

to require “Seaman’s Protection Certificates” of all mariners, verifying national identities. And if we are to accept Carretta’s argument that “Weston” is a mistaken entry for “Vassa,” then is there any basis for believing that the entries for “Syfax” and “Yorke” are stable? I realize that I dissent from Carretta in regarding the muster lists as part of the evidentiary problem, not the court of appeal.

A document that I am inclined to credit, which Carretta does not address, is Equiano’s 1785 letter to the Quakers that I mention in my essay. Equiano changed his self-identification as “African” in the 1785 letter to “negro” for the version that he included in *The Interesting Narrative* four years later, an alteration that complicates the claim that Equiano was invested in fabricating a specifically African identity. It is clear that Equiano’s vibrant historical presence and ensuing importance have magnetized a field of discussion, fact-checking, and ongoing investigation and debate, of no less concern to us than to his contemporaries, and I am pleased to have Carretta as a colleague in this endeavor.

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## The Origin of Donne’s Soul

TO THE EDITOR:

Although Ramie Targoff convincingly argues in “Traducing the Soul: Donne’s *Second Anniversarie*” (121 [2006]: 1493–508) that the poem is unexpectedly heterodox regarding the origin of the soul and that its “violation of normative Christian belief . . . has until now escaped our critical eye” (1494), her emphasis on the uniqueness of the soul’s generation in the *Second Anniversarie* as compared with the *First Anniversarie* is mistaken. Indeed, while I agree that such lines as “Thinke further on thy selfe, my soule, and thinke / How thou at first was made but in a sinke” have been overlooked as suggesting simultaneous generation of soul and body (*Second Anniversarie*, lines 157–58), I must point out that the same suggestion, albeit less bluntly, lies in “the soule of man / Be got when man is made” (*First Anniversarie*, lines 451–52). Both poems portray the soul not as a separate divine creation but as a result of the same sex act that produces the body.

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## Human Rights Conference

TO THE EDITOR:

In “Relative Humanity: Identity, Rights, and Ethics—Israel as a Case Study” (121 [2006]: 1536–43), Omar Barghouti, using primarily Israeli sources, documents callous and violent Israeli acts against Palestinians. Barghouti neglects to mention the homicide bombings, fatal kidnappings, stabbings, and stonings inflicted by Palestinians upon Israelis. Barghouti suggests that the roots of alleged “Israeli public justification” of Israeli injustice can be found in, “among other sources, [fundamentalist] interpretations of the tenets of Jewish law, or Halakhah” and the Torah (1540). On the Torah, Barghouti quotes from a statement attributed in a controversial work by the late Israeli chemistry professor Israel Shahak to a fundamentalist rabbi, Yitzhak Ginsburgh, who asserts that “[t]he Torah would probably permit” taking a “liver of an innocent non-Jew to save” the life of a Jew who needs one [because] “[t]here is something more holy . . . about Jewish life than about non-Jewish life” (qtd. in Barghouti 1540).

Some twenty-five hundred years of diverse rabbinic opinions encompassing ethics as well as law compose the Halakhah, which means literally a way of “going” or “walking,” of being in the world. Having been nourished for decades by Halakhah grounded in such midrashim as one in which God rebukes “the angels” for singing when the sea closes over the newly liberated Israel’s pursuing oppressors, whom the midrash recognizes as equally God’s creatures, I am horrified by Ginsburgh’s wild-eyed if qualified interpretation (*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus 23.7). But also horrifying is Barghouti’s use of Ginsburgh’s atypical words to impugn the character of the Torah, the Halakhah, and the ethos that prevails in today’s Jewish-Israeli society. The dehumanized, stereotyped image of the Jew as vampire that Barghouti invokes hovers over the remainder of his piece to justify its cynical closing call for an end to the Jewish-Israeli state (1542).

