

Chapter 1

Introduction

THE LOT COMPLEX

Now follows the text about Lot and his daughters. It perplexes both the Jews and our own people, and causes them to ask many questions. Our fathers generally passed it over, either because they were hindered by other endeavors or because God so directed it.

—Martin Luther¹

I.

Back to the Source

Let me begin by reviewing the shocking old story that haunts modern life and literature and has worked to make us what we are.

To seek his own good and avoid family strife, an ambitious young owner of herds heeds the advice of his wise uncle, a heaven-blessed nomad leader, that they part. The nephew heads for fertile country and moves into a rich city. God-fearing, well-meaning, but worldly—a compromiser—he dwells and prospers with his wife and daughters among wicked men in a thriving but doomed community. Meanwhile, the aged uncle is visited by divine messengers who tell him, first, that his barren old wife will miraculously conceive a child, and, second, that God means to destroy the bad city where his nephew dwells. The uncle, however, thinking of his relative, pleads and bargains with God to spare the place.

Two angels, posing as men, do come to observe the nephew's city, notorious for its evil ways. He rushes to welcome them, bowing and scraping, and presses them to take shelter, knowing that the men of the town, wild for "strange flesh," will try to ravish the visitors.

He is right. A violent horde masses around his house. The townsmen demand that he give up the two strangers so that they can know and use them. Frantic, terrified, believing his sacred duty to God requires him to defend his guests, he improvises a desperate plan. Wheedling, he calls the men “brothers” and tells them if they leave his two guests alone, he’ll give them his own daughters to use sexually. Caught up in choosing what he sees as the lesser of evils, he opts to sacrifice his own female flesh and blood, and he chooses, for God’s sake, the safety of his visitors and his sacred duty of hospitality over the life of his girls.

But the townsmen scream that he has no right at all to tell them what to do; they mean to break into his house, do what they want—rob, rape, or kill whomever they like. Then they maul him and try to force entrance. At this point, the two archangels reveal their power, rescue their host, pull him inside, and blind the men of the crowd, leaving them outside, stunned and groping to get in. God, the angels say, has now passed judgment and will obliterate the place. They tell the man to take his family and get out right away. He tries to rouse his prospective sons-in-law, but they laugh, doubt his story, and think him ridiculous. In the morning, the two divine visitors tell the man again to hurry up and take his wife and daughters and flee. The man delays, but the angels grab him and the three women and whisk them out of the city. The voice of the Lord tells them to escape for their lives, head for the hills, and under no circumstances look back.

Soon God unleashes a rain of fire that burns up their former home, the people in it, and all the surrounding cities and land. The man and his daughters are spared, but his wife disobeys the command, look backs at the searing destruction, and then hardens into a pillar of salt—a bitter monument of death. She becomes a part of the suddenly arid, dead landscape—female flesh turned into a geological fossil.

Perspective switches momentarily to the righteous uncle. This patriarch—safe and removed—gazes out from high ground, watching the whole plain and its cities go up in smoke. His survival casts irony over all that follows. The nephew and his daughters have no idea that anyone else survives the holocaust.

Surrounded by ruin and horror, the man and the two girls, desperate refugees, flee to the mountains where they find a cave to live in. In flat contrast to their final hours in the city, when, in a panic, their father treated them as sex objects to trade, the young women now become decisive,

action-taking subjects; it's their father who becomes a thing to manipulate. The daughters look to the future. Thinking the rest of humanity has been obliterated, the elder conspires with the younger to save the race. Their father is old, she says, and there are no other men left to mate with. It's up to them to begin repopulating the world by seducing him—to "preserve the seed of our father," she says.

But that means incest. Together, it seems, they must take responsibility for species survival by breaking the law and mating with their sire. The situation between father and daughters is completely reversed from what it was in town. Then he sought to dispose of their sexuality to preserve life. Now, they seek to control and manage his sexuality for what they determine to be the general good, no matter what he thinks or wills. The plotting older daughter assumes that the incest taboo is so powerful that their father would not rationally choose to have sex with them. Therefore they must overwhelm his inhibitions. On successive evenings, they ply him with wine, get him drunk, and then each—the older on the first night, the younger on the second—lies down naked in the cave with the oblivious man. They both get pregnant by him and have sons from whom two peoples spring (people destined to be scorned by the uncle's seed). That's the tale. After two nights of drunkenness and venery, nothing more is ever heard of the father, nor, after they give birth, of his daughters.

