

INTERESTED READERS

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INTERESTED READERS

ESSAYS ON THE HEBREW BIBLE

IN HONOR OF DAVID J. A. CLINES

*Edited by*

James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier

Society of Biblical Literature  
Atlanta

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## PREFACE

There are so many explanations as to why a seventy-fifth birthday Festschrift for David J. A. Clines makes sense as a follow-up to the sixty-fifth birthday volume, *Reading from Right to Left*.<sup>1</sup> There is one primary landmark that places beyond reason any need to justify this volume, which is that David's contribution to the international development of the discipline of biblical studies is now understood to be of such significance that in 2009 he was elected president of the Society of Biblical Literature—the first person from outside North America to serve the society in that role.

The title of this volume, *Interested Readers*, intentionally alludes to David's volume of collected essays, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*.<sup>2</sup> David dared to pronounce that both writers and readers have interests, in other words that "the biblical text is an ideological production, that the interpreter is reading the text from within a particular ideological formation."<sup>3</sup> David poignantly argues that all writing and reading is done in a certain cultural and sociopolitical context and thus entails a set of ideas of which the author or recipient may or may not be aware. Biblical scholars are "informed" readers, knowledgeable and highly educated, but readers with interests nevertheless. Moreover, the scholars who contributed to this volume are ardent readers of David's work, which they find inspiring and thought-provoking. All of their readings are related in one way or another to a question, topic, or methodological insight that David raised, either in one of his articles or in conversation.

The honors paid to David in the previous Festschrift by J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson—documenting his contributions to the

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1. *Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson; JSOTSup 373; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

2. David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

3. *Ibid.*, 19.

discipline and his wide-ranging interests—do not need repeating at length here. David's own assessment of his contributions, in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, lists the following areas as his specialisms, "Method, Literature, History, Theology, Language, Psalms and Job,"<sup>4</sup> which are aptly discussed in Exum and Williamson's preface of ten years ago. What it is harder to honor is the influence all this work has had on so many who have intersected with David's scholarship.

One way to begin to measure the scale of David's influence in the last ten years is to list his four most significant accomplishments.

1. The completing of the eight-volume *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* has been a remarkable achievement in the history of biblical scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Too often dictionary projects falter and remain incomplete; only with a dedicated and energetic editor like David can such a major work be achieved, and in a relatively brief time span. Its contribution lies in the comprehensive analysis and presentation of the syntactic data for each word, its inclusion for the first time of the complete data from Ben Sira, the Dead Sea Scrolls, inscriptions, and papyri, and its bibliographic review. This makes it the first complete dictionary of ancient Hebrew as opposed to the corpus-limited Biblical Hebrew. The dictionary has already established itself as an essential resource for any scholar in the field. Now the concise edition of the dictionary<sup>6</sup> has opened up his approach to Classical Hebrew and collaborative scholarship to students and beginners in the language as well.

2. With the publication of his three-volume commentary on Job, David has set another major landmark in the history of biblical interpretation.<sup>7</sup> It is the longest and most detailed commentary on the book of Job ever published (not excluding the famous sixth-century *Moralia in Job* of Gregory the Great), and demonstrates all his skills as text critic, philologist, exegete, and theologian. All three volumes have already found a varied group of enthusiastic readers. With his interpretation of the book of Job, David also underscores his exegetical rigor and demonstrates that it is, indeed, still

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4. David J. A. Clines, *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 292, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1:xx.

5. David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (8 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011).

6. David J. A. Clines, with David Stec and Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009).

7. David J. A. Clines, *Job* (3 vols.; WBC 17, 18A–B; Dallas: Word Books; Nashville: Nelson, 1989–2011).

possible for a single scholar to finish within his lifetime a commentary on a major Hebrew writing.

3. The contribution he has made to establishing and directing Sheffield Phoenix Press is an extraordinary case within the publication business. After Sheffield Academic Press was sold to a larger publisher, David realized that through his first publication venue, Sheffield had become a brand name for excellent, up-to-date, and cutting-edge research. Working together with two other colleagues, J. Cheryl Exum and Keith W. Whitlam, he founded Sheffield Phoenix Press, housed within the Department of Biblical Studies in Sheffield, dedicated to scholarly publishing of international research in the field. By the end of 2012 it had published more than two hundred titles, helping to maintain Sheffield as a significant source of new research for the scholarly community. Through David's and his colleagues' reputation as scholars and publishers, scholars around the world are given an opportunity to publish their innovative work.

4. Being made president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2009–2010 was remarkable recognition of his status internationally and a reflection of his concern to support colleagues all around the globe. The reasons for this appointment may be multiple but some of them are obvious: David's dedication to the society could be felt earlier when he not only attended the annual meetings in the United States but almost every international meeting held around the world. Yet to say that David "attended" a meeting is pure understatement since he always delivered at least one thought-provoking paper and/or a refreshing statement on a panel, often received by a packed auditorium. Beyond his presence as a speaker, David regularly invited younger international scholars to a gathering to inquire of their research and their own assessment of the position of scholars in their home countries. Was it curiosity or his keen interest for novel and cutting-edge scholarship? For the recipients of his invitations, among them one of the editors of this volume, the conversations with him were rewarding and challenging at the same time. As his own review of the society's work demonstrates, he has also been reflecting on its goals and further development.<sup>8</sup> As president, the commitment David gave to the role was noteworthy, including regular trans-Atlantic travel to participate in an array of meetings across a three-year period.

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8. Cf. David J. A. Clines, "From Salamanca to Cracow: What Has (and Has Not) Happened at SBL International Meetings," in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, 1:158–93.

As to David the person, it is worth mentioning just a few biographical details that were not covered in the 65th birthday *Festschrift*. David was born in Sydney, Australia, on November 21, 1938. He has lived in England since 1961, but remains an Australian citizen. His first degree, at the University of Sydney, was in Greek and Latin (BA 1960). He won a traveling scholarship to continue his studies at St John's College, Cambridge, where he read for the Oriental Tripos in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac (BA 1963, MA 1967). In 1964 he was appointed assistant lecturer in the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, where he has spent the whole of his academic career (apart from a temporary appointment in California in 1976–1977), becoming in turn Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, and Reader. In 1985 he was appointed Professor of Biblical Studies.

It is David's special combination of academic learning with an openness to supporting scholars young and old that explains the contributors to this volume. In many ways they serve as a helpful navigation point for charting the breadth of David's influence. Those who wrote for David's earlier *Festschrift* in 2003 were on the whole his elders or his contemporaries in age. The contributors to this volume, on the other hand, are for the most part younger scholars who belong to various circles of friends David has made over the years.

Since Sheffield remains the center of his universe, we should begin with those of his Sheffield research students represented here: Craig Broyles, Philip Chia, Paul Kissling, Barbara Leung Lai, and Laurence Turner. Their position here is a token of his commitment over four decades to the nearly fifty research students that he supervised, from the United States, Canada, Australia, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, India, The Netherlands, as well as the United Kingdom.

There are two other Sheffield stalwarts here as well who remember him from the research seminars that began each week in the department (Mark Brett and Gerald West), together with one of his colleagues from the present department who was not in Sheffield when the previous *Festschrift* was published (Hugh Pyper). Jeremy Clines, David's son, has also joined the editors of this volume, representing both Sheffield, where he still lives and works at the university, and the family, a connection so important in David's life.

Moving outward, but still in the United Kingdom, his friends and colleagues from the Society for Old Testament Study include Adrian Curtis, Katharine Dell, Sue Gillingham, Diana Lipton, Deborah Rooke, and Stuart Weeks, as well as James Aitken, one of the editors.

Then there are his European friends, whom he has always looked forward to seeing at the annual SBL International Meetings in the summer or the triennial congresses of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament: Daniel Bodi, Athalya Brenner, Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, Jan Joosten, Frank Polak, and Eep Talstra, as well as Christl Maier, one of the editors.

The widest circle geographically are other members of the Society of Biblical Literature (almost all the foregoing names are members as well), not just friends from North America like Jacques Berlinerblau, Marc Brettler, and Alan Hauser, but one from South Africa (Jeremy Punt), and others from Israel like Edward Greenstein and Mayer Gruber, and from Australia like Roland Boer, Norman Habel, and Ian Young. They also serve as a reminder of David's cherished roots.

Unclassifiable, however, is one name, that of Heather McKay; people are usually surprised and delighted when they learn that David and Heather are husband and wife. She belongs to all the circles mentioned above, and is as ubiquitous as he is on the international conference circuit. She also is a scholar in her own right and a great mentor of younger colleagues from around the world.

In order to cover David's broad range of approaches, the editors of this *Festschrift* sought to classify the contributions in this volume under four different rubrics: Literary/Exegetical Readings, Ideological-Critical Readings, Language and Lexicography, and Reception History.

Among the literary/exegetical readings are some that follow David's idea of "reading from left to right," that is reading the biblical text in the author's own cultural context. Some others closely explore the narrative intricacies of a biblical passage or book, or the implications of a biblical character, including the character of God. One may perceive an emphasis on the Psalms, Job, and other wisdom texts, most of which engage with David's contributions to these areas.

Some of the ideological-critical readings disclose what David called the "ideology" of biblical writers, namely their outspoken or hidden agenda. For David, such explorations deconstruct the ideology of a given passage: "Recognizing that discourse in general, and our biblical texts in particular, are open to deconstruction, which means to say that they never wholly succeed in maintaining the fundamental sets of oppositions on which they rely, is another way in which I can bring to the surface as a practical exegete the effect of a postmodern approach to biblical

interpretation.”<sup>9</sup> As some essays collected under this rubric also demonstrate, postmodern perspectives of reading, such as postcolonial theory or African contextual theology, reveal the ideologies of biblical texts.

The third section assembles articles that deal with lexical issues, including studies on Hebrew semantics or syntax. While the contrast between rigorous philological studies and new perspectives of reading appears to be deep, David has genuinely employed both approaches. In an article on the postmodern adventure in biblical studies, David compared the modern to a pyramid and the postmodern to a net, which neither threatens nor sabotages the project of modernity, but is “the quizzical re-evaluation of the standards and assumptions of traditional intellectual enquiry and scholarship.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, David sees the relation between the pyramid and the net as “a perpetual source of interesting conflicts.”<sup>11</sup>

Last, but not least, our volume includes essays that deal with the reception of biblical texts either within the scholarly guild or in art and music. In biblical studies, exploring the Bible’s reception is a new and burgeoning field. David would not be David if he had not anticipated this intriguing trend. Actually, he has already founded the publication *Biblical Reception*, an annual volume covering all kinds of use of the Bible, which he coedits with Cheryl Exum and the help of an international editorial board.<sup>12</sup>

We hope that this Festschrift may stimulate the conversation with David and the discourse of interested readers around the globe. The endeavor would not have been possible without the encouragement and sustained support of the Society of Biblical Literature, especially its executive director, John Kutsko, and its editorial director, Bob Buller, who from the beginning was enthusiastic about this publishing project. The editors are deeply grateful to both individuals and to the society that they represent. It is a pleasure for us to congratulate you, David, on your seventy-fifth birthday and to honor you with this volume.

James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier

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9. “Introduction,” in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, 1:xvi.

10. “The Pyramid and the Net: The Postmodern Adventure,” in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, 1:144.

11. *Ibid.*, 142.

12. Cf. J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, eds., *Biblical Reception* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press); the first volume was published in 2012, and the second in 2013.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AEL	<i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i> . M. Lichtheim. 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973–1980.
AHw	<i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–1981.
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ASV	American Standard Version
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AThR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.
BE	Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BHK	<i>Biblia Hebraica</i> . Edited by R. Kittel. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937.
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1983.
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibS(F)	Biblische Studien (Freiburg)
BIOSCS	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BMW	Bible in the Modern World

BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Edited by I. J. Gelb et al. 21 vols. in 26. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2011.
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
CAT	<i>Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CC	Continental Commentaries
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
CV	<i>Communio viatorum</i>
DBSup	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément</i> . Edited by L. Pirot and A. Robert. Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1928–.
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by David J. A. Clines. 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2011.
EA	El-Amarna tablets. According to the edition of J. A. Knutson, <i>Die el-Amarna Tafeln</i> . 2 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908–1915. Continued in A. F. Rainey, <i>El-Amarna Tablets 359–379</i> . 2nd rev. ed. Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1978.
EncJud	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> . Edited by C. Roth and G. Wigoder. 16 vols. Jerusalem: Keter, 1971–1972.
ESV	English Standard Version
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
HALOT	L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. <i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament



HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IG	<i>Inscriptiones graecae</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 1924–.
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
Jastrow	M. Jastrow, <i>A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature</i> . 2nd ed. 1903. Repr., New York: Judaic Press, 1975.
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
Joüon	P. Joüon, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. 2 vols. <i>Subsidia biblica</i> 14/1–2. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991.
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	King James (Authorized) Version
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976.

LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LB	<i>Linguistica Biblica</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
MB	Middle Babylonian
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NETS	<i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NIB	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
NIBCOT	New International Bible Commentary on the Old Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDB	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by K. D. Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009.
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OB	Old Babylonian
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PSB	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RHPR	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
SB	Standard Babylonian
SBH	G. A. Reisner, <i>Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln griechischer Zeit</i> . Berlin: Spemann, 1896.
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLANEM	SBL Ancient Near Eastern Monographs

SBLBSNA	SBL Biblical Scholarship in North America
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	SBL Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLSCS	SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSymS	SBL Symposium Series
SBLWAW	SBL Writings from the Ancient World
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–.
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
UNP	<i>Ugaritic Narrative Poetry</i> . Translated by M. S. Smith et al. Edited by S. B. Parker. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>



PART 1  
LITERARY/EXEGETICAL READINGS



# THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE COURTESAN IN THE GILGAMESH EPIC AND WITH RAHAB IN JOSHUA 2

Daniel Bodi

## 1. THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ENKIDU AND THE “JOYFUL LASS” IN THE GILGAMESH EPIC

According to William Moran,<sup>1</sup> the story in the Gilgamesh Epic is structured around three seven-day periods, each being associated with a profound transformation of Gilgamesh or his companion Enkidu.

1. In the first seven-day period (7 days + 7 nights in the Old Babylonian version, or 6 days + 7 nights in the Standard Babylonian version), Enkidu, the wild man who lives on the steppe with the animals, becomes humanized by epic lovemaking with Šamḥat, sent to seduce him. His encounter with her serves to underline a sharp nature-culture contrast. She is the agent of acculturation: besides human lovemaking she also teaches him how to bathe, anoint, and clothe himself and how to eat the human fare—bread. After drinking seven kegs of beer, he breaks into song. Only when Enkidu becomes humanized and civilized is he ready to enter the city of Uruk and to attempt to curb Gilgamesh's tyrannical rule.

2. The second transformation occurs when the hero Gilgamesh loses his friend Enkidu and grieves over his body for seven days and seven nights. Deeply affected by the pain of his disappearance, he becomes conscious of human mortality. He refuses to wash and put on fresh clothes. Wrapped in animal skins, he departs into the steppe.

3. In the third seven-day period the last transformation occurs. The only man to have obtained immortality, Uta-napištim, challenges Gilgamesh

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1. William Moran, “The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jack M. Sasson; 4 vols.; New York: Scribner's, 1995), 4:2327–36.

to stay awake for seven days. Gilgameš accepts the challenge but miserably fails as he falls asleep—for seven days. Confronted with the facts, he yields and learns how to become reconciled with his own mortality. He casts off his animal skins and bathes. Each time his transformation occurs, Gilgameš goes through a rite of passage associated with purification and a change of clothes. The multiple transformations show the hearer or reader of the epic how to exorcise the fear of death.

As Simo Parpola suggested,<sup>2</sup> the Gilgameš Epic seems to be a story of initiation, or a kind of *Bildungsroman* (Moran), tracing the story of Gilgameš's education and progress to maturity. Therefore, in the first part of this article I will concentrate on the initiation and the transformation of the wild man Enkidu through his encounter with the courtesan.

According to the Gilgameš Epic, because of the humiliations inflicted upon the inhabitants of Uruk by their tyrannical ruler, the people implore their gods for help. The divine council decides to create Enkidu to become Gilgameš's rival and partner, or in other words, his twin or double. Enkidu is an old Sumerian name (<sup>d</sup>en.ki.dùg.ga or <sup>d</sup>en.ki.du<sub>10</sub>), which means "(with) the lord of the good place,"<sup>3</sup> and probably refers to an oasis in the steppe, a pleasant place to live. Enkidu, a wild man living with animals, is the representative of the nomadic life. However, before entering Uruk, he must learn how city dwellers live. This is the moment when the decisive encounter happens with a woman who lives on the fringe of the city. In the second tablet of the Old Babylonian (OB) Gilgameš Epic dating from the eighteenth century B.C.E., before going to Uruk, Enkidu must become acculturated and civilized. In OB Gilg. 2 ii 45–49, he meets a "Joyful Lass," in Akkadian *ḫarimtu šamḫat*,<sup>4</sup> who, living at the outskirts of Uruk, the city

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2. Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52 (1993): 192–95. Parpola suggests viewing the Gilgameš Epic as an account of the mystical path of spiritual growth from animal passions through spiritual awakening and culminating in the acquisition of superior esoteric knowledge. For a critique of Parpola's interpretation, see Jerrold Cooper, "Assyrian Prophecies, the Assyrian Tree, and the Mesopotamian Origins of Jewish Monotheism, Greek Philosophy, Christian Theology, Gnosticism, and Much More," *JAOS* 120 (2000): 430–44.

3. Walther Sallaberger (*Das Gilgamesch-Epos: Mythos, Werk und Tradition* [Munich: Beck, 2008], 43) criticizes this etymology on grammatical reasons. The correct etymology remains unclear.

4. Wilfred G. Lambert, "Prostitution," in *Außenseiter und Randgruppen: Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients* (ed. Volkert Haas; Xenia: Konstanzer althis-



of Ištar, the goddess of love, is herself Ištar's protégée. In the OB version, Enkidu and the courtesan make love for seven days and seven nights (Gilg. 2 ii 45–54): “Enkidu was sitting before the courtesan. The two of them were making love together; he forgot the wild where he was born. For [seven] days and seven nights Enkidu was erect and coupled with Šamhat. The courtesan opened her mouth, saying to Enkidu: ‘I look at you, Enkidu, you are like a god [*ki-ma ilim* (dingir)], why with the animals do you range [*ta-at-ta-[n]a-la-ak*] through the wild?’”<sup>5</sup>

In the enfolding of the narrative, Enkidu's first step toward integrating civilized human society is the sexual act with a woman. This would imply that prior to this act, Enkidu was copulating with animals with which he lived in the steppe. Before his protracted lovemaking with the Joyful Lass, Enkidu was a being without culture, a subhuman, naked, roaming the steppe, running with beasts, himself akin to a beast and probably having beasts as his original sexual partners. This feature is deduced from the fact that after his sexual union with a woman, the beasts shun his company. “After he was sated with her delights, he turned his face toward his herd. The gazelles saw Enkidu and they started running, The animals of the wild moved away from his person. Enkidu had defiled his body so pure” (SB Gilg. 1 195–198).<sup>6</sup>

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torische Vorträge und Forschungen 32; Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1992), 139: “*šamuḫtu/šamḫatu* (also with *k* for *ḫ*), is the feminine adjective ‘flourishing,’ used also as a conventional proper name for any prostitute.” The word *ḫarimtu* is written with a long *i*, as a type of passive participle, because the plural is regularly *ḫarimātu*, which, if the *i* were short, should be *ḫarmātu*. It is related to the root *ḫrm* in the other Semitic languages, meaning “the separated one” in the sense of dedication (138).

5. A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:175. All quotations of the Gilgamesh Epic come from George's translation, replacing, however, his use of the term “harlot” with “courtesan.” In the Standard Babylonian version (SB Gilg. 1 194) they make love for “six days and seven nights,” and this figure totaling 13 (= 6+7) seems to carry symbolic importance.

6. See Aage Westenholz and Ulla Koch-Westenholz, “Enkidu—the Noble Savage?” in *Wisdom, Gods and Literature: Studies in Assyriology in Honour of W. G. Lambert* (ed. A. R. George and I. L. Finkel; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 439 n. 9, reading *ul-taḫ-ḫi/ḫa* based on parallelism between *ultahḫi* - *ullula* - *umtaḫḫu* in SB 1 199–201 and *šuhḫū, tašḫitu - ella - tušamḫinni* in SB 7 109, 128–131 = MB Ur 16 37–40. The verb *šuhḫū* (AHw 3:1261, s.v. *šuhḫū* III) seems to denote the harmful, defiling aspects of sex, like English “fornicate.” See Dietz O. Edzard, “Kleine Beiträge zum Gilgamesh-Epos,” *Or* 54 (1985): 46–55, esp. 50–52: “Die Tiere verlassen Enkidu”; Werner R. Mayer, “Ein neues Königsritual gegen feindliche Bedrohung,” *Or* 57 (1988):

After his sexual initiation with Šamḥat, animals flee Enkidu's company. "But he had reason [*tēmu*], he [was] wide of understanding" (SB Gilg. 1 202–208). Enkidu becomes a man who has acquired a new kind of intelligence.<sup>7</sup> According to Benjamin Foster, the sexual initiation theme belongs to the most elementary common denominator of human knowledge; this is what one has to experience in order to be considered a human being. One could say, it is what makes a man a *Mensch*.

In the Gilgamesh Epic, Enkidu is naked, and therefore Šamḥat's first gesture after their lovemaking is to clothe him. "She stripped off her clothing, dressed him in one part, the other part she put on herself" (OB Gilg. 2 ii 69–71).

Šamḥat's name is the feminine form of the adjective *šamḥu*, "luxuriant, lush," itself deriving from the verb *šamāḥu*, "to grow, flourish, attain extraordinary beauty or stature."<sup>8</sup> As pointed out by Wolfram von Soden,<sup>9</sup> however, the verb *šamāḥu* is related to Ugaritic *šmḥ* and Hebrew *šmḥ*, meaning "to rejoice, to be joyful." With these etymological connections, Jean Bottéro suggested translating her name with "*La Joyeuse*,"<sup>10</sup> which I follow by rendering it in English with "Joyful Lass." The latter teaches Enkidu the art of love but also the customs of the city dwellers. She

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155–58, *šuḥḥû* "beschmutzen"; Gordon J. Wenham, "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev 15,18)?" ZAW 95 (1983): 432–34.

7. Sexual initiation with the courtesan has been compared to Adam and Eve's initiation in Genesis; see John A. Bailey, "Initiation and the Primal Woman in Gilgamesh and Genesis 2–3," JBL 89 (1970): 137–50. Benjamin R. Foster, "Gilgamesh: Sex, Love and the Ascent of Knowledge," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good; Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987), 21.

8. George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 148. George uses the quaint term "harlot" when referring to Šamḥat.

9. AHw 3:1153.

10. In French, the terms *joyeuse* and *fille de joie* capture the double entendre and allude to a prostitute, and in my opinion, also capture the double entendre present in the Akkadian *šamḥatu* in this epic. There certainly is a double entendre present in the use of her name with a reference to a prostitute, but this latter connotation is secondary and should not be put to the fore in this context. In order to avoid systematic and immediate identification of the terms *šamḥatu* and *ḥarimtu* with "prostitute," I prefer to use the term "courtesan," which likewise follows the same development, from an original reference to a beautiful, desirable young woman at the royal court whom the king solicits for company and sexual enjoyment. The term "courtesan" subsequently became synonymous with "prostitute."

instructs him how to dress, how to eat bread, how to drink beer, and how to anoint his body with ointments, “because it is, she says, the custom of the country” (OB Gilg. 2 iii 87–111). This sexually free woman is present throughout his initiation journey, acting as a mediator, allowing the passage of the hero from one area to another, facilitating the transformation of the stranger, of which he was the absolute model, into a full-fledged member of the urban community. In doing so, she is nothing less than a representative and a personification of the goddess Inanna/Ištar whose role she plays. Indeed, in the myth of Inanna and Bilulu, while establishing laments and funeral rites, the goddess Inanna transforms the inhabitants into socialized beings.<sup>11</sup> Inanna/Ištar is the goddess of fertility on earth, but she spends half of the year in the netherworld. She is the great mediator who facilitates the passage from the world of the living into the world of the dead while also providing the mutation of nonacculturated beings into members of human society. As pointed out by Jean-Jacques Glassner, in the context of the Gilgameš Epic, “the feminine sex serves as a powerful metaphor of the mediation between the outside and the inside, the wild and the civilized, between a social status and another one, in short, it plays the role of a catalyst of inversion.”<sup>12</sup>

In order to understand the role of this courtesan who teaches the sweetness and amenities of the urban lifestyle, Rivkah Harris suggests finding in her persona “the connection between artful, or sophisticated, sensuousness and civilization.”<sup>13</sup> Her role as a middle woman is important, because being marginal herself, she allows the wild man Enkidu to cross the borderline from animality to humanity, facilitating his integration into human society.

