

**owens:** How did you first become interested in Simone Weil?

**braude:** In a sense, I got into Weil completely from the outside. When I came across her work, I wasn't particularly interested in 20th century mystical thought. I became interested in her because of an article she had written, which was probably the most obscure piece of work she ever did—it's been completely ignored by scholars of Weil. When I was starting to track down that article, I realized I was having trouble finding it. The English versions of the book were readily available, and I started looking at them, but the article was missing. I realized the article was only in the French editions, and that was curious. I got a hold of the French article, and I started reading it, and then I found out that, while it wasn't published in the United States, it was published in the United Kingdom. This immediately presented a problem: why is it that everything is so different from one country's version to another?

This article is significant because it represents the only engagement with a major biblical story that a lot of people knew of. The great masters of myth, such as James Frazer, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud and Claude Levi-Strauss had reason to know it, but they avoided this particular story. She engaged it in a completely

different way than did anybody else—and in a highly problematic way as well.

So I was looking at her from a very specific and limited vantage point. The significance of this particular biblical story is that it becomes the instrument by

which expressions of sexuality, justifications for slavery and supposed origins of racism are hung.

**owens:** This is, of course, the story of Noah's nakedness found in chapter 9 of Genesis.

**braude:** Yes. It was the story of Noah's nakedness and the very great problem that this biblical story has presented to

people for more than 2,000 years. Once I started looking at that essay in the context of her life, I started to expand my work to try to figure out, first of all, why it had been either suppressed or ignored. Second, I asked: what does it mean in

why it has been ignored in general. The essay purports to deal with the story of Noah and his sons. It's entitled "The Three Sons of Noah and the History of Mediterranean Civilization."

It begins with a conventionally racist interpretation of the story, identifying each of the three sons with certain racial continental marks. Ham is identified in part with Africa but more with Egypt. This is a slightly different take on the conventional definition, but not unusual. Shem is clearly and unquestionably identified with the Jews. Japheth is identified with the Romans, the Europeans, and the Germans, which is not unusual.

She then takes that story, accepting the racist framework in which it was conventionally depicted in the 1930s and early '40s, and starts mystically inverting it in a Gnostic fashion so that the act of Ham seeing the nakedness of his father becomes not a sin but a blessing, in contrast to the biblical interpretation. The contact between Ham and the naked Noah is considered to be a form of divine revelation, and the other sons who refuse to look at the nakedness of Noah are the evil ones, the cursed ones, because they are not prepared to accept God's revelation. These two evil ones, Shem and Japheth, are then considered to be partners in sin, deserving of being cursed.

Weil then goes on to say that these brothers are in fact now engaged in a horrible conflict, and basically this conflict—the conflict which she identifies as between the Germans and the Jews—is one in which they deserve each other. This was in effect an expression of "a plague on both their houses"—which in 1942 is a problematic and repugnant statement.

She then goes on to say, of course, that the Jews are repugnant and that's why they don't appear in a lot of ancient texts. She claims that the Jews are not only guilty of killing Christ, but that they also tried to kill one of the figures whom she identifies with Christ in the greater world mythology—the figure of

Dionysus, whom they tried to attack. And then she presents a rather silly, vitriolic interpretation of the Iliad

**braude:** Well, I'm not sure how easy

