



American literature's new vision Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*- a critical view

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ABSTRACT

Literature makes the people understand life in all areas of living. It encourages one to escalate the living to participate in life with its fullness. As literature mirrors life with its written and spoken substantial evidences. Literature also plays a key role to describe creative writing to technical and scientific documents. The creative imagination, such as poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction, it has the most explicit record of human life possessing the perception and the analytic mind of a sociologist. American Jewish women have taken better efforts to present literature that reflects historical trends in the life of the American Jewish.

Key terms: American literature, Jewish American, Anita Diamant, multi-cultural.

Literature in English is of England, Scotland, the whole of Ireland, Wales, as well as British colonies, including the United States. Since American literature is the literary work produced in the United States and its preceding colonies, it has relatively a short colorful history, shaped by the history of the country. Existing for a century and a half as group of colonies dispersed along the eastern seaboard of the North American continent, with the successful rebellion against the motherland, America became the United States formed as a nation that was vivid in the early writing including the religious disputes

Having extracted from the British roots in the early 1800s, American Literature initiated in the late 18th century followed by the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, whence, the nation's first novels were published. Thomas Attwood with the first novels; Digge's *Adventures of Alonso* in 1775 and William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* in 1791. Susanna Rowson as a female writer is best known for her novel *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth* in London in 1791.

Contemporary writing as English Novels produced by women writers constitutes a major segment providing insights, a wealth of understanding a reservoir of meaning and a basis of discussion. Women writers could see a different world with their assistance because they have allowed them to create their own world to set the condition of existence, free from men. American literature, Native American literature and African American literature attribute multi-cultural literature including Jewish American literature. Positioning themselves as American Jews and as women were the target set to achieve in the American life.

Identifying Literature highlighting the professed moral and spiritual similarities between Judaism and Christianity has been common among Jewish women-families migrated to the United States between 1880 and 1924. The middle and upper-class American Jewish women produced primarily poetry, devotional verses, hymns, and memoir literature during their inhabitation.

Diamant, a freelance journalist who won awards been published in the Boston Globe magazine, Parenting magazine, New England Monthly, Yankee, Self, Parents and McCalls. *The New Jewish Wedding* of Diamant was published in 1985 and followed by seven other books about contemporary Jewish practice. The fiction, *The Red Tent*, fin 1997 and *Good Harbor* and *The Last Days of Dogtown*, brought out 19th century environment of women. *Day After Night* is also the novel about four women who survived the Holocaust.

The New Jewish Baby Book in 1998 was a guide to the customs and rituals of welcoming a new child to the world Jewish community. *Living a Jewish Life* in 1991 revised Judaism exploring the spectrum of liberal Jewish life. It is more about the choice of the right synagogue.

Diamant published *Pitching My Tent* in 1995, a collection of short and personal essays on family, friends and religion as a reflection on the author's life. Exploring Love, Marriage, Baby Carriage, it shares personal and

general thoughts on marriage and partnership. These thoughts, like those in the rest of the collection, in many ways center not just on marriage, but on a life lived within a particular religious tradition.

Diamant deals with “motherhood” focusing on her daughter Emilia. She writes loving essays about parenthood as both ‘an adventure and an education’. She writes about Yom HaShoah, the Holocaust Remembrance Day and the idea of memory as a sacred trust. The novel, *Good Harbor* (2001) tells the skills continuing to resonate with the warmth and truth. It is about the sometimes-complex relationships of women.

Anita Diamant’s *The Last Days of Dogtown* (2005) is a long-forgotten chapter of early American life. It is all of Judy Rhines, a fiercely independent soul, deeply lonely, who nonetheless builds a life for herself against all imaginable odds. *Days After Night*, published in 2009 discovers the lives of biblical women ignored by the male-centric narrative. It opens a window into a time of sadness, confusion and optimism in the modern Jewish history.

The Red Tent, as a powerful novel, published in 1997 transforms the brief violent story in Genesis 34 on Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob. Diamant reveals it as, “I did not set out to explain or rewrite the biblical text, but to use Dinah’s silence to try to imagine what life is like for women in the historical period” (*Reform Judaism*). The expands it long story with many additional twists and turns, emphasizing the important role of women in biblical times and turning Dinah.

The story lay in Jacob who had a daughter, Dinah who was raped by a prince who wished to marry her. Demand by her brothers that all the men from the prince’s city be circumcised before the wedding. The men come for circumcision are slaughtered by Dinah’s brothers. *The Red Tent*, Jacob fraudulently receives the blessing from his father Isaac. Jacob brings his family back to Canaan and there is reconciliation between Jacob and Esau and Dinah meets the strong grandmother Rebecca.