The courtesan Šamḫat in Mesopotamia, just like Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, embodies the city life as the paradigm of urban sophisti-

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11. Thorkild Jacobsen and Samuel N. Kramer, “The Myth of Inanna and Bilulu,” *JNES* 12 (1953): 160–68.

12. Jean-Jacques Glassner, “Polygynie ou prostitution: Une approche comparative de la sexualité masculine,” in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting; 2 vols.; Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 2002), 1:162.

13. Rivkah Harris, “Images of Women in the Gilgamesh Epic,” in *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran* (ed. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard, and Piotr Steinkeller; HSS 37; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 223, citing Paul Friedrich, *The Meaning of Aphrodite* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 14.

cation.<sup>14</sup> The courtesan allows the solitary man to reintegrate into society. She initiates him to social life. Gilgameš and Enkidu are contrasted and illustrate two different ways of life, the nomadic versus the sedentary. Gilgameš, the mighty king of Uruk, is the representative of the city dwellers. Enkidu is the nomad who runs through the steppe, lives with animals, and acts as their friend. In spite of his different origin and place of birth, however, Enkidu will become not the servant of Gilgameš but his friend and companion. In Old Babylonian times, the urban and nomadic populations were already mutually dependent. The relationship between these two ways of life is presented as positive, necessary, and complementary. The dialectic polarity and the vital complementarity that existed between the nomadic travelers and the city dwellers in the ancient Near East have been recognized and applied to the discussion of the settlement of the Israelite tribes in the land of Canaan. Expressions like “dimorphic society”<sup>15</sup> or polymorphic societal organization<sup>16</sup> seem to describe better the historical reality of this period of Israel’s history.

The story of the encounter between Enkidu and the courtesan also contains a negative element.<sup>17</sup> Before dying, Enkidu curses the courtesan, accusing her of having placed him on the path of death. The city with its sophistication, sensuality, and civilized life also entails some death-inflicting elements.

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14. Harris, “Images of Women,” 223: “Relevant too is the fact that the prostitute in Mesopotamia, like the prostitute in ancient Israel, was a prime representative of urban life.”

15. The theory of dimorphic society sees two constitutive elements in society: the sedentary and the nomadic; cf. Michael B. Rowton, “Dimorphic Structure and the Problem of the ‘Apiru-‘Ibrim,” *JNES* 25 (1976): 13–20; idem, “Urban Autonomy in a Nomadic Environment,” *JNES* 22 (1973): 201–15.

16. Niels P. Lemche (*Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* [VTSup 37; Leiden: Brill, 1985]) has proposed the term *polymorphic* society to take into consideration all the different possibilities of this cohabitation. Cf. also Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988); idem, “Early Arad—Urbanism of the Nomads,” *ZDPV* 106 (1991): 34–50.

17. Parpola, “Assyrian Tree of Life,” 193 n. 121: “the length of the coitus (6 days and 7 nights), which ended only barely before it would have completed the number of Nergal (14).” Enkidu came within a hair’s breadth of death because he stopped short of the number 14, which is a fateful figure. The number 14 refers to Nergal, the god of death and the netherworld.

On one hand Enkidu has acquired an advantage, and he has become human. But he has also lost something: his vitality. SB Gilg. 1 iv 17: *ul iš-ḥu-ut il-ti-qi na-pis-su*, “without hesitation she took away his vitality,” or “she took his breath away,” exploiting the double meaning of the term *napšu*, which means both “breath” and “life,” reinforcing the main theme of the epic.<sup>18</sup> Right from Enkidu’s initiation one knows that he has entered the path of death. Terms like *napšu*, *napištu*, and *Uta-napištim* are key elements in the epic, pointing to its main theme, which is the quest for eternal life.

## 2. THE TAVERN AS A PLACE TO MEET UNENCUMBERED WOMEN AND THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE TERM “PROSTITUTE”

In the ancient Near East one of the places where men could meet sexually free women was the tavern or alehouse (*bīt aštami*). In a bilingual song, Inanna/Ištar, the goddess of love and the patron of the courtesans, is linked to the tavern. The Sumerian is: [ká.é]š.dam.ma.ka [tuš.a.m]u.[dè kar].kid mu.lu mu.zu me.e [ši.i]n.ga.mèn.[na mu.tin ku].li.ni nu.n[us ma.la].ga.[ni ...], “When I sit at the tavern door, I am a kar.kid-courtesan, knowing the male member, I am man’s companion, and woman’s friend (...).” The Akkadian text, however, is slightly different: *ina ba-ab aš-tam-mi ina a-šá-bi-ia šar-ra-qí-tum ḥa-ri-im-tum ra-im-tum ana-k[u-ma ...]*,<sup>19</sup> “When I sit at the tavern door, I am a subtle woman [lit. “a female thief”], a loving *ḥarimtu*-courtesan (...).”<sup>20</sup>

In the wake of “gender studies,” however, it is advisable to avoid indiscriminately using the term “prostitute” in ancient Near Eastern texts and

18. Here I follow the translation of Raymond J. Tournay and Aaron Shaffer, *L'Épopée de Gilgamesh* (LAPO 15; Paris: Cerf, 1994), 56. George (SB Gilg. 1 190) translates the line with, “she took in his scent,” which should be *nipšu* I, “breathing, scent,” but *napšu* III, “life, breath,” suits better here in view of the main theme of this epic.

19. Konrad Volk, *Die balag-Komposition ŪRU ĀM-MA-IR-RA-BI* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989), 196, tablet 21:25–27. The term *šarrāqītu*, “female thief,” is an epithet of Ištar.

20. In a Late Babylonian hymn, Ištar is linked to a tavern, one of the places where men could meet unencumbered women in Mesopotamia (George Reisner, ed., *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln griechischer Zeit* [Berlin: Spemann, 1896], 106:51), *ina bāb aštammī ina ašābi-ya ḥarimtum rā'imtum anāku*, “Sitting at the tavern door, I am a loving courtesan.” See Gerda Lerner, “The Origin of Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11 (1986): 236–54.

rather seeing these unencumbered women present in the alehouses as hostesses. Their task was to maintain a jovial, pleasant mood (*Gemütlichkeit*) and a somewhat “eroticized atmosphere” with the clients.<sup>21</sup> Ištar together with her worshipers and protégées were perceived as sexually free single women, in full possession of their bodies, mistresses of their sexuality, free from any male patronage or guardianship, whose sexuality was not kept in check by society’s laws and constraints, and who were set free from the constraints of maternity.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. THE ENCOUNTER OF THE HEBREW SPIES WITH RAHAB OF JERICHO

Joshua 2:1–24 describes the arrival in the city of Jericho of the Hebrew spies hiding in the house of Rahab,<sup>23</sup> who courageously saves them from their pursuers. “So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute [*’iššâ zônâ*] whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there [*wayyiškēbû šāmmâ*]” (Josh 2:1 NRSV). We are struck by the assurance shown by the spies when they come to Rahab’s place: they know where her house is

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21. Julia Assante, “The kar.kid/*ḥarimtu*, Prostitute or Single Woman? A Reconsideration of the Evidence,” *UF* 30 (1998): 5–96; idem, “From Whores to Hierodules: The Historiographic Invention of Mesopotamian Female Sex Professionals,” in *Ancient Art and Its Historiography* (ed. A. A. Donohue and Mark D. Fullerton; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13–47.

22. Glassner, “Polygynie ou prostitution,” 156; Hermann Behrens, *Die Ninegalla-Hymne: Die Wohnungnahme Inannas in Nippur in altbabylonischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), 34, 105–15. In the hymn to Ninegalla (“Great Lady”), Inanna as a kar.kid-courtesan goes to the tavern, attired with a pearl necklace, which denotes her distinctive status, and she picks up a man. Not being bound by marriage ties, she is free to have many partners: (19) *úr-MUNUS-nita-dam-zu* <sup>d</sup>*Dumu-zi-da-ke*<sub>4</sub> U.PIRIG tag-tag-ge-zu-dè (20) <sup>d</sup>*Inanna niir-si imin-zu ki-ná mu-e-da-ak-e*, “When you trip along into the lap of Dumuzi, your bridegroom, Inanna, your seven grooms/paranymphs lie with you!” (BE 31,12).

23. François Langlamet, “Josué II et les traditions de l’Hexateuque,” *RB* 78 (1971): 5–17, 161–83; idem, “Rahab,” *DBSup* 9:1065–92; Gene M. Tucker, “The Rahab Saga (Joshua 2): Some Form-critical and Traditio-historical Observations,” in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring* (ed. James M. Efrid; Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 66–96. Tucker argues that the Rahab story circulated independently as an oral tradition (75). One intention of the story is etiological, with the dominant motif being the fate of Rahab and her family. See Aaron Sherwood, “A Leader’s Misleading and a Prostitute’s Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2,” *JSOT* 31 (2006): 43–61.

located and what trade she practices. It indicates that Rahab's house was a well-known place and easily accessible. The Greek term *katagōgion*, "inn, tavern," used by Flavius Josephus (*Ant.* 5.8), as well as the Aramaic term *pūndēqītā'* in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on this passage, suggest that she was an innkeeper and seem to preserve the memory of an ancient tradition.<sup>24</sup> The choice of her house is significant in this context and seems to have been deliberate on the part of the Hebrew spies, as the place where one can gather information.

Rahab's attitude is also remarkable: "she receives the spies knowing who they are, she hides them and collaborates closely with them, helps them to escape, and compromises herself hopelessly with regard to her fellow-citizens."<sup>25</sup> All these details probably reflect the subsequent work of reinterpretation and reveal an elaborate and theologically well-constructed story.<sup>26</sup>

So far, scholars have adduced parallels from Greco-Roman antiquity, confining themselves to simply finding historical analogies without looking for the topos of the encounter with the courtesan and her role as an agent of transformation.<sup>27</sup>

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24. The Aramaic term *pūndēqītā'* from the Targum means "the hostess, the inn keeper (f.), keeper of a public house," but also "prostitute." According to Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaic Press, 1975), 1143, Aramaic *pūndāq* is derived from the Greek *pandokeion*, "inn, tavern, lodging place," while *batē-pūndaqtā'* means "brothels" (1144). We find this tradition again at the time of King Justinian when the supposed Rahab's house has become a hostel (*xenodochium*), and the room where she had hidden the spies has been remodeled into an oratory dedicated to Saint Mary; see Félix-Marie Abel, "L'anathème de Jéricho et la maison de Rahab," *RB* 57 (1950): 330.

25. J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua* (trans. R. A. Wilson; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 39–40.

26. The Hebrew Bible often insists on the lowly character of the persons whom God calls to occupy key positions in the realization of divine plans, for example, the election of David, the youngest of the sons of Jesse (1 Sam 16:11), or of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 1:6). In the case of Rahab her profession as a prostitute makes her morally ambiguous; see Soggin, *Joshua*, 39.

27. There is the case of Vestia Oppia, who, locked up in a place besieged by the Roman legions, every day offered a sacrifice to the gods of the Roman army and in so doing won her freedom and the restitution of her possessions. Another analogy is the case of the Abydenians, in the Hellespont region, who freed their town with the help of a courtesan who managed to seize the keys as the enemy garrison was subsequently massacred. The Abydenians showed her their gratitude by erecting a temple dedicated

The translation “they entered” is the rendering of the Hebrew verb *bāʾ*, which may have two meanings. It is successively used seven times in verses 1–4 and three more times later in the story (vv. 18, 22, 23). The Hebrew verb *bāʾ*, “to enter, to go, to come,” followed by a feminine direct object, may have a sexual connotation. The king of Jericho, whose name, ironically, is not indicated, orders Rahab to have “the men who have gone in to you” (*habbāʾim ʾelayik*, Josh 2:3), in the sexual sense of the expression, brought to him.<sup>28</sup>

The etymology of the name Rahab reflects a verb meaning “to open wide, to broaden.” Originally, it might have been connected to a divine name or title (probably some Canaanite fertility god), for instance *rāhāb-ʾēl*, “the god has widened (the bosom?).” Other similar names would be Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, and Rehabiah (1 Chr 23:17), the last one being a theophoric name derived from the same root.<sup>29</sup>

The parallel with the Joyful Lass in the Gilgamesh Epic who is a servant of the goddess Ištar would add some weight to former studies, which linked Rahab’s profession with Canaanite fertility cults. This thesis was defended by Hugo Gressmann in 1914, supported by Gustav Hölscher, and reiterated by Jan Heller.<sup>30</sup> According to these writers, Rahab would be plying her trade under the aegis of the Canaanite avatar of Išar-Aštarte or of the moon god, with reference to the name of the city of Jericho. Its Hebrew

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to her patron goddess, the Aphrodite Porne. See Hans Windisch, “Zur Rahabgeschichte: Zwei Parallelen aus der klassischen Literatur,” *ZAW* 37 (1917–1918): 238–68; Abel, “L’anathème de Jéricho,” 327–28.