Born of the Torah and the books of the Hebrew prophets, the ideal that attends the two-thousand-year-old Jewish dream of return to the land—no matter how grim the current reality—is a peacefully united world. In published and forthcoming work, I have shown that when the biblical promise of peace fails to materialize, the Torah

has the literary capacity to fulfill it by facilitating a “conceptual process of de-dichotomization” such as Barghouti contends is “a necessary condition for a just reconciliation” (1541). This process requires neither a Hegelian sacrifice of difference such as Barghouti rightly condemns nor a sacrifice of the life-sustaining narrative of a people and their state such as he recommends. It requires only openness to the difference of the narrative of the Torah, the “teaching” that can recall the timeless, prelinguistic, bodily recorded experience of interconnection with all the life of the earth through the mother. It requires willingness to take responsibility for the choices one makes when determining meaning, naming self and other.

For example, the Torah’s first reported instance of human speech is an act of naming that does violence to self and other when the namer, *adam*, a human being formed of the dust of the *adamah*, the earthen ground or soil, both breaks its nominal connection with the ground by changing its name to *iysh*, “man,” and arrogates to man the generative capacity of woman’s body (Gen. 2.23). However, the occasion for the naming speech arises only after the *adam* has been set into a “deep sleep” from which the biblical narrative does not state that the *adam* awakens, licensing a dream reading, a linguistic return to the (m)other within (Gen. 2.21). In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter observes that the naming speech is “[w]ritten in a double chiasmic structure,” a double structure of mirror inversion ([New York: Basic, 1981] 31).

In the mirrors of this speech it is possible to see a corrective exposure of mankind’s tendency to the dehumanized and dehumanizing state of disconnection that Julia Kristeva has taught us temporarily to call abjection. But, unlike the words of Ginsburgh and Barghouti, the words of the biblical naming speech are written in the language of self-questioning and renewal, a mode of linguistic relation that calls for improved relations among diverse human beings, new Halakhah. As I write this letter, an already anguished Lebanon is once again in turmoil. It is not only still rebuilding after the recent bombings that were Israel’s response to the kidnapping of its soldiers by Hezbollah, the self-styled “party of God,” whose warriors live among the civilian population and whose tunnels near the Israeli border contained

tens of thousands of the rockets that destroyed the lives of hundreds of Israelis. But Lebanon is also in shock after the assassination of yet another of its cabinet ministers by, it is commonly supposed, that same Syrian-backed party of God.

That Barghouti draws primarily on Israeli sources to document Israeli abuses attests to the spirit of autocritique and free speech that pervades Israeli cultural life. Syria, as of this writing, refuses to participate in a United Nations tribunal intended to investigate the murder of the Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri. In Beirut, Hezbollah insists on the right to veto all government decisions, including whether Lebanon will participate in the same UN tribunal. Hezbollah is expected soon to try to bring down the Lebanese government. In nearby Iran, meanwhile, President Ahmadinejad with the enthusiastic support of Islamic fundamentalist leaders calls regularly for the obliteration of the Jewish state, and he is building Iran’s nuclear capabilities. What chance of survival would Barghouti’s proposed secular state stand in a region so increasingly in thrall to the homogenizing fanaticism of the violently religious? What chance would its moderate Muslim citizens stand, let alone its Jewish and Christian citizens? What would become of the Torah, the “teaching” that can begin to fulfill its promise of peace only when readers are willing to see within themselves the source of images of self and other, including the image of God?

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#### TO THE EDITOR:

My enjoyment of *PMLA*’s October issue was greatly marred by the inclusion of an anti-Israel conference paper whose one-sided rhetoric is hardly what one would expect from an academic publication constrained by the bounds of proof and context. The fact that Omar Barghouti, author of the paper in question, is a graduate student at an Israeli university already belies his claim about the systematic dehumanization of Palestinians in Israel. Thousands of Palestinians like him are welcomed into Israeli institutions, including the Israeli Parliament. At the peril of death, on the other hand, Israelis cannot set foot in most Arab countries.