The story, of course, is scriptural—mainly from Genesis 19.² The man is Lot, that morally equivocal, bumbling, God-struck, put-upon, incestuous founding father—the patriarch, so to speak, in the closet (more precisely, in the cave). The uncle is Abraham, whose wife becomes the post-menopausal mother, Sarah; the petrified, nameless woman of salt is Lot's wife; the city is Sodom; the crowd of men are Sodomites; the punishment—like the punishment of Hell—is fire and brimstone; the once-fertile land is the land of the Dead Sea (also known as the Sea of Lot); and the conspiring, incestuous girls are Lot's daughters, whose respective issues are the Moabites and the Ammonites—nations alien to Israel. But scriptural history makes the elder daughter the mother of Moab, and thus the ancestor of the virtuous Moabite daughter Ruth, whose canonized Book of Ruth shows how the sexual relationship between a father-figure and a younger woman can be redeemed, legitimized, and blessed. From Ruth eventually descends the great poet-king David, the wise Solomon, the House of David, and, hence, in the Christian Bible, the genealogy, family, and holy fig-

ure of Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word. Thus the scandalous Lot family may be seen not only as figures representing the disreputable history of heathen, marginal peoples—outsiders, *others*—and the repressed incestuous history of human civilization and its origins, but also as the indispensable generating agents of female subjectivity, the integration of peoples, catholic sensibility, moral redemption, and even of Holy Scripture itself.³

II. *Defining the Lot Complex and Discovering its History*

Stories as well as people have their biographies, and it's the vibrant life of the Lot's daughters narrative I want to tell. In it, I find the origins of what I call the "Lot complex," a dynamic configuration of wishes, sexual fantasies, fears, and symbolic imagery that has worked to form generational relationships and structure personality, gender identity, religious faith, and social organization.⁴ By the term "complex," I mean a convergence and drastic condensation in human psychology of personal and social experience, images, drives, motives, and impulses that can be seen both to form and represent a pattern. A "complex"—as I use and define the term—is constituted out of the interaction between members of different generations and the history of adult-child relationships. As an organized and organizing group of ideas, memories, and powerful unconscious feelings, a complex serves to shape the psyche—its emotions, attitudes, and behavior. I don't claim that the Lot complex is universal, but I do argue that, given the similarity of certain historical, psychological, and biological conditions, it is general and prevalent, and I contend that in modern times especially, the evolving Lot story permeates imaginative life.

The Lot complex, as I read it in nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture, features the drive or compulsion to preserve, adapt, and/or expropriate the traditional paternal power to sustain, regenerate, define, represent, and transmit life and civilization—the patriarchal seed of culture in history. It thus plays a central part in the high drama of the change in the status of women and the liberation of female aspirations. Future-oriented, *Lot* expresses the agonizing demand to sacrifice the past, as you can read in Jesus's famous command, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32)—the succinct

biblical verse that popularized Lot and the Lot complex in the minds of millions.⁵ “Remember Lot’s wife,” an oxymoronic command, means you must give up the past with its memories to which you are wed—the past which has mothered you—and make yourself ready, under any circumstances, to give birth to the future. “Remember Lot’s wife” is an injunction to look to the past so that you will *not* look to the past, but forward. It offers a logical contradiction, a “double bind”—*always remember to forget*—and makes the ability to accept and live with that contradiction the key to the preservation and flourishing of humanity.

In Lot the father-daughter relationship becomes indispensable in the making and preservation of culture, but *Lot*, with its image of young females conspiring to take power and act also contains the seeds for transforming that patriarchal culture. The Lot story includes wish-fulfilling symbolic projections, unconscious longings, resentments, fears, rationalizing defense mechanisms, conflicts, and transgressions *of both fathers and daughters—of both women and men.*

It’s a perplexing myth whose meanings have always been contested. Why is this incest canonized in Scripture? What impact has it had on human consciousness? How does it work on people? Did Lot and his daughters do right or wrong? Readers from the beginning have wondered about it and differed. Full of ambivalence and irony, the problematic Lot-Scripture often gets repressed in religious history, but, like the repressed, it always returns—old wine in new vessels.

What you can see figured in Lot are desires that shake the world: the desire for immortality through progeny; the desire to continue life under any conditions; the desire for sexual pleasure without guilt or responsibility; the desire of women to control the action of men to whom they traditionally have been subject and take an active role in determining fate and history; the desire of men to preserve themselves, conquer time, remain potent, and keep on wooing the future.