28. The Syriac version also implies that the spies had sex with her. In Deut 21:13 a Hebrew warrior who has captured a beautiful woman and desires her sexually must not touch her for a month. He must leave her time to lament her parents and then he will be able to “go in to her, and be her husband and she shall be his wife” (*tābōʾ ʾēlēhā ūbēʾaltāh wēhāyētā lēkā lʾiṣṣā*). In this context the expression has a sexual meaning as well as in Ahitophel’s advice to Absalom to lie with David’s concubines as an act of seizing political power by the appropriation of his predecessor’s females: *bōʾ ʾel-pilagšē ʾābikā*, “go in to your father’s concubines” (2 Sam 16:21).

29. Martin Noth, *Israelitische Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (BWANT III/10; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1928), 193.

30. Hugo Gressmann, *Josua* (Schriften des Alten Testaments 1.2; 2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), on Josh 2; Gustav Hölscher, “Zum Ursprung der Rahabsage,” *ZAW* 38 (1919–1920): 54–57; Jan Heller, “Die Priesterin Rahab,” *CV* 8 (1965): 113–17.



name, *yēriḥô*, is etymologically associated with the Canaanite term *yeraḥ* which means “moon, month.”<sup>31</sup>

The Hebrew text tells us only that Rahab was a prostitute, *’iššâ zônâ* (Josh 2:1), *rāḥāb hazzônâ* (6:17), and that her house was easy to find. Though she is designated with the term *zônâ*, it might be superfluous to speak of her as an ordinary or a sacred prostitute. Her trade would be under the protection of a patron god or goddess. The writer wishing to avoid any ambiguity employs the term *qēdēšâ*, semantically similar but used exclusively to denote the prostitute associated with fertility worship. In the book of Hosea, the relationship between God and his people is likened to the one between the prophet and his unfaithful wife.<sup>32</sup> The prophet is asked to marry an *’ēšet zēnūnīm*, “a wife of whoredom” (Hos 1:2). A long exegetical tradition explains this expression in the sense of *qēdēšâ*, a sacred prostitute, a woman dedicated to the worship of some Canaanite god of fertility.<sup>33</sup>

Martin Noth had suggested explaining the Rahab story as an etiological legend derived from the expression *bêt-rēḥôb* “a street, public house,” implying “brothel,”<sup>34</sup> well known in the region. The term *rḥb* appears in biblical texts referring to prostitution. In Ezek 16:24, in his invective against Jerusalem, the prophet associates the term “brothel” (Hebrew *gāb*; LXX *oikēma pornikon*; Vulgate *lupanar*), with the street *rēḥôb*. In Isa 57:8, in a context dealing with prostitution, the same root *rḥb* is used: “You

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31. The term *yrḥ* appears in the Gezer agricultural calendar dating from the tenth century B.C.E. and written in Old Hebrew, in each one of the seven lines of the text.

32. T. Drorah Setel, “Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Letty M. Russell; Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 86–95, 157–59; Phyllis Bird, “To Play the Harlot: An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 75–94.

33. Harold H. Rowley, “The Marriage of Hosea,” in *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy* (London: Nelson, 1965), 66–97. Cf. Michael C. Astour, “Tamar the Hierodule: An Essay in the Method of Vestigial Motifs,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 186: “As to the *qēdēšôt*, the parallelism between this term and *zônôt* (Hos 4:14), the interchange of *qēdēšâ* and *zônâ* in Gen 38 leave no doubt that they were cult prostitutes akin to Greek hierodules.” See also John Day, “Does the Old Testament Refer to Sacred Prostitution and Did It Actually Exist in Ancient Israel?” in *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart* (ed. Carmel McCarthy and John F. Healey; JSOTSup 375; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 2–21 (bibliography).

34. Martin Noth, *Josua* (3rd ed.; HAT 1.7; Tübingen: Mohr, 1953), on Josh 2.

have widened your bed" (*hirḥabt miškābēk*). The verse adds, "Behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your symbol [*zikkārôn*]." It probably refers to phallic images used to indicate the presence of a prostitute's house.<sup>35</sup> In the Rahab story, the red ribbon could have had a similar function. However, what really matters here, as in the case of the Joyful Lass in the Gilgameš Epic, is that Rahab's services go far beyond what it is usually expected from a courtesan.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF THE TAVERN IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

In the ancient Near East, the courtesan specialized in meeting with strangers, for she had *pignon sur rue*, and lived by the window or at the threshold of her house watching and inviting passersby. The courtesan was a free woman, unencumbered to meet and have commerce with any man she chose to or who came to her. Moreover, courtesans were working in taverns or alehouses where men could stop, eat, drink, and sleep either alone or in the company of a courtesan, as it seemed implied in Josh 2 with the use of the term *šākab*, "to lie down." The role of Rahab was to lodge the Hebrew men who stopped at her house, to inform them, and eventually to hide them, awaiting the pending military takeover of the city by the Israelites. For spies to stop at such a house was part of the traditional method of military espionage.

Here again the Gilgameš Epic can shed some important light on the role of taverns in the ancient Near East. The most sensible advice about why he should end his quest comes from the barmaid, probably because women are believed to know something about immortal life since only women can perpetuate life by giving birth and thus provide a form of immortality.

The first two couplets of tablet 10 introduce Šiduri the *sabītu*, an "alewife" who kept a tavern by the edge of the ocean. She hid her face, apparently behind a veil. Babylonian alewives were probably not veiled. Women who kept and frequented taverns were sexually independent and free of marriage, and were therefore forbidden the veil, which was a mark of respectability for a married woman. Her veiling is probably related to her function as a mysterious goddess of wisdom.<sup>36</sup>

35. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman' in Proverbs 1–9," *Bib* 72 (1991): 465 n. 18: "it served to identify the place as a 'house of ill fame.'"

36. In *Šurpu* 2 173, Šiduri is explicitly called "Ištar of Wisdom." She is here por-

In taverns one could also obtain latest news of commercial and especially political nature, and important information can be transformed into power as reminded by the statement in the ancient chronicles saying that the founder of the Fourth Dynasty of Kish, a city located 25 km east of Babylon, was Ku-Bau, a female innkeeper.<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew spies in Josh 2 were on a mission to gather information. Staying with Rahab in a tavern would be an ideal place for that.

The taverns were often located outside cities, in the intermediary space between cities and the steppe, at the crossroads of caravan routes. They were also built next to navigation canals, fluvial routes of intense traffic that literally crisscross the plain of ancient Mesopotamia, as indicated by the expression *sābīti ša kārī*, “the tavern keeper of the wharf.” The tavern is also a place par excellence where one meets travelers but also sexually free women who work there and are free from both paternal and marital tutelage. Some taverns are located next to the temples of the goddess Inanna/Ištar, and the women who work there are devotees of this goddess of love and pleasure.<sup>38</sup>

In his long harrowing journey, at the very end of the inhabited world reaching the shores of the waters of death, Gilgameš reaches a tavern. The alewife Šiduri is the projection into the myth of an historical and socially well-established ancient Mesopotamian tavern keeper. She is there to give information to the travelers what road to take. Šiduri the barmaid is the typical model, projected into the legend, of those merchant women at the crossroads, though it is difficult to see what kind of clients if any she would have at this particular place, at the extreme outskirts of the inhabited world. She is necessary for the plot in the Gilgameš Epic, and she is there to provide him with vital information. Moreover, folklore and fairy-

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trayed, through her veiling, as the daughter-in-law of Ea, the god of wisdom and divination, and as the devotee of Ištar, the patron and protective goddess of the alewives and courtesans. See Karel van der Toorn, “The Significance of the Veil in the Ancient Near East,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 327–39.

37. Elena Cassin, “Note sur le ‘commerce de carrefour’ en Mésopotamie ancienne,” *JESHO* 4 (1961): 167.

38. Jean-Jacques Glassner, “Le cabaret: Un commerce de proximité,” in *Les débuts de l'histoire: Le Proche-Orient, de l'invention de l'écriture à la naissance du monothéisme* (ed. Pierre Bordreuil, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and Cécile Michel; Paris: La Martinière, 2008), 75.

tales do not always follow strict logical thinking.<sup>39</sup> Šiduri in the Gilgameš Epic has the function of the informant; she points the way and attempts to provide an answer. Gilgameš has left behind the world of human society and civilization, has reached the extreme limits of the world, and is about to enter the gates of darkness. At this borderline region, the hero asks her how to get across the waters of death. He has reached the extreme limit, the legendary waters of death mentioned in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek mythologies.

Šiduri's message to Gilgameš is to enjoy the mortal life he was given as his destiny preordained by the immortal gods. His days on earth should be spent eating, being merry, enjoying a wife, and taking care of his child. The only immortality he can achieve is through his progeny. The innkeeper, with her wise advice to Gilgameš, is a counterpart to the courtesan, the Joyful Lass, and her civilizing role in respect to Enkidu.

#### 5. THE POSITIVE ATTITUDE OF THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION TOWARD RAHAB

In the rabbinic and Christian tradition, Rahab is perceived in a particularly favorable way. According to Josephus, grateful for her help, Joshua gave her possessions (*Ant.* 5.30). The Hebrew tradition adds that, after her conversion, she became Joshua's wife and gave him many daughters. The rabbinic tradition places a series of prophets and priests among her descendants. Midrash Ruth 2:1 (126a) states: "Ten priests who were also prophets stem from Rahab the prostitute: Jeremiah, Hilkiah, Seraiah, Mahasayah, Hana-meel, Shallum, Baruch, Neriah, Ezekiel, Buzzi."<sup>40</sup> Some also include the prophetess Huldah among her descendants. Midrash Numbers Rabbah 8:9 enumerates eight of Rahab's descendants: Baruch, Neriah's son, Sarahiah, Mahseiah's son, Jeremiah, Hilkiah's son, Hanameel, and Shallum's son.

The New Testament exceeds the rabbinic tradition by making Rahab an ancestor of the Messiah (Matt 1:5). The Epistles also perpetuate Rahab's memory in Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25. She is called *pornē* as a reminder of the first period of her life. According to the writer of the Epistle to the

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39. Bottéro, *L'Épopée de Gilgameš*, 165.

40. For other rabbinic references see Martinus A. Beek, "Rahab in the Light of Jewish Exegesis," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. Dr. J. P. M. van der Ploeg* (ed. W. C. Delsman et al.; AOAT 211; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1982), 37–44.

Hebrews, by faith Rahab escaped the fate of unbelievers by saving the Hebrew spies. The Epistle of James quotes her as an illustration of a person justified by her deeds of righteousness.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the Gilgamesh Epic as in the story of Rahab from Jericho, the motif of the courtesan is used to describe the customs of city life. In ancient Mesopotamia as well as in the nomadic Israelite society, the courtesan is the representative par excellence of the city and its way of life.

The courtesan with whom the wild man Enkidu spends seven days and six nights teaches him how to live in society and helps him to become acquainted with the amenities of urban life. His encounter with her enables him to cross the border between the steppe and the city. She initiates the nomadic man into civilization and makes of Enkidu a man ready to become integrated into the city of Uruk. In the Gilgamesh Epic the courtesan illustrates the important civilizing role of the woman.

I have suggested reading the Rahab story as a paradigmatic and symbolic vision of the encounter between Hebrew nomads and the Canaanite city dwellers through the intermediary role of a local prostitute. For the ancient Hebrews the prostitute embodies the essence of the Canaanite urban centers. Their practices, customs, and religion were systematically denigrated as dangerous, tempting the Israelites to commit infidelity toward YHWH, and they were castigated by the prophets with the metaphor of prostitution. The city of Jericho and the prostitute Rahab are closely linked. Rahab who lives in the Jericho ramparts can be identified with the city. Jericho represents a border city par excellence.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the storming of Jericho in Josh 6 is represented as a liturgical action in which seven priests blow seven shofars and march seven times around the ramparts.<sup>42</sup> The contemporary archaeological layers from the date of the Hebrew conquest are nonexistent. The Amarna tablets do not mention Jericho, and it seems that at best this city was then an insignificant township, a village on

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41. This is the place where King David's dishonored envoys halt on the way to Jerusalem (2 Sam 10:5; 1 Chr 1:5) and also a border post where captive Judeans were led by the armies of Israel according to 2 Chr 28:15.

