening that men would be afraid to sleep with the leading lady. (Ibid)

Yet Eve Ensler feels the women in *Fury Road* answer a powerful question: “How do women survive in a patriarchal, violent culture?” (cited in Dockterman 2015a, 54). And certainly, some (rather miserable) Men's Rights activists agree and have described it as Trojan Horse Feminism—a film that they have apparently been tricked into seeing.

The Green Place as Promised Land resonates in the film as a utopian dream that drives the exodus of *Furiosa* and the five wives through the desert. This is an unrealized imaginary in the film but one that subverts the cultural code. It is figured as a maternal space and those that live there inhabit a matriarchal world. These tribes are unified by the Vuvalini of Many Mothers and are ruled by maternal law. It is a green, verdant paradise. It might even be possible (at a stretch) in this context to envisage *Furiosa* as a kind of Moses-Eve, a representative Everywoman, and history's new woman, who is attempting a return to the tree of life, willing to come face to face with the fiery cherubim, with the fiery face of the storm God. *Mad Max*, too, could be read as a kind of Adam, the universal blood donor, who in one scene rises spectacularly from the dirt, and whose mental anguish and grief represents his eternal loss of the garden. These allusions are fleeting and yet viable. The Green Place is, at the end of the day, as illusory as it was for that first generation of Hebrew slaves. It is the unfortunate scenario that the primal couple must live inside culture, and thus the only possible project at hand for women wanting the right to freedom from the patriarchal master is to nurture their

agency in the deconstruction and transformation of the here and now world. In light of this, after the heartbreaking disappointment that meets Furiosa at the end of the road, she must return to the troubled citadel as its leader and begin again. She begins with the gift of water and steps into the figure of Cixous's new woman of history with startling resonance:

She had the double courage that women have when they have followed the course of fear and have descended down to the desert and have recognized it was death and there have tasted it to return from it not without fear but henceforth capable of living fear. Greater than the courage to disbelieve and then the courage to begin, to marvelously live before, before all exploration, before all reason, before god, before all hope, or after. (Cixous 1994, 41)

Furiosa is a unique character. Like Moses, she does not serve the master's interests but those of her people, and her people are her mothers and sisters. Her interests are profoundly invested in enslaved women. Furiosa is flawed yet liberated, retaining her unique power and identity even as her relationship with Max progresses. She is a woman prepared to journey through fear, despondency, and overwhelming odds, even to life and death.

It is a fascinating arc in the narrative when Mad Max, later in the film, voluntarily reattaches the blood transfusion tubes. In a curious moment of maternal representation, he provides his own blood for Furiosa who has taken a near mortal stab wound. Earlier in the film we have seen the rooms of women being milked, attached to tubes, like cows in a shed, breast milk also being a commodity. In a world where people are reduced to parts and where Max has already had one stint as an involuntary donor, it is a moment of compassion and a lucid escape from the Hegelian economy when, as Furiosa begins to succumb to shock, Max gifts to her his own blood. Max's silence in the film, particularly in this scene, definitively limns this escape from the Hegelian economy of the world of *Fury Road* and its possibility in Exodus. Whereas Furiosa and the wives are often heard in the film, Max is as mute as a Freudian hysteric. As Cixous writes concerning silence in "Le sexe":

Silence: silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech, they are aphonic, and at times have lost more than speech: they are pushed to the point of choking, nothing gets through. They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks and man doesn't hear the body. (1981, 49)

It is Max's recognition of the other in Furiosa that he at the same time as giving his own blood from his body, also gives up his name to her. Perhaps Abrams is right to see a little of Moses here in Max: the stumbling, stuttering speech of the most humble man on earth (Num. 12:3). This is a clarion moment that subverts patriarchal certainty in power. And in microcosm, Max and Furiosa show what is possible between the couple in refusing a Hegelian world wired by power and greed. This is where the work must be done, declares Cixous in "Le sexe." Certainly, in the culture of the West that has been so shaped by the biblical text that its references remain ubiquitous in film, the end of history, as Cixous describes it, is still yet to arrive:

... it's on the couple that we have to work if we are to deconstruct and transform culture. The couple as terrain, as space of cultural struggle, but also as terrain, as space demanding, insisting on, a complete transformation in the relation of one to the other. And so work still has to be done on the couple ... what a completely

different couple relationship would be like, what a love that was more than merely a cover for, a veil of, war would be like. (1981, 44)

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