Women and the Word

Also by Jeannette King

TRAGEDY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL: Theory and Practice in the Novels of
George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James

AN OPEN GUIDE TO *JANE EYRE*

DORIS LESSING

Women and the Word

Contemporary Women Novelists and the Bible

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To Flora and Siobhan

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Preface and Acknowledgements

For some time now I have been interested in myth, and the part that it plays in the construction of gender, in our perceptions of what it is to be male or female. This interest first resulted in an article on the East German writer, Christa Wolf, whose book *Cassandra* uses that archetypal image of the silenced woman to explore women's relationship both to language in general, and in particular to the patriarchal religious myths that have played so great a part in defining women and their role in society. At the same time I became increasingly aware that religious myths much closer to our own time and culture seemed to preoccupy many of the best women novelists writing today in our supposedly very secular society. A desire to explore the significance of this preoccupation is what prompted this study.

In completing the study, which goes some way beyond my original area of expertise in literary criticism, I have, however, benefited from considerable support of various kinds. First, I must thank the University of Aberdeen for a Research Fellowship which enabled me to concentrate entirely on the project for a period. I am indebted to many of my colleagues in the Women's Studies group at Aberdeen for suggestions and comments, and am particularly grateful to Helen Bond of the Department of Divinity for ensuring that I avoided making fundamental theological errors. Any errors that may have slipped through are entirely my responsibility. I would also like to thank the students who took my course on women novelists and the Bible, whose enthusiasm, ideas and questions have all fed into this book.

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into being at the University of Aberdeen, and my pleasure at being part of that programme has been largely due to what they have taught me, and to their friendship.

J.K.