42. Jacques Briand, ed., *Terre sainte: Cinquante ans d'archéologie* (2 vols; Paris: Bayard, 2003), 1:352: "It is less a matter of a conquest than a warlike liturgy."

a heap of ruins.<sup>43</sup> The capture of Jericho seems to have a paradigmatic and didactical aspect. Therefore, in the role of the prostitute Rahab, the use of an ancient Near Eastern literary topos must be recognized. The difference with the courtesan in the *Gilgameš* Epic is the curse Enkidu expresses against her, accusing her of putting him on the path leading to death. In the Rahab story, the prostitute and her whole household are protected from the curse of death and destruction. In return for her services, Rahab and her clan are spared, so that from that time their descendants live in the midst of Israel (Josh 6:17–25). From the theological perspective of the biblical story, Rahab embodies forgiveness in the midst of judgment. One can justly ask if the story of Rahab is not meant, somehow, to correspond to the story of the city of Jericho as the declaration of forgiveness would correspond to the announcement of judgment.

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43. J. Alberto Soggin, "Jéricho: Anatomie d'une conquête," *RHPR* 57 (1977): 1–17.

(DIVINE) SILENCE IS GOLDEN:  
A NEW READING OF THE PROLOGUE OF JOB\*

Marc Zvi Brettler

It is a privilege to participate in this volume honoring David. He supported me early in my career, accepting my dissertation as a JSOT Supplement volume; he welcomed me to Sheffield when I was on sabbatical in England and wanted to discuss my second book, and has always been supportive of my work. His range, creativity, skill, boldness, and love of fun have served as a model for me, as has his ability to combine solid old-style philology with modern approaches to biblical studies.

I have attempted to write this article in one of David's many styles—as a short article, with few footnotes, that gets to the main point right away. (I am tempted to footnote this by citing several such examples by David, especially those that appear at the end of volume 2 of *On the Way to the Postmodern*, but I am using some restraint.) My contention is that Job argues that silence, even divine silence, is desirable, so I will try to be the opposite of Elihu, and will limit my words. I here follow Prov 17:28: “Even a fool, if he keeps silent, is deemed wise; intelligent, if he seals his lips” (NJPS—and so elsewhere).

The God of the prologue of Job talks too much. All was going exceedingly well for Job (Job 1:1–5) until God decided to instigate a conversation with “the adversary,” הַשָּׂטָן. God's initial remarks (1:8) add nothing to what the omniscient narrator, and thus the adversary, already knew. This implies that had God not initiated this conversation in the divine council, the adversary would not have followed up with his challenge (1:9–11), and all would have gone well with Job, his (original) family, and his property. But

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\* I would like to thank Mr. Lenin Prado for his assistance with this article, which developed as a result of a comment in an adult education class by Mr. Michael Bentley.

it gets worse—God does not learn, and in chapter 2 God again instigates a conversation with the adversary, and this leads to the physical punishment of Job. To make matters even worse, God's talkativeness may follow the example of the adversary, who notes (1:7; 2:2) that he has just been מש[ו]ט בה בארץ ומהתהלך בה, doubled language that is obscured by the NJPS rendition, "I have been roaming all over the earth."

In a sense, the prologue illustrates the later rabbinic dictum (b. Ber. 19a and elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud): לעולם אל יפתח אדם פיו לשטן, "A person should never open his mouth to the adversary [*laššātān*]." Indeed, given that Job is best seen as a parable, as already noted in one talmudic opinion (b. B. Bat. 15a) and followed by some medieval Jewish exegetes,<sup>1</sup> the book offers God as a negative example to humans—open your mouth unnecessarily like God, and look at the damage you might cause!

In addition, the talkative God of Job offers an explanation of theodicy: at least in some cases, human affliction is due to God talking too much, and in some cases, talking himself into a bind. After all, the prologue (to my mind—I know others dispute this point)<sup>2</sup> is quite clear: Job "was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (1:1, 8; 2:3); nevertheless, he and his family were gravely injured or killed, and his property was decimated. This all happened because God was too talkative. Had God not instigated this whole dialogue, the dialogues that followed in chapters 3–42, motivated by the punishments, would not have transpired, and we would not have the book of Job. Put quite simply, the book of Job illustrates, among many other things (here too I follow David in not reducing complex books to a single point), that divine imperfection is sometimes responsible for unfair human punishment.

I believe that the theme of talkativeness, being loquacious, has been ignored in most studies of Job (except, of course, in relation to Elihu,

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1. Moshe Greenberg, "Did Job Really Exist? An Issue of Medieval Exegesis" [in Hebrew], in *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 3\*–11\*.

2. On the prologue, see in particular David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word, 1989), 6–7; Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 32–71; Edward L. Greenstein, "Truth or Theodicy? Speaking Truth to Power in the Book of Job," *PSB* 27 (2006): 241. Meir Weiss (*The Story of Job's Beginning* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983], 72–73) contends that 2:10, when compared to 1:22, indicates that Job's attitude did change as a result of his personal punishment.



where it is so explicit), especially those of the prologue.<sup>3</sup> As a survey of the commentaries on the prologue (and epilogue) and of David's comprehensive bibliography makes clear,<sup>4</sup> most literature on this material focuses on divine councils as they relate to the ancient Near East, on the extent to which 1:9b ("Does Job not have good reason to fear God?") is a key to the book's theology, and on the role of Job's wife. To the best of my knowledge, no study has focused on the role of speech, and especially of divine speech, in the prologue. This is in some ways surprising given that divine speech plays such a crucial role in the center of the book, as Job demands an answer from God (see esp. 31:35, "O that I had someone to give me a hearing; O that Shaddai would reply to my writ, Or my accuser draw up a true bill!"), and God indeed finally responds (chs. 38–41). But given that modern scholarship has been quite dogmatic—with good reason—in separating the poetic center of Job from its narrative framework, the issue of divine speech has generally not been transposed from the poetry to the prose.

Methodologically, that may be proper, depending on the theory adopted concerning the authorship of Job, and the possible relation between the poetry and the prose section. Yet the extent to which speech, including divine speech, is important in the prose itself has been undervalued. Although several scholars have noted patterns of repetition, especially a fourfold pattern of repetition in the prologue,<sup>5</sup> few scholars have emphasized that this material *is* wordy and emphasizes words, especially spoken words. Although various solutions have been given to the wordiness and repetitions in the prose—on both the micro- and macrolevel, both within the prologue and between the prologue and the epilogue, few

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3. Alan M. Olson ("The Silence of Job as the Key to the Text," *Sem* 19 [1981]: 113–19) and J. David Pleins ("Why Do You Hide Your Face?" Divine Silence and Speech in the Book of Job," *Int* 48 [1994]: 229–38) emphasize a very different aspect of silence than the one I treat here, though some of their observations about silence in Job are apposite to my claims.

4. Clines, *Job 1–20*, 1, 1225–26; and idem, *Job 38–42* (WBC 18B; Nashville: Nelson, 2011), 1243–46, 1257.

5. See esp. James E. Patrick, "The Fourfold Structure of Job: Variations on a Theme," *VT* 55 (2005): 187–89; Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Structure and Message of the Book of Job," *VT* 46 (1996): 92; and Newsom, *Book of Job*, 39, who notes that some have classified the prologue of Job as folklore on the basis of repetition in the prose, which is a stylistic element of folktales, though she finds this classification problematic.

scholars have emphasized that this material *is* wordy and highlights words, especially spoken words.

The wordiness begins with verse 1—instead of a simple **ויהי איוב** **איש היה בארץ־עוץ**, we have the long and somewhat convoluted **ויהי האיש שמו עוץ איוב שמו ההוא**. And there are many brief ways in Biblical Hebrew to signal a person's righteousness (e.g., by calling him a **צדיק**), but this verse drags out the description of Job's qualities, using six words instead of one: **תם וישר וירא אלהים וסר מרע**. Though not to the same extent, this wordiness continues throughout—do we really need to know, for example, that the great wind fell on the *four* sides of Job's children's house (1:19)? And the major theme of the prologue—whether Job would curse/bless (**ברך**) God—an action accomplished through words—reminds us again of words, as does the likely (oral) proverb recited by the adversary in 2:4: “Skin for skin—all that a man has he will give up for his life.” Job's wife's brief, straightforward, six-word suggestion (2:9), **עֲדָךְ מַחְזִיק בְּרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת**, “You still keep your integrity! Blaspheme God and die!” to which Job offers a long-winded answer (2:10), also highlights the role of speech. Job's friends' initial, reasonable action of **וַאֲיֵן־דָּבָר אֵלָיו דָּבָר**, “None spoke a word to him” (2:13), highlights, by contrast, the damage caused by speech, especially the wrong word at the wrong time (i.e., false comfort). Although accusative cognates are the norm in Biblical Hebrew, the locution **דָּבָר** (verb *qal*) + **דָּבָר** is rare, attested only four other times. Thus this locution also would have called attention to itself, highlighting words and wordiness just as the prologue came to a close.

This wordiness continues as the prose section resumes in 42:7. Given the function of the Hebrew narrative sequence, it would have been sufficient to simply continue with 7b: **וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה**, “the LORD said,” without the intervening 7a: **וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי דִבְרֵי יְהוָה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־אִיּוֹב**, “After the LORD had spoken these words to Job.” After noting that Job was doubly restored (v. 10), the narrator enumerates in complete detail his doubled property (vv. 12–13), as if we cannot multiply by two! And 42:8b is one of the most verbose, confused sentences in the entire Hebrew Bible: **כִּי אִם־פָּנִיו אֲשָׁא לְבַלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם נְבִלָה כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כַּעֲבָדִי אִיּוֹב**. The NJPS translation, “or to him I will show favor and not treat you vilely, since you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job,” cleans it up, and hardly reflects its verbosity.

Various reasons can be, and have been, given for explaining the features I have noted. I do not mean to dismiss them, but want to add one:

the author of this section was very interested in highlighting the importance of conciseness, especially in speech, and he did so through contrast, by creating a highly verbose narrative structure that contains repetitions and convoluted syntax. This “in your face” verbose style was meant to call attention to God’s inappropriate verbosity in chapters 1–2. In some instances, the type of verbosity in the descriptive sections of the narrative is identical to that in God’s speech there (e.g., unnecessary duplication or piling on of synonyms), while in other cases the narrative sections are verbose in ways not found in God’s words. But the verbosity, no matter how expressed, ties together the divine utterances and the surrounding narrative, and calls attention to the verbosity in what God says. This leads us, as readers, to realize that being garrulous and effusive at the wrong time is not merely poor style and a bad habit for public speakers and officials, but can also harm people grievously when it is practiced by God.

To me, it is not at all surprising that the book of Job would provide a critique of God, noting that his excessive talking could cause horrific (albeit “temporary”) effects. With David at the vanguard, biblical scholars in the last few decades have highlighted that the Bible contains critiques of God and of divine behavior, and the series where David has served as an editor has published many such studies. Returning to my work *God Is King*, which JSOT Supplements, with David at the helm, accepted almost a quarter of a century ago, I would now claim that God is certainly depicted throughout the Bible as better than human kings, but not as *the* perfect king. Thus the prologue of Job, as is generally recognized, suggests that God does not always run his divine council meetings smoothly—though he usually runs them better than the typical human king. (Look, for example, at what happens to Absalom in 2 Sam 17 when he seeks excessive advice—it ultimately leads to his death!) The prologue projects onto God the notion that human kings can talk too much during meetings with other officials and disaster may ensue. (Of course, God, unlike human kings, may “rectify” such disasters that he has caused, doubling Job’s property and “restoring” his ten children.)

It is not surprising, as many readers may have surmised, that this point concerning the value of being quiet at the appropriate time is found in Job, a wisdom book. The importance of being quiet is highlighted in a number of wisdom texts, including the one cited toward the beginning of this article, from Prov 17:28: “Even a fool, if he keeps silent, is deemed wise; intelligent, if he seals his lips.” Proverbs 11:12 is similar: “He who speaks contemptuously of his fellowman is devoid of sense; a prudent man

keeps his peace.”<sup>6</sup> Michael Fox notes in reference to Prov 13:3, “He who guards his tongue preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips, it is his ruin”: “Wisdom often advises caution in speech. Together the lines suggest an image of guarding a gate. A prudent man guards his mouth as one would a gate and thereby protects his *nepeš*—his gullet, his emotions, his life.”<sup>7</sup> In one of Job’s speeches, he tells his “friends” (13:5): “If you would only keep quiet it would be considered wisdom on your part.” Qoheleth similarly advises silence and discretion, especially in 5:1–6:

(1) Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few. (2) Just as dreams come with much brooding, so does foolish utterance come with much speech. (3) When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. For He has no pleasure in fools; what you vow, fulfill. (4) It is better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill. (5) Don’t let your mouth bring you into disfavor, and don’t plead before the messenger that it was an error, but fear God; else God may be angered by your talk and destroy your possessions. (6) For much dreaming leads to futility and to superfluous talk.