My subject, therefore, turns out to be a very large one, but my approach and the structure of this book are quite simple. In Part I, Chapters 2–5, I identify and lay out the rich heritage of this biblical narrative of incest, with its major historical and cultural implications.⁶ In Part II, I look closely at some important, representative modern daughters of Lot—both real and fictional—and the male figures whose relationships with them generate conceptions of the way we live now and might in the future. There, in Chap-

ters 6–11, I discuss the lives and significant Lot stories of Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Lewis Carroll and William Stead, Sigmund Freud and his “Dora,” Shirley Temple, and Woody Allen and Mia Farrow. In Part III, the concluding section, I end with two recent, substantial Lot’s-daughters narratives set in the modern Mecca of power, Washington, D.C. These Potomac testaments, one by the African-American writer Carolivia Herron and one featuring Bill Clinton, Monica Lewinsky, Linda Tripp, and Chelsea and Hillary Clinton, make clear the full power—personal, political, and global power—that the evolving Lot complex still holds in the imagination of the world at the turn of the century.

Overall my main aims are (1) to stress the comparatively underestimated importance of father–daughter, older male–younger female relationships in history, particularly in the last two centuries of developing female ambition and progress for women;⁷ (2) to explore, as a test case, the complex ways that an important literary text from the past goes on living in social history and popular culture by showing how the effects and aesthetic processes of Lot over time can and do work on the human imagination—how, that is, a specific, written narrative can fuse indelibly into unfolding history, individual lives, and works of art; and (3) to make clear the historical reasons and ideas that would cause James Joyce, one of the true anthropological geniuses of the twentieth century, to end his last book with the voice of the dying mother merging into and becoming the regenerating voice of the daughter. In light of gender history and social flux, remembering Lot’s daughters as well as Lot’s wife becomes an urgent matter, but such remembrance of things past keeps on taking new meanings and forms.

III. *A Grid Through Which to View the World*

The patterns, figures, and imagery of Lot have such explanatory power for reading the history of human relationships that—especially for times and texts concerned with women’s subjectivity, the emergence of once marginalized people, and the nuances of social and familial power-shifts—they can form a useful grid through which to view the world. And the Lot complex can help redress and clarify the pervasive influence of the Oedipus

complex and myth with its inherent narrative biases stressing male desire and action. Like Oedipus (with which it clearly has much in common), Lot brings together diverse ancient legends and living impulses.⁸ Oedipus features unwitting patricide and the intercourse of son and mother; Lot features the divinely ordained death of the wife and mother and the intercourse of father and daughters. Lot offers key male fantasy projections, as does Oedipus,⁹ but the Lot complex shows how these adult male projections (for instance, the power of disposal over young women, fulfillment through children, a supply of youthful sexual partners into old age, a successful drive to outlive one's contemporaries) form and determine the representation of the *younger* generation's voices, experience, and desires, as Oedipus arguably does not. It also presumes to figure crucially and explicitly both rational and unconscious *female* wishes, fears, and drives; and it stresses the arbitrary death and metamorphosis of the mother, the traumatic impact of her loss and absence, and the meaning of her replacement by the daughters. The Lot text represents the terrible sacrifices, compromises, and self-deceptions necessary for survival, which the offering up of the daughters, the panic of the wife-mother, the stupefying of the father, his blind rut, and the desperate strategy and fertility of the daughterwives shockingly trope.

A narrative lives when people can read it so as to find in it their particular sense of life, their passions, and their secrets both represented and reformed. And what turns a narrative into a complex is the relevance for living human beings of its broad-based, lasting analogical power—its felt quality of distilling for many over a long time a paradigm of experience that directly or indirectly shapes their minds and the minds of those they touch. It continues somehow to be like what human beings know and see happening. A story becomes a kind of map and code by which men and women can read and organize the chaotic turbulence and psychology of their relationships, activities, inner conflicts, and longings. A “complex” is, then, a complex narrative that, in one way or another, has sunk deeply into people over the years.

Lot fills that bill. The potential meaning of this text is rich and provocative. But a complex has a complicated history. It both endures and changes. If it is to continue to make sense and show how minds and societies are structured, it must and will be rediscovered, refashioned, and relived. I mean, in Part I, to stress that point in three related ways: first, by

making clear in this introduction what I, writing at the beginning of the third millennium CE, find most generally relevant now in the Lot text and complex; next, in the second chapter, by setting out, as a preview and overall pattern, defining images and instances of modern Lot's daughters as they evolved in the last two centuries; and then, in the three following chapters, by looking briefly at the history of Lot-Scripture interpretation from the beginning and at some of its most revealing manifestations in art and literature before the modern era.

