

Outlandish Blues by Honorée Jeffers, Wesleyan, 2003, 62p, paper \$12.95 • Two aspects of Jeffers's book are both elemental and electric: blues + the Bible / blues + history. The book's central section features thirteen persona poems spoken by biblical matriarchs—Sarai/Sarah, Hagar, Lot's wife, Lot's daughters—exploring the human and feminist ramifications of strange sexual power plays: Sarai giving her handmaid Hagar to her husband Abram/Abraham to bear his firstborn; Lot offering the Sodomite mob his virgin daughters; those same daughters bearing their own father's children. Jeffers also explores the strangenesses of historical exigency: James Brown pleading on stage and at home; a lynched man saying his final words; "Confederate Pride Day at 'Bama": "fraternity boys dressed in gray uniforms, [. . .] coming home to black / maids, their heads tied up in bright handkerchiefs." Jeffers's poems are unflinching in facing hard realities: how to TCB as a woman within/against ancient misogyny; how to deal as a black person with/against the dregs of racist history still painfully alive. Jeffers vividly combines these two hard-knock worlds.

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