Oddly, though quiet and discretion have frequently been called to our attention as important wisdom motifs, both in the Bible and in the ancient Near East, no study has examined the idea comprehensively.<sup>8</sup>

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6. Similar ideas are found in Prov 10:19, “Where there is much talking, there is no lack of transgressing, But he who curbs his tongue shows sense”; 14:3, “In the mouth of a fool is a rod of haughtiness, but the lips of the wise protect them”; 15:2, “The tongue of the wise produces much knowledge; but the mouth of dullards pours out folly”; 17:27, “A knowledgeable man is sparing with his words; a man of understanding is reticent”; 18:7, “The fool’s speech is his ruin; his words are a trap for him”; 21:23, “He who guards his mouth and tongue guards himself from trouble”; Qoh 3:7, “A time for ripping and a time for sewing, a time for silence and a time for speaking”; 10:12–14, “A wise man’s talk brings him favor, but a fool’s lips are his undoing. His talk begins as silliness and ends as disastrous madness. Yet the fool talks and talks!”

7. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31* (AB 18B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 561–62.

8. For quiet and discretion, see, e.g., Choon Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 198–99. For Mesopotamia see lines 26–30 of the Counsels of Wisdom in Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 96: “Let your mouth be controlled and your speech guarded: therein is a man’s wealth—let your lips be very precious. Let insolence and blasphemy be your abomination; speak nothing profane nor any untrue

My association of wisdom and silence with the narrative framework of Job may be problematic, since that prose composition shows few if any signs of Wisdom literature, and exactly how it became connected to the wisdom poetic center is hotly contested. Scholars of the last half-century, however, have noted that “wisdom” is a very slippery idea, and that many non-wisdom works have been influenced by wisdom ideas. To my mind, the result of the many studies that have sought and found wisdom influence in almost every biblical book is that the חכמים, “wise,” of ancient Israel were not ivory-tower scholars, far removed from the public, but like David were public intellectuals, who mixed and lived with non-חכמים, and shared ideas in both directions. It would not be prudent to claim that the advice to be quiet and circumspect only circulated among the elite חכמים in ancient Israel. Many non-wisdom texts, ranging from the tower of Babel story to the prophecies of Isa 1–40 (e.g., 7:4; 14:7; 18:4; 30:15; 32:17) advise quiet or שקט as the proper mode of behavior. The internal semantics, rather than any wisdom influence, may have influenced the positive value of quietude in Hebrew—after all, the verb שקט meant both to “be quiet” and to “be at peace.”<sup>9</sup>

It has taken tremendous self-control to be brief, and not to include extensive footnotes and bibliography on Job, biblical style, Wisdom literature, and so on. But, to misuse Qoh 3:7b, I am trying to illustrate that there is “a time for silence and a time for speaking,” and that the Bible sug-

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report. A talebearer is accused.” Commenting on Prov 4:23, Michael V. Fox (*Proverbs 1–9* [AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 185–86) notes the Instruction of Ptahhotep, which states, “Master your heart, control your mouth.” Fox observes: “The theme of concealing one’s thoughts and controlling speech is prominent in Egyptian Wisdom. Amenemope connects the heart and speech: ‘Put [my words] in the casket of your belly, so they may be as a lock in your heart. When a storm of words arises, [the teachings] will be a mooring post for your tongue’ (§1; AEL 2:149). Wisdom ‘locks up’ one’s heart so that he can control his tongue and thus be a ‘truly silent’ man. This verse, then, is an admonition about discretion in speech, which is the theme of the next verse also.”

See Coralie A. Gutridge, “The Sacrifice of Fools and the Wisdom of Silence: Qoheleth, Job and the Presence of God,” in *Biblical Hebrews, Biblical Texts: Essays in Memory of Michael P. Weitzman* (ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Gillian Greenberg; JSOTSup 333; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 83–99; A. Bauman, “דָּמָה,” *TDOT* 3:262–65; and Paolo Torresan, “Silence in the Bible,” *JBQ* 31 (2003): 153–60. In noting this last work, I am following David’s example, who is comprehensive in his research and does not confine his references to scholarly, peer-reviewed journals only.

9. *DCH* 8:550–51, “שקט I.”

gests in Job that even God sometimes gets his times confused, with disastrous results for humans. David has illustrated for me, in his writing and speaking, the truth of Prov 15:23: “And how good is a word rightly timed!” To return to Qoh 3, I wish him many more years of dancing, embracing, loving, and peace.

## MEMORIES, MYTHS, AND HISTORICAL MONUMENTS: YAHWEH'S DEVELOPING CHARACTER IN THE PSALMS

Craig C. Broyles

The book of Psalms makes clear categorization and dogma impossible.<sup>1</sup> It is arguably the book of the Bible with the widest scope. Its tradition and literary history spans from the premonarchic period to the Second Temple period, and from social circles as varied as north and south, and from royal court and priestly temple to rural clan settings. We go from premonarchic victory songs to postexilic literary acrostics.

In this paper I attempt to trace the developing sources of tradition and memory reflected in the Psalms throughout the preexilic, exilic, and postexilic periods. I focus on psalms that can be dated to these periods with some measure of certainty. For reasons of space, I will not touch on those psalms whose relative dating is up for debate.

### PREEXILIC PSALMS

I largely agree with John Day that the psalms that are most clearly preexilic are the royal psalms, the songs of Zion, psalms alluding to the cherubim-

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1. The chief inspiration for this article, with its interest in the Psalms and the characterizations of Yahweh, stems from the pre-postmodern David J. A. Clines. His two articles on "Psalm Research since 1955" (1967 and 1969) were a key draw for my choice of doctoral supervisor. While engaged in my Ph.D. research, his article "Yahweh and the God of Christian Theology" (*Theology* 83 [1980]: 323–30) sparked my thinking on how "Christian theology ... has obscured the reality of the biblical God" (323). These three articles are reprinted in Clines, *On the Way to the Postmodern* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 292, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 2:639–64; 665–86; 498–507, respectively.

ark (including the psalms of Yahweh's kingship), and corporate laments alluding to an army.<sup>2</sup>

#### PSALMS OF YAHWEH'S KINGSHIP

Psalm 99 makes explicit reference to Yahweh's cherubim-throne (יֵשֶׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים)<sup>3</sup> and to "his footstool," symbolized by the ark (Ps 132:6–8; 1 Chr 28:2)—both of which are located "in Zion," "his holy mountain." These are not merely metaphoric allusions, as the congregation is explicitly implored to "bow down" (הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ) and to "tremble" before these sacred symbols. The threefold acclamation of "holy" rings out like a liturgical performance. Unusual among the "Yahweh *malak*" psalms, this one refers to memories that are distinctly Israelite and historical, namely Moses, Aaron, and Samuel as recipients of Yahweh's "testimonies" and "statute." Also mentioned are the "pillar of cloud" (in both J and E) and Yahweh's "forgiving and avenging," which is reminiscent of the golden calf incident and of Exod 34:7 in particular (J).<sup>4</sup>

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2. John Day, "How Many Pre-exilic Psalms Are There?" in *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; JSOTSup 406; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 225–37. For further elaboration on psalms that presuppose the cherubim-ark symbol in ritual procession, see my article, "The Psalms and Cult Symbolism: The Case of the Cherubim-Ark," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (ed. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2005), 139–56.

3. This epithet, יֵשֶׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים, is part of the full designation for the ark: "the ark of the covenant of Yahweh of hosts who sits enthroned (on) the cherubim" (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2).

4. Some commentators, such as Erich Zenger, have argued for a late date for Ps 99 on the basis of its apparent dependence on pentateuchal traditions; see Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), esp. 495–86, 490. While Ps 99 indeed uses similar terminology, there are several significant deviations from their use in the Pentateuch that speak against literary dependence. (1) Psalm 99 is the only text in the Bible that counts Moses among "the priests." (2) In J "a pillar of cloud" serves a guiding and protective function (Exod 13:21–22; 14:19b, 24; Num 14:14). In E Yahweh speaks from "the pillar of cloud" (Exod 33:9–10; Num 12:5–6, which some commentators assigned to J, though cf. Num 11:24b–25), but in each case it is attached to the tent, not the ark. (3) It seems odd that Zenger should argue that "Psalm 99 was composed for its literary context" when the psalms celebrating Yahweh's kingship reflect an original liturgical function accompanied by the ritual procession of the cherubim-ark. In this



Although Ps 47 contains no explicit reference to cherubim or ark, it does describe God “sitting upon his holy throne” (יֹשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא קֹדֶשׁ), which is similar to the phrase (יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים) in the context of his “ascent” (עֲלָה) amid “shouting” and “the sound of the horn,” as enacted by “peoples” attending the ceremony. This liturgy appears to commemorate the event narrated in 2 Sam 6:15, where “David and all the house of Israel were bringing up [עֲלָה] the ark of Yahweh with shouting and the sound of the horn.” This ascent appears to be part of a victory procession (as evident in Ps 68, discussed below) commemorating Yahweh’s “subduing” (יִדְּבֵר) peoples and “choosing” (יִבְחַר) Jacob’s “inheritance” (vv. 4–5). The choice of the prefixed conjugation for both of these verbs may signify (a) narration in the historical present, (b) characteristic actions, or (c) past events expressed in the old West Semitic *yaqtul* preterite (perhaps suggested by the short form יִדְּבֵר). Readers might naturally think of the conquest of Canaan, but the original hearers of this liturgy in the monarchic period

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preexilic temple context we would be mistaken to assume that the terms “his testimonies” (עֲדָתָיו) and “statute” (singular, חֻק) have the same referents as in the Pentateuch. Zenger rightly draws a connection with “your testimonies” referenced in Ps 93:5, another psalm of Yahweh’s kingship. But here they are connected explicitly with Yahweh’s “house” or palace, and it is their reliability that is celebrated because he, as God of the skies (not lawgiver), has brought stability to world order by prevailing over “the waters” (in a way reminiscent of the sevenfold “voice of Yahweh over the waters” in Ps 29). The verb form “testify” (עֹדֵד) appears in Ps 50 (likely preexilic in view of the quotation in Lam 2:15 of Pss 50:2 and 48:3), where Yahweh appears and speaks in the form of a thunderstorm theophany to a congregation assembled at the temple (vv. 1–7). See also 81:9. Thus, in the context of liturgical performance at the temple, Yahweh’s “testifying” refers to temple oracles, not to pentateuchal legislation. In the Deuteronomistic History and in the Torah psalm, Ps 119, “testimonies” and “statutes” always appear in the plural. (4) In Ps 99 the “testimonies” and “statute” are presented as Yahweh’s answer to those who “call his name,” specifically Moses, Aaron, and Samuel. This suggests the context of oracular inquiry, not that of the unprompted Sinai revelation. (5) Unlike Exod 34:7, אֵל נֹשָׂא is an epithet where the participle lacks the direct objects of “iniquity, transgression, and sin,” and its counterpart is not “visiting” (פָּקֵד) but “avenging/avenger” (נֹקֵם), as in the participial epithets in Nah 1:2. (5) The terms “equity” and “justice and righteousness” in Ps 99:4 need not be Mosaic terminology, as they are at home in the psalms celebrating Yahweh’s kingship (89:17; 96:10, 13; 97:6 = 50:6; 98:9; cf. 75:3–4), especially as “righteousness and justice” are “the pedestals” of Yahweh’s “throne” (89:15; 97:2). In sum, Ps 99 appears as a source of premonarchic traditions separate from JEDP.

probably recalled the expansions of the Davidic territories. The closest parallels to these expressions are found in royal psalms:

יִדְבֹּר עַמִּים תַּחְתֵּינוּ (47:4)

וַיִּדְבֹּר עַמִּים תַּחְתֵּי (18:48)

יִבְחַר־לָנוּ אֶת־נִחְלָתָנוּ (47:5)

שָׁאֵל מִמֶּנִּי וְאַתָּנָה גּוֹיִם נִחְלָתָךְ (2:8)

The principal sphere of Yahweh's kingship in the "Yahweh *malak*" psalms, however, is cosmic. Psalm 97 similarly refers to Yahweh's "throne" but also describes its "support/pedestal" (מִכּוֹן) as "righteousness and justice." In connection with the epithet, "the one who sits enthroned on cherubim" (יֹשֵׁב כְּרוּבִים), the iconography of cherubim thrones help us to visualize the pedestals of Yahweh's throne as these cherub figures.<sup>5</sup> Further, in the psalm Yahweh is established as divine king by a dramatic portrayal of his theophany as God of the skies, complete with thunderclouds, lightning, and melting mountains. This tradition of divine kingship is well known from the Late Bronze Age narrative poems of Baal and the ancient poems of the Hebrew Bible (Exod 15:1–18; Judg 5:4–5; Deut 33:2, 26; and possibly Hab 3:8, 15), which likely stem from the premonarchic and early monarchic periods (i.e., prior to the "Classical Biblical Hebrew" documents beginning in the eighth century B.C.E.). So he is acclaimed as Most High (עֲלִיוֹן) "ascended [עלה, *niphal*; cf. 47:10] above all gods." The climax of the theophany occurs when "the skies/heavens proclaim his righteousness" (הִגִּידוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם צֶדֶק, Ps 97:6), that is, his "right order" that establishes creation order. All peoples "see" this display, but while idol worshipers are shamed, Zion uniquely "hears" the celestial proclamation that Yahweh "puts things right." As a result, Zion recognizes this as cause for rejoicing (v. 8) because it entails that Yahweh will deliver from the wicked those who love Yahweh and hate evil. In closing, they are assured, "Light has dawned [reading זֶרַח with the versions for MT זֶרַע] for the righteous" (v. 11), thus continuing the celestial imagery but with a solar emphasis. Psalm 97, therefore, transfers the Late Bronze Age storyline of the God of the skies from the natural order to the social order of humans.