IV. *Features of the Lot Complex in Modern Life*

To make clear what's at stake in this book, let me set down the main features of the Lot complex touching modern life that I see coming out of the *Lot* text—thirteen ways of looking at Lot and his daughters.

1. *Sex for pleasure versus sex to preserve seed: the tension between the desire to use sex for immediate, sensual gratification and the desire to use sex only for the regeneration of life and the sake of the future.* The Lot complex features the drive to control, displace, and suppress sexuality: Sodom is destroyed; the cities of the plain are burned; the children of incest turn out to be the outcast neighboring tribes of Israel, not the children of Abraham and God; all sex without the purpose of progeny is for the time being eliminated. Allegorically, the story of Lot moves from the lawless pursuit of sex as polymorphous pleasure (the men of Sodom) to what seems the regrettable but necessary practice of genital sex for the sake of procreation. And yet there is a subversive undercurrent here that shows how people are attracted to, and held wallowing in, the tides of transgressive sex. *Lot*, notoriously set in Sodom and Gomorrah and then in the incestuous cave, immortalizes the forbidden backward look that can be read as nostalgia for a world of sexual pleasure in and for itself; the text offers the diversity and power of erotic appetite and even suggests that amoral, sexual besotment and the suspension of reason and law are sometimes absolutely necessary for survival.

The obvious fissure in the myth, as it has conventionally been interpreted, is that God blasts the cities of the plain for sexual sin, but then hu-

man salvation, for the survivors, apparently depends on the three refugees from a world damned by immoral sexual behavior, breaking the incest laws and using drink and tabooed sex to renew life. Incinerated and petrified, the repressed returns.

2. *Progeny—preservation of seed—as the primary responsibility of humanity.* One meaning of Lot might be: for the sake of children (whose lives are an imaginative projection beyond the self) all is allowed, all is required. Children make the future: no children, no future; no hope for the children, no hope for the future. Faith, then, becomes invested in the child.

3. *The primacy of the father-daughter relationship.* Lot provides a corrective to the Oedipus complex's nominally skewed stress on the primacy of son and mother roles. In it, what signifies most is not the son's drive to replace the father and possess or control maternity, but the father's desire to implant his seed, countenance, and symbolic being in and on the living flesh of the future. As for woman in the myth, she lives by defining her desire and function in relation to man as father. Generalizing, you might say that power relations between the sexes until very recent times would best be symbolized, not by a mother-son relationship, nor a husband-wife relationship, but by a father-daughter relationship.

4. *The existence and force of incestuous impulses—both conscious and unconscious.* Though Lot may be the sole example of specific parent-child incest in the Bible, God supposedly recreates and incarnates Himself through his "daughter" Mary. The model of the Christian Holy Family is incestuous. Taken together, the pregnancy of Lot's daughters by their father and the pregnancy of the Holy Virgin Mary through God symbolize the psychological contradictions of the Lot complex and represent the conflicted feelings about the nature of incestuous desire that develops and drives history. Collectively, humanity is an incest-surviving species. The Lot complex exposes much that is sordid in domestic history and troublesome in personal and social psychology. Lot's scheme to placate the lust of the Sodomites by offering them his girls only makes sense if, at least instinctively, he himself thinks of them as sexually attractive. Nevertheless, civil order and society depend on the existence, control, and benevolent use of incestuous affections—*on the sublimation of incestuous desire into positive concern for the long-term survival and well-being of other family members.*

5. *The power of projection.* People think about, wish for, and sometimes ruthlessly do forbidden things, but they don't like to feel guilty, and so they

often project their wishes and their responsibility onto others (it's not me but God who wills the destruction of my vicious foes and my stony, bitter, old spouse; it's not me but these naughty, crazy girls who get me drinking and coax me into bed; it's not me, but the good of society and my victimization that makes me seduce and use an older man for my purposes). The logic of the unconscious mind reveals itself as the (projected) discourse and behavior of others. The daughter's talk of sexual seduction can be heard as the expression of Lot's (the aging male's) desire. The older generation—meaning both men and women—has overwhelming power to project and inculcate desires, motives, fantasies, thoughts, actions, and expression onto and within the younger generation. Momentous examples in history would be the projection and displacement of sexual desire by mature, aging father figures onto young women and the displacement of this desire by men into fields of power and influence. (The decisions that have determined the running of the modern world have for the most part been made by older men whose physical power has peaked and is declining—men who often try to project their tangled wills upon society.)

