

I got to know Cheryl Exum in Jerusalem in 1983-84. She was on sabbatical at the Ecole Biblique, and beginning to work on her first major book, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*. She was a great favourite of the friars; bright, sparkly, wise, and an adept at the streets and restaurants of Jerusalem. We bonded over our shared love of the Song of Songs, and a commitment to the poetry of the Hebrew Bible, to its beauty and wonder. She was also fierce, passionate in her commitment to feminism and to shaking up the male establishment. But fierceness was not at the expense of love, and an appreciation of human warmth and vitality. She had just come back from a year at the Goethe Institute in Germany, where she developed her lifelong love of German poetry, especially Else Lasker-Schüler, and made friends who cherished her to the very end.

Cheryl's academic life can be divided into two phases, both institutionally and creatively. She taught for 16 years in Boston College, from 1977 to 1993, and another 16 years at the University of Sheffield, from 1993-2009, as part of the legendary Biblical Studies department. Her deep roots and friendships in Boston notwithstanding, she loved England, the Peak District, her neighbours, the daffodils in spring. I think she had a profound affinity for England, her adopted country. She was close friends with David Clines, whose passing must have affected her grievously. Together they helped shape the world of biblical studies as it opened up to new methodologies and interests.

I divide Cheryl's publications into two parts. The first consists of three books, which represent her intersecting commitments to poetics, feminism, and cultural studies. They are *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative* (1992), *Fragmented Women* (1993, 2nd ed. 2016), and *Plotted, Shot, and Painted* (1996). In each she is concerned with resistant readings, with despair, and with the ways film and painting have traduced and objectified biblical women. They are characterized by her verve, her critical stringency and intelligence, and by playfulness. At the same time, she wrote, together with her friend Alice Bach, may her memory be for a blessing, a book of children's stories from the Bible, *Moses' Ark* (1989).

Cheryl's major work, her lifetime's achievement, is her commentary on the Song of Songs (WJK, 2005). Year by year she would talk about her immense pleasure in getting down to work on it each summer. For her it was a safe place; it was there she found her voice as a writer, to say everything she knew about poetry and love. It was a meticulous work of scholarship, to be sure, but also a work of empathy and sheer artistic craftsmanship. One feels the voice of the poet inhabiting hers, so that one hears the language and rhythms of the Song in her writing. She

writes, "Perhaps all literature is a defense against mortality" (p.3), and I like to think it in her case.

Her other major work, into which she invested so much passion and energy, is *Art and Biblical Commentary* (t & t clark, 2019). In it she revisits some of her favourite biblical texts and discusses how they have been interpreted in the European artistic tradition. A whole vivid section concerns Hagar being brought to Abraham's bed by Sarah. The book demonstrates throughout Cheryl's remarkable critical eye, her ability to tease out the emotional depth in each of her subjects. It is also full of extraordinary juxtapositions, such as the Annunciation, the Levite's concubine, and the early modern obsession with the dissection of female bodies.

Her last published book was a study guide to the Song of Songs, *The Song of Songs: The Bible's Only Love Poem* (t & t clark, 2022). She wrote it with as much care and attention to detail as everything else. Almost half the book is devoted to current issues in the study of the Song. She was fully conversant with all that was new and exciting in the field.

In 1993 Cheryl founded the journal *Biblical Interpretation*, which she edited for 15 years. When she stepped down, it felt as if the baby bird had left the nest. She was a founding editor of Sheffield Phoenix Press, and edited volumes without number.

Only once did I see Cheryl teach, but the pudding was in the eating. She had fabulous graduate students, whom she loved with an unflinching passion and dedication.

I would see Cheryl at every SBL; we would have dinner together, attend each other's papers. In the last years she was too debilitated by illness to travel. Last autumn I sent her my book on Isaiah, which moved her greatly, and she wrote that she did not think she would see me again. I deeply regret not keeping more in touch.

I think of Cheryl as being a reclusive person, somewhat self-protective. Perhaps that is an illusion, she loved life, friends, her table, poetry, imagination. We will all miss her.

Francis Landy