Psalm 93 most clearly represents the Semitic motifs of divine kingship in its dramatic portrayal of the challenge of sea/ivers to world stabil-

5. For handy reference see Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury, 1978), figs. 231–36.

ity and to Yahweh's kingship, a storyline reminiscent of Baal's clubbing of Prince Sea/Judge River (*KTU* 1.2.4.7–36).<sup>6</sup>

Psalms 96 is another “Yahweh *malak*” psalm that alludes to ark symbolism at the temple.<sup>7</sup> It shares the theological perspective of 97:7 and 9 that, as divine king, Yahweh is superior to “all gods” (96:4; cf. 95:3; 89:6–9; and 47:3, if אֱלֹהִים is to be read with a few manuscripts). Psalm 96 echoes phrases from Ps 29 (cf. 96:7–9 and 29:1–2), which appears to be the older text as Ps 96 removes problematic phrases that echo a polytheistic Levantine perspective.<sup>8</sup> Though not formally a “Yahweh *malak*” psalm, Ps 29 celebrates Yahweh as cosmic king, who “has sat enthroned as king from remote time” in his palace-temple. Its Levantine roots also surface in the word pair Lebanon and Sirion, both of which lie to the north of Israel's territories (cf. *KTU* 1.4.6.16–21), the deity's thunderous voice in the storm (*KTU* 1.4.5.8–9; 1.4.7.25–31), and the possible replacement of Yahweh for Baal, whose name reveals considerable alliteration within the poem.<sup>9</sup>

In Ps 24 the gates are commanded to open so that Yahweh, whose localized presence is likely symbolized by the cherubim-ark, may “ascend” into the “sacred mountain,” whereby he is granted a new title, seemingly unrecognized by the gatekeepers, as “king of glory.” The password used to open the gates is the old title, long associated with the ark since the days of Shiloh, namely “Yahweh of hosts” (1 Sam 4:4). The occasion for this victory procession lies in Yahweh as “champion of war,” who has established world order over “seas/ rivers,” another echo of Baal's victory over Sea/River.

Psalms 89 is composed of three distinct sections, each of which stems from a different genre: a hymn to Yahweh's kingship (vv. 2–3, 6–19), a

6. On “your testimonies” in v. 5, see n. 4.

7. The phrase in v. 6, עֶז וְתַפְאֶרֶת בְּמִקְדָּשׁוֹ, does not merely identify paired divine attributes associated with the sanctuary. Both terms denote the symbol of the ark in the historical recital in 78:61. Cf. the phrase תַּפְאֶרֶת עֶזְמוֹ in 89:18, discussed below. In the single explicit reference to the ark in the Psalms it is named אֲרוֹן עֵץ.

8. In Ps 29:1; cf. *KTU* 1.4.3.14) is replaced with מִשְׁפַּחַת עַמִּים (96:7).

9. If Ps 29 is a Yahwistic adaptation of a hymn originally ascribed to Baal, it involves more than simply erasing “Baal” and replacing it with “Yahweh.” Verse 11 appears to be a distinctly Yahwistic addition since Yahweh, unlike Baal, has “his people,” whom he is inclined to “bless . . . with peace.” This closing verse is also adapted as the closing verse for Ps 68, discussed below.

dynastic oracle (vv. 4–5, 20–38), and a corporate lament (vv. 39–52).<sup>10</sup> With the same phrasing as in 97:2, the hymn alludes to the cherubim-throne, which leads a procession accompanied by the characteristic “shouting” (47:2, 6; Josh 6:5, 20; 1 Sam 4:5; 2 Sam 6:15; also to be noted are the repeated references to Yahweh’s *עז*, vv. 11, 14, esp. v. 18). Consistent with the “Yahweh *malak*” psalms, Yahweh is incomparable in the “assembly/council of the holy ones” (cf. *KTU* 1.2.1.20–21) and among the *בני אלים* (the same curious phrase found in Ps 29:1). His sovereignty is acclaimed over “the sea,” Rahab, and Zaphon.

### PSALM 68

Psalm 68 explicitly refers to “the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary” (v. 25), a ritual that is initiated by echoing the Song of the Ark (Num 10:35) in the opening verse. This psalm is a fascinating case study on the issue of memory. What is particularly telling is its appropriation of some of the Hebrew Bible’s most ancient poems, namely the Song of Deborah (Judg 5), the Song of Moses (Deut 32), the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33), Ps 29, and the Song of the Ark (Num 10:35).

#### Judges 5

<sup>4</sup> O *Yahweh*, when you went out *from Seir*,

when you marched *from the region of Edom*,

the earth quaked,

even the heavens dripped,

the clouds indeed dripped water.

<sup>5</sup> The mountains quaked

before *Yahweh*, the One of Sinai,

before *Yahweh*, the God of Israel.

#### Psalm 68

<sup>8</sup> O *God*, when you went out *before your people*,

when you marched *through the wilderness*,

<sup>9</sup> the earth quaked,

even the heavens dripped,

before *God*, the One of Sinai,

before *God*, the God of Israel.

10. While the lament *may* presuppose the demise of the Davidic dynasty, it has been composed in light of an earlier edition of Ps 89 containing just the hymn and oracle. See further Craig Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBCOT 11; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 355–58.

The problematic geographic regions of Seir and Edom are replaced with the more generic expressions, “before your people” and “through the wilderness.” This reflects a kind of “corporate amnesia” regarding Yahweh’s origins in regions later considered hostile to Israel and Judah during the monarchic period.<sup>11</sup>

There are further echoes of the Song of Deborah in the military language in Ps 68:13–14, 19, 22, but with a distinctive hymnic twist. While they share terminology, Israel’s victory is more decisive in Ps 68 (cf., e.g., Judg 5:19 and Ps 68:13a; Judg 5:30 and Ps 68:13b). But what is more striking is the change in Yahweh’s role. The Song of Deborah is a victory song. While Yahweh makes a theophanic appearance as “the one of Sinai,” so that “the earth quakes” and “the skies drip,” his theophany is not connected directly with the proceedings of the battle. What is center stage is that “the people volunteered” (v. 2), and the tribes that did so came “to the help of Yahweh” (v. 23). But Ps 68 hymns Yahweh’s agency in battle.

## Judges 5:12 (Song of Deborah)

Barak is commanded: “take captive  
your captives [ושבה שביד]”

## Psalm 68:19

God “has taken captives captive  
[שבית שבי]”

Both the Song of Deborah (Judg 5) and the Song of Moses (Deut 32) make peculiar reference to the “longhairs” of ancient armies. In the Song of Deborah the armies are Israel’s (“when locks are long in Israel, when the people offer themselves willingly,” Judg 5:2). But the Song of Moses refers to “the long-haired heads of the enemy” (Deut 32:42), which Yahweh’s sword will devour. Likewise, in Ps 68, it is God who “will smash the heads of his enemies” and their “hairy skull” (v. 22). Thus in Ps 68 we see the “hymnification” of a military victory song, wherein Israel’s victory is explicitly ascribed to Yahweh’s agency (see also vv. 15, 23). Yahweh’s theophanic appearance in the skies is thus more explicitly connected with his intervention into human affairs.

In the theophany recited in Ps 68:8–9 and its parallel in Judg 5:4, the replacement of “the region of Edom” with “wilderness” (ישימוז) probably stems from the Song of Moses (Deut 32). Both Ps 68 and the Song of Moses share the same starting point for the story of Israel and Yahweh: “He found

11. See Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 153–54.

him in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste [ישימון]” (Deut 32:10a; cf. Hos 9:10). In these poems Israel’s story begins in the wilderness, not in the exodus from Egypt.

The theophanic descriptions in Ps 68 and the Song of Deborah are also very similar to another ancient poem, the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33), in particular its hymnic introduction and conclusion (vv. 2–5, 26–29).

Deut 33:2

<sup>2</sup> Yahweh *came from Sinai* [מסיני בא],

and dawned from Seir upon us;  
he shone forth from Mount Paran.

With him were myriads of holy ones;  
at his right, a host of his own.

Ps 68:18

<sup>18</sup> The chariots of God are twice ten thousand,

thousands upon thousands,  
the Lord *came from Sinai* [בא מסיני];  
MT: [בם סיני] into the holy place.

The most striking parallel lies in their concluding acclamation of the “rider of the skies.”

Deut 33:26

There is none like God, O Jeshurun,  
the rider of the skies/heavens  
[רכב שמים] to your help,  
majestic through the skies.

Ps 68:34a

... rider in the skies/heavens, the  
ancient skies/heavens  
[רכב בשמי שמי-קדם]

Also similar to Ps 68, Deut 33 hymns Yahweh’s agency. While “the people volunteered” and came “to the help of Yahweh” (Judg 5:2, 23) in the Song of Deborah, it is Yahweh who “helps” Israel in the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33:26, 29).

The remaining verses in the concluding strophe of Ps 68 echo Ps 29, an ancient poem (perhaps from northern Israel) with probable Late Bronze Age antecedents.<sup>12</sup>

12. Psalm 68 has further Late Bronze Age echoes of its own. Most notable is the title, “rider in the clouds/steppes” (רכב בערבות, v. 5), echoing Baal’s title, *rkb.ʾrpt* (KTU 1.2.4.8). The clouds/steppes ambiguity may be intentional for the following verses. While “the stubborn dwell on scorched land,” God went before his people in

## Psalm 29

<sup>4</sup> The voice [קול] of Yahweh is powerful;  
 the voice [קול] of Yahweh is full of  
 majesty (cf. 18:11, 14).  
<sup>1</sup> Ascribe to Yahweh, O heavenly  
 beings,  
 ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength  
 [עז].  
<sup>11</sup> May Yahweh give strength to his  
 people [עז לעמו יתן]!  
 May Yahweh bless his people with  
 peace!

## Psalm 68

<sup>34</sup> O rider in the heavens, the ancient  
 heavens;  
 listen, he sends out his voice, his  
 mighty voice [קול].  
<sup>35</sup> Ascribe power [עז] to God,  
 whose majesty is over Israel;  
 and whose power is in the skies.  
<sup>36</sup> Awesome is God in his sanctuary,  
 the God of Israel;  
 he gives power and strength to his  
 people [נתן עז... לעם]. Blessed be  
 God!

What is particularly intriguing is that each of these ancient poems reflects a northern provenance, especially the Song of Deborah, in which Judah is noticeably absent from the tribal confederation (note also Deut 33:7 in the Blessing of Moses). Yet at some point in the redaction of Ps 68, these ancient poems became the property of Yahweh's "temple at Jerusalem" (v. 30). In effect, Judah appropriates a memory of a military victory in which they never took part.

This appropriation may be traced back to the ark traditions echoed in the psalm, which in its final form functions as a liturgy accompanying its ritual procession.<sup>13</sup> The psalm's opening verse initiates the procession with the insertion of the Song of the Ark, which is ascribed to the J source of Judah. This song memorializes Yahweh's "going forth" before his people in the wilderness.<sup>14</sup>

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the wilderness (echoing steppes) and provided rain (echoing clouds, vv. 7–11). In both texts the rider in the skies "gives his voice" (יתן בקולו, Ps 68:34; and *ql ... ytn*, KTU 1.4.7.29). The claim, "to Yahweh, the Lord, belong outlets from death" (ליהוה אדני, למות תוצאות, v. 21), echoes the entry into Mot's underworld (see KTU 1.4.8.1–14; 1.5.5.11–17). This parallel with the Baal texts is even more compelling by the peculiar use of the ל to mean "from," as in Ugaritic (see HALOT, 2:508; 3:1706).