Even childhood traumas and memories are defined by the actions, wishes, expectations, and suggestions of the older generation. There is no going back to the beginnings of individual development in childhood without taking into account adult projections. Recollected images, psychic memories, early “object relations,” the private material of one's unconscious, that which is most personal to the self, are conditioned by the drives of elders, by their use of language, by their powers of suggestion, by their examples as role models, by the narratives through which they organize their lives, by the emphasis they put on words and things, and by the child-rearing arrangements they make.

In light of Lot and his daughters, you can see easily how an adult projects disingenuously back into childhood *his or her own desires and claims that it's not he or she who controls the inner dialogue, but the child*. But just because, in the Lot complex, the desires of the father are projected upon the daughters, it doesn't follow that the daughter's desire for the father—for his seed, for some imagined paternal essence, for his perceived power—is inauthentic.

6. *The drive for female agency; the development of female subjectivity in order to establish and sustain civil culture*. By projecting upon the daughters the moral onus for incest, the Scripture ironically allows them to be-

come conspiratorial, socially responsible agents. Women move from sacrificial objects to reasoning subjects. From chattel, they become paradigmatic figures out to save the world. They identify with the divine command and purpose to look forward, not back, and their plotting together to use the father shapes history. They seek to intoxicate and obliterate the “rational” male will that would leave them without a future. They can be seen moving to replace the rivalries of sons and brothers with sisterly cooperation. Daughterhood might become a sisterhood moving to recreate social life. It might even come to reanimate the lives and minds of the abandoned older women.

7. *A subversive, evolutionary—even potentially revolutionary—pattern.* In the Lot myth, the objects of libidinous desire, the objects that power seems able to dispose of at will, themselves become empowered. The angels, objects of the Sodomites’ aggressive libido, take power over the men of Sodom; the daughters take power over the father; the powerlessness of progeny becomes the power of progeny to determine the future; the slighted parental obligation becomes the primary obligation; the rigid, lifeless mate-and-mother becomes the quickened, life-giving mother doubled; the displaced, disgraced, incestuous refugees, children of Sodom and Gomorrah, become the ancestors of David and Jesus. Those who feel excluded can reinterpret matters so that they find themselves included in scripts that change ideas about who it is who “belongs.” The Lot complex can incorporate and express feminine resentments of injustices and oppression and can even figure imaginatively the problems of historical, international, personal, and communal disparagement and exclusions of peoples.

8. *The drive to be part of eternal being and a supernatural reality.* Lot complexes incorporate and refashion in modern life religious longings and the drive for permanence. Lot shows the search for faith and the ambiguous human relationship towards the sacred to be alive and determining, though protean and ambiguous. Put-upon Lot, especially plucked from Sodom to be saved, converses with supernatural beings, and even his eldest daughter identifies her thinking with the righteous purposes of immortality. Life is to be regenerated not by miracle, but by women using their spirits and bodies to carry out naturally what they see as the will of God.

The inclusion of the Lot family in a sacred canon points up the need to turn compromising—even squalid—experience into something lasting, something part of a larger plan, something that can be inscribed and pre-

served. A drive exists to immortalize family and sexual relationships in the symbolic order—in language, articulation, and scriptural lessons.

9. *Specific symbolism and the challenge of understanding it as that which orients, actuates, represents, and translates human experience, making communication flow, psychology deepen, and interpretation of meaning reverberate forever.* “Pillar of salt,” “fire and brimstone,” “cave,” “wine,” and “seed” stand out here. “Pillar” and “cave,” for example, may represent the primacy of genital physiognomy (or heterosexuality) in history; “fire and brimstone” may represent hell, the beginnings of earth formation, and/or the historical furor about homosexuality; “wine” may stand for the power of intoxication in human affairs; “seed” may be understood to germinate metaphorically and metonymically in any number of ways. You might see that bitter “pillar” (sometimes translated as “statue”) as the hard fate through history of the female past childbearing age or as an example of the way traditional patriarchal vision sees everything in phallic terms. In subjective mental life, the symbolism of image and word are not distinct, and together they fuse with physical reality and matter. Along with fire and brimstone, the potent image of Lot’s wife turned to the pillar of salt, a signifier of world-historical proportions, is what has stuck most vividly in the world’s memory of this chapter. The point is that the life-bearing woman loses life and is turned into something else—*some thing*—and people are left to try to find the meaning of that thing: they *literally* and *symbolically* must try to find the point: “Remember Lot’s wife.”