Irvin S. Cobb quotes, “A good storyteller is a person with a good memory and hopes other people haven’t” (brainyquote.com). Dinah says,

There was far more to tell. Had I been asked to speak of it, I would have begun with the story of the generation that raised me, which is the only place to begin. If you want to understand any woman you must first ask about her mother and then listen carefully. ... The more a daughter knows the details of her mothers’ life - without flinching or whining - the stronger the daughter. (2)

The Red Tent represents the hidden story of Jacob’s daughter Dinah. There is an intrinsic link between the Bible’s treatment of women and their experiences and the social positioning of contemporary women. Diamant explores, recreates and re-envision the life of Dinah, the biblical woman. This novel has arisen as a result of first, feminist readings of the Bible that have noticed that women’s voices and their narrated historical testaments are omitted from both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures and second, the twentieth-century anxiety that important testaments, including ones written by women, have been intentionally excluded from the Bible canon.

Diamant grapples with the important issue of inclusivity and exclusivity of narrative. She re-envisions the lives of Dinah in the Bible. This fictional re-imaginings of the biblical narratives reiterates the historical accounts from the perspectives of the female protagonist. It reveals the untold stories of female experiences: marital dynamics, motherhood, childbearing and childbirth, infertility, power and politics within patriarchal societies, women’s knowledge and unique female relationships - which lay hidden between the Bible’s wholly gendered lines.

The hidden stories are the center of feminist considerations of the Bible. In 1997 Anita Diamant wrote a rather controversial book titled *The Red Tent*. Taking as inspiration the story found in Genesis 34, it reimagines the story of Dinah, that obscure biblical daughter who is merely a footnote in the tale of the biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The novel’s first words are, “We have been lost to each other for so long. My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust” (1). Making use of three similarly disconcerting images, namely the loss of connection, the lack of meaning and ultimately the death of memory in the guise of dust, the statement highlights the complete historical marginalization of the author. The revisionist tendency transforms patriarchal propaganda into new feminist fiction.

Red Tent is revisionist in the sense female character. This novel takes Dinah as its protagonist biblical woman, but when imagining the life and story of her, Diamant stay true to the patriarchal agenda of the original biblical accounts. In the Bible story of Dinah, Diamant invents the odd character, setting and narrative point of view. She conforms to the androcentric ideology of the original.

The first-person narration of *The Red Tent* displays the independent thought and action. On the very first page of the novel one can identify Dinah, the protagonist as the narrator of the novel. Diamant’s revision is the fact that she portrays her female protagonist not as one-dimensional footnotes as fully-developed human beings capable of both good and evil. The realistic portrayal can begin to see the importance of Diamant’s embellishment of the original text for the facts regarding female characters. Diamant gives Dinah a story to imagine the injustices done to her. By embellishing the facts given in scripture and presenting Dinah as a character Diamant places her in a position to rebel against, question and critique. Diamant re-imagined Dinah and gave her a life and personality outside of what scripture makes of her. Therefore, while she is no longer marginal to the story, she remains marginal in relation to the patriarchal ideology that ultimately still controls and limits that story.

The ideological dislocation is originally “embedded in and structured by patriarchal culture and religion” must be “subjected... to a process of ... displacement... before we can re-imagine and recreate them in a feminist key” (Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 27). *The Red Tent* employs three strategies - take place in gynocentric social settings that are dominated by mothers, matriarchs and magnificent Goddesses. The female character exists outside the patriarchal ideology. The ideological displacement facilitates a feminist reimagining of women’s stories. The ideological dislocation, the relevance of a move to a matriarchal social organization is head and descent and inheritance are traced through the female line.s suggesting the values and ideologies that completely contradict those of patriarchy

The inclusion of Goddess-cults to be one of the major strategies the writer employs in order to locate the story outside of the phallogocentric ideology of the original. The theories that in contrast to social systems perceives the male as supreme and the only real authority.

Images of the Goddess as independent and powerful entity locate those same qualities in the female empowering women. The powerful female figures make up the heart and soul of the book, capable of acting with authority that stems not from their relation to one or other man, but from their selves and their ability to draw on what they perceive as the power of the Goddess. Among many examples of this the most striking one is that of the elderly Adah, who in spite of her old age and infirmity, rises up against the patriarch Laban when he sexually harasses one of their daughters.

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