13. See further Broyles, *Psalms*, 281–84.

14. The reference to the "melting of wax" (68:3) is echoed in another "Yahweh *malak*" psalm, which describes Yahweh's theophanic appearance in a thunderstorm

## Numbers 10

<sup>35</sup> Arise, Yahweh, so your enemies  
scatter,

and your haters flee before you.

<sup>33</sup> The ark of the covenant traveled  
before them.

## Psalm 68

<sup>2</sup> Let God arise, his enemies scatter,

so his haters flee before him.

<sup>8</sup> God, when you went forth before  
your people. ...

While Yahweh's *departure* "from Sinai" in Ps 68:18 derives from the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33:2), his final *destination* is determined by the ark's climactic "ascent" "to the height," that is, "the holy place," identified later in the psalm as "the temple at Jerusalem" (68:30).

## Psalm 47

<sup>6</sup> God has ascended with a shout,

Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet.

<sup>2</sup> For Yahweh, Most High, is awe-  
some [נורא]

## Psalm 68

<sup>18</sup> the Lord came from Sinai into the  
holy place.

<sup>19</sup> You ascended to the height. ...

<sup>36</sup> Awesome [נורא] is God in his  
sanctuary

Psalm 68 represents a redrafting of ancient poems and their incorporation into a ritual procession. The ark, which evokes a historical memory, is joined to the mythological memory of "the rider of the clouds/steppes" (v. 5), "the rider in the skies" (v. 34), who does so via his cherubim-chariot (as in Ps 18:10–11; cf. 1 Chr 28:18).

## SONGS OF ZION

The Songs of Zion are essentially about Yahweh's sacred mountain, where he dwells and which he defends. At Ugarit the tradition of the sacred mountain is essentially an extension of the storyline of the God of the skies, though it also belongs to El, as highlighted below. Baal's claims are echoed in the Psalms and the Song of the Sea.

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and alludes to his cherubim-throne (Ps 97:5). Micah 1:4 forms an even closer parallel, wherein mountains melt at Yahweh's theophanic appearance in the skies.



Baal Myth	Hebrew Bible
26–28 I understand the lightning which the Heavens do not know, The word people do not know, And earth's masses not understand. 28–31 Come and I will reveal it In the midst of my <i>mountain</i> , Divine <i>Sapan</i> [špn], In the <i>holy mount of my heritage</i> [bqđš.bgr.nḥlty], In the <i>beautiful</i> [n'm] hill of my might. (KTU 1.3.3.26–31; trans. Mark S. Smith in UNP, 110)	<sup>2</sup> Great is Yahweh and exceedingly praised in the city of our God. His <i>holy</i> <i>mountain</i> [הר־קדשׁו], <sup>3</sup> <i>beautiful</i> in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, <i>Mount Zion</i> , the heights of <i>Zaphon</i> [צפון], the city of the great King. (Ps 48:2–3)  <sup>4</sup> to gaze upon the <i>beauty</i> [נעם] of Yahweh and to inquire in his temple (Ps 27:4)  <sup>17</sup> You brought them in and planted them on the <i>mountain of your</i> <i>heritage</i> [בהר נחלתך], the place, O LORD, that you made your abode, the <i>holy</i> place [מקדש], O LORD, that your hands have established. (Exod 15:17; cf. Ps 78:54)

Other Songs of Zion contain echoes of the sacred mountain belonging to Yahweh as the God of the skies. In Ps 76, although God's "abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion" (v. 3), it is "from the skies/heavens" that he "has announced judgment" (v. 9).<sup>15</sup> In Ps 46 amid the "uproar" of the nations (v. 7)—an action that parallels the "uproar" of the waters" (v. 4)—God "raises his voice" (נתן בקולו), as in other theophanic passages of the God of the skies (18:14; 68:34; cf. 76:9; 77:18; cf. EA 147:13–14). The reference to "a river" in "the city of God" may be best explained not by the geography of Jerusalem but by another Ugaritic text, though this time concerning El.<sup>16</sup>

15. "Both rider and horse are stunned" (Ps 76:7) echoes the Song of the Sea and the Song of Miriam (Exod 15:1, 21).

16. Here we should note the transferability of divine epithets. While in the Uga-

“The mountain of El” is “at the springs of the Rivers, amid the streams of the Deeps” (*KTU* 1.4.4.20–23; *UNP*, 127)      The “river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High” (Ps 46:5)

## ROYAL PSALMS

What are the memories that legitimate the Davidic dynasty in the royal psalms? The narrative of 1 Sam 16 and the dynastic oracle in 2 Sam 7:8–16 are careful to establish David’s right to the throne on the basis of historical events. But the only royal psalm to invoke historical memory is Ps 132, though its final form is likely postexilic.<sup>17</sup> Its quoted material, however, likely contains preexilic traditions, the first of which appears to reflect a reenactment of the events narrated in 2 Sam 6–7, namely David’s vow to “find a place for Yahweh” and his procession bringing the ark to Zion, his chosen “resting place.”

The psalm that most extensively elaborates the basis for the Davidic dynasty is Ps 89. David’s dynastic oracle (vv. 20–38) is predicated on a hymn of Yahweh’s cosmic kingship (vv. 6–19), as discussed above. The dynastic oracle, when compared to the prose oracle of 2 Sam 7, has been heightened to the point of being mythicized. The king is granted virtually divine prerogatives: dominion over “the sea” and “the rivers,” calling God “my father,” and being made *עליון* [NRSV ‘the highest’] of the kings of the earth” (vv. 26–28).

The other lengthy royal psalm, Ps 18, also appears to be a composite: a thanksgiving of the individual (vv. 2–7, 17–20), a theophany (vv. 8–16), an echo of a temple entry liturgy (vv. 21–27), a victory song of the warrior (vv. 28–43), and a royal thanksgiving for victory (vv. 44–51). The individual thanksgiving commemorates rescue from death/Sheol (vv. 5–6) and the “many waters” (v. 17), but it makes no special appeal to royal prerogatives. Indeed, its appeal is identical to the tradition found in individual laments:

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ritic texts it is only Baal who is called “Most High” (*KTU* 1.16.3.4–8), in the Bible El of Salem (Gen 14:18–22; cf. Ps 76:3), as well as Yahweh, is accorded that title.

17. Psalm 132 is counted among the Songs of Ascent, an otherwise postexilic collection. The psalm is structured by two petitions with each followed by quotations with narrative introductions. The petitions may imply that David’s dynasty was a memory and in need of restoration (vv. 1, 10). Psalm 144 is another case of a postexilic psalm that includes preexilic tradition, notably from Ps 18.

"In my distress *I called* upon Yahweh; to *my God* I cried for help. From his temple *he heard* my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears" (18:7).

Inserted within this thanksgiving is a discrete theophany, wherein the God of the skies "bowed the heavens," "rode on a cherub, and flew," "thundered in the heavens, and ... uttered his voice," so that "the channels of the sea were seen" (vv. 8–16).<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere in the psalm the king's military enemies are clearly in view, but the memory lacks any historical specifics and is thus typified. This feature obviously gives the psalm broader application and removes any distractions from the primary claim of Yahweh's intervention.

In Ps 20, a prayer for the king's victory in battle, there is no appeal to the memory of the military conquest of Canaan, as one might expect. Instead, attention is on Yahweh's "sanctuary" (קֹדֶשׁ) on "Zion" (v. 3). But the actual source of Yahweh's salvation is "from his holy heavens/skies" (מִשְׁמֵי קֹדֶשׁ, v. 7). We here gain a glimpse of the Zion sanctuary as a window on the heavenly sanctuary. Thus it is the *memory* of this mountain sacred to the God of the skies/heavens that gives *hope* for the future in battle.

Psalm 110 and especially Ps 2 operate on the tradition of the divine, cosmic king (not political) and his sacred mountain. In Ps 2 Yahweh is "the one sitting enthroned in the skies/heavens," and the Davidic king is consecrated "on Zion, my holy mountain." In Ps 110 Yahweh operates from "Zion," and the image of the Davidic king "sitting" at Yahweh's "right hand" echoes the notion that Davidic kingship is predicated on Yahweh's. The reference to Melchizedek recalls the narrative memory of Abram's encounter with this king-priest of Salem and the mythological memory of El Elyon (Gen 14:18–24). Both psalms go beyond the simile of sonship in the dynastic oracle of 2 Sam 7:14 to claims of divine "begetting" (Pss 2:7; 110:3).<sup>19</sup>

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18. Within the theophany itself (vv. 8–16) there is no apparent referent for the "them" that he "scatters" and "throws into confusion" (v. 15). Within the larger psalm the nearest antecedent is "my enemies" in v. 4 and then "those who hate me" in v. 18, both within the sections of the individual thanksgiving. Thus it is not clear that the original theophany itself was directed at human adversaries or armies. While remaining a discrete section, the theophany is skillfully inserted into the thanksgiving. The reference to Yahweh's "temple/palace" in the thanksgiving (v. 7) leads to his theophanic descent from the skies/heavens (v. 10). And the sky God's rebuke of the "channels of the waters" (v. 16) leads to the individual's thanksgiving, "He reached down from on high, he took me; he drew me out of mighty waters" (v. 16).

19. Following BHS, Ps 110:3 reads, "In the holy mountains, from the womb of the

## CORPORATE LAMENTS CONCERNING BATTLE DEFEAT

In Ps 44 Israel clearly has “armies” (צבאותינו, v. 10), who are defeated in battle, a feature that limits its origins to the preexilic period. It explicitly invokes the historical memory of the conquest of Canaan. But much of the terminology echoes not the book of Joshua but the ancient Song of the Sea, where God’s agency overshadows any efforts of the Hebrews.

Exodus 15 (Song of the Sea)	Psalms 44
Yahweh “planted” (נטע) his people in the land (v. 17)	<sup>2</sup> We have heard with our ears, O God, our ancestors have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old:
Egyptians’ “sword” (חרב) fails (v. 9)	<sup>3</sup> you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted [נטע];
Yahweh’s “right hand” (ימין), vv. 6, 12)	you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free;
Yahweh’s “arm” (זרוע, v. 16)	<sup>4</sup> for not by their own sword [חרב] did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory;
	but your right hand [ימין], and your arm [זרוע], and the light of your countenance, for you delighted in them.

Although Ps 80 makes no explicit references to Israel’s army, the reference to Yahweh’s cherubim-throne (v. 2) and the allusions to the king (v. 18) and the breakdown of national defenses (vv. 13–14) point to preexilic usage. The psalm explicitly appeals to the historical memory of the exodus and conquest (vv. 9–12), but it is told in a way that is hardly reminiscent of narrative history of Exodus. Yahweh is portrayed as a gardener who transplants “a vine from Egypt,” “drives out nations,” and “plants” it (נטע), a term and image that echoes the Song of the Sea in Exod 15:17 and Ps

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dawn, like dew, I have begotten you.” To this compare *KTU* 1.16.1.20–22, where Kirta is called “son of El.”

44:3),<sup>20</sup> so its “branches” go from “sea” to “river” (reminiscent of both the promised extent of the Davidic empire and the cosmic opponents of the God of the skies).

## PSALM 78

Psalm 78 is likely preexilic.<sup>21</sup> Memory is its reason for being. It consists of a historical recital from the Egyptian plagues to David. So, of all the so-called historical psalms, such as Pss 105, 106, 135, and 136, it may be the only one from the First Temple period. Also unlike these, it does not begin with imperatival praise. Its genre is difficult to identify, though it calls itself “instruction” and a “parable.” What is significant for our quest for preexilic memories is to observe the traditions that are considered ultimately constitutive for the people of God. In spite of all God’s saving acts on behalf of “the Ephraimites” (v. 9), he “rejected the tent of Joseph” (v. 67). Instead, he “chose the tribe of Judah,” specifically because he chose “Zion, which he loves,” and “he chose David” (vv. 68, 70). The historical storyline from the exodus to the fall of Shiloh is disparaged in favor of these two founding traditions of Judah. While Yahweh’s choice of David in this psalm lies in historical reasons (namely David’s prior experience in “shepherding”), his choice of Zion has cosmological grounds: “he built like the heights his sanctuary, like the earth, which he founded forever” (v. 69).

## EXILIC PSALMS

Both Pss 74 and 79 lament the destruction of