10. *The power of ambivalence and contradiction to define, dominate, and control personal and communal life.* The Lot-Scripture says the law of the fathers must sometimes be broken to preserve the law of the fathers. It says the life force may depend upon drunkenness and blind sexual arousal, and it says that drink and sex corrupt family life and family values. It says both “this passage is relevant, this is the seed from which we spring,” and also “these are not our people—be glad and learn from their bad example.” It gives you the point of view of those caught in an apocalyptic crisis and forced to cope as best they can; and it gives you the point of view of the God-blessed, safe progenitor of a chosen people removed from the turmoil, looking down on the cataclysm, and thus showing, with his being and perspective, the dubious plans and acts of the refugee survivors to save the species to be deluded and misconceived. It can both say and mean “this father is weak and despicable,” and “this victimized husband-and-father is

good enough—man, beset by human iniquities and terrible acts of God, trying to survive as best he can.” It says “these desperate daughters are concupiscent sinners” and “these victimized, resourceful young women are brave and wise in breaking the law to preserve life.” It says young women want to rescue the father and also be rid of him once and for all.

Most important—crucial in modern history—the complex Lot pattern can figure as a human success story in which the conjunction of fathers and daughters, of older men and younger women, develops historically for the benefit of society and cultural progress, *and/or* it can figure as the anachronistic preservation and misuse of an obscenely despotic power—erotic viciousness, incestuous bad faith, and irresponsible oppression.

11. *Split personality, schizoid being, pluralistic identity as characteristic of female representations.* The daughter made binary is a striking fact. *Lot* gives you not one, but two girls. Mother, mate, sister, daughter—the female role in the Lot chapter is she who must live and act in concert with another. This repetition and division is a complex male projection (women are relative creatures; a man’s object of biological desire is replicated, like one breast becoming an image of two, or like the vision of the female genitalia as a splitting; the patriarchal story of the two copulating girls enacts a fantasy of a continual supply of stimulating but undemanding young mates to draw forth the man’s seed, etc., etc.); but it can also be a female projection representing drives for being another self, for a sister’s support in challenging prevailing law, for gender union in taking decision-making power away from the man, and for a transcendence of time-doomed individuality and fertility, which the fate of Lot’s wife brings home.

Imagine the scene of Lot’s seduction. You have the two daughters. Attention focuses on the girl who lies with the father, but try to imagine the other daughter. What does she do? She removes herself from sexual encounter. She distances herself from the present action, but psychologically, she may repeat an experience she’s had before. Her father is lying with a family member. She is an emotional voyeur hanging somewhere around the cave. She may repeat a “primal scene.” It may seem as if her mother (in the substitute guise of her sister) is again alive, but she, the other daughter, is back in pre-pubescent childhood. The mother and the opportunity for a recouped childhood are returned to her—that is, the conditions of such, through fantasy and analogy, are re-invoked for her. Momentarily she is a pure girl beyond the fray, contemplating the wild passion of physical being

—like an awakened child or like Abraham looking on the terrible force of nature. The Lot complex includes the grandiose idea that the daughter might control the sexual life of the father, and that she both participates in it and is exterior to it—free of it. One daughter is engaged in incest with the parent, but one is not. The binarism shows how the Lot story can be seen to represent the fulfillment of contradictory wishes—for example, *I outstrip and replace my mother* and *I retrieve the time of my mother's life, when she was alive and cared for me*. The myth of Lot's daughters expresses a deep desire to *be* the mother, to *regenerate* her, to recreate a world in which the self-as-mother lives and lies with the father, but it also expresses the desire to be the self-as-child-witness, preserving security in virgin regression, never having to grow up. Behind the incest in Lot may lie a fantastic symbolic logic expressing a twisted passion for the surety of the past—an idealized, projected normalcy in the midst of actual disaster and miserable deprivation.

12. *The emergence in Lot of the "anti-hero"—man as the foolish, flawed, victimized survivor in a violent world where conventional heroism often means a sea of blood and the reign of death.* Lot has something oddly comic about him, and he, with his ineptness in the face of violence, may draw a sneaking sympathy. Or maybe his final unawareness hides the guilty denial of a man contemptible for the weakness of his flesh and paternal irresponsibility. He may do the best he can, but that isn't good enough. He needs help. If patriarchy depends on him, maybe patriarchy's days are numbered. This equivocal image of manhood for centuries would lie mostly dormant, but if you look now at figures like Lewis Carroll's White Knight, James Joyce's Leopold Bloom and HCE, Franz Kafka's protagonists, Samuel Beckett's talking heads, and Woody Allen's self-portrayed "heroes," you can see why moderns might feel they have more in common with Lot than with Abraham. In twentieth-century psyches, Lot awoke from his slumber, an ancient schlemiel inextricably joined to the fate of young women.

13. *Human life as defined by personal trauma and the crises of history.* The Lot chapter presents the threat of violence and death—from God, nature, and men—as the determining fact of life. If *Lot* is about the preservation of the seed of life, of the possibility of civilization, it shows that desperate measures are unavoidable in their pursuit. The Lot complex stresses expulsion and exile in every sense—exile, the ineluctable human experience, from womb to tomb. It assumes that experience devastates physical

and moral security: you live under historical necessity, and you will surely be called upon to make agonizing, questionable choices and take imperfect, distasteful, and even morally improper actions in the wake of inevitable disasters, one of which is the metamorphosis and loss of some mother-pillar of being.

V.

Why the Subject Can Make You Nervous

When people think about the Lot episode of the Bible, with all the tabooed sex, cosmic violence, and ambiguities, it has always made them edgy, and why not? It has been, off and on, a school and hunting ground for both puritanical and pornographic imaginations. It brings up the hottest topics imaginable: flagrant incest, fire and brimstone, divine judgment and wrath, holocaust, a rationalization for ultimate violence, a world-shaking calamity of nature, religious faith, Sodom and Gomorrah, moral condemnation, creation myths, ethnic history, the threat of human extinction, blatant evil, human nature in a horrible light, sexual deviance, sexual harassment, a city of buggers lusting after angels, a man who offers his daughters to Sodomites, alcohol abuse, girls pregnant by their own father, good people who do bad things, issues about women's reproductive functions, pressing questions of blame and guilt, and the never-to-be-forgotten woman who, unable not to look back when her home and land turn into a colossal furnace, gets instantly soldered into the landscape. No wonder that with so much bad behavior, so many dilemmas, and so much meaning condensed in its three pages, the Lot-Scripture could give you a complex.

Appendix

THE KING JAMES BIBLE, GENESIS, CHAPTER 19

1 *Lot entertaineth two angels*

4 *The vicious Sodomites are stricken with blindness*

12 *Lot is sent for safety into the mountains*

24 *Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed*

30 *Lot dwelleth in a cave*

37 *The birth of Moab and Ammon*

- 1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing *them* rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;
- 2 and he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.
- 3 And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.
- 4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, *even* the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:
- 5 and they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where *are* the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.
- 6 And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him,
- 7 and said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.
- 8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as *is* good in your eyes: only unto those men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

- 9 And they said, Stand back. And they said *again*, This one *fellow* came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, *even* Lot, and came near to break the door.
- 10 But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut the door.
- 11 And they smote the men that *were* at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.
- 12 And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? sons-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring *them* out of this place:
- 13 for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.
- 14 And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.
- 15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.
- 16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.
- 17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.
- 18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord:
- 19 behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die:
- 20 behold now, this city *is* near to flee unto, and it *is* a little one: O, let me escape thither, (*is* it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.
- 21 And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.
- 22 Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zo'ar.
- 23 The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zo'ar.
- 24 Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;
- 25 and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

- 26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.
27 And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood
before the Lord:
28 and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of
the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the
smoke of a furnace.
29 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God
remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow,
when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.
30 And Lot went up out of Zo'ar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two
daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zo'ar: and he dwelt in a cave,
he and his two daughters.
31 And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father *is* old and *there is* not a
man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth:
32 come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we
may preserve seed of our father.
33 And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in,
and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when
she arose.
34 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger,
Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this
night also; and go thou in, *and* lie with him, that we may preserve the seed
of our father.
35 And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger
arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when
she arose.
36 Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.
37 And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same *is* the
father of the Moabites unto this day.
38 And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Ben-am'mi: the
same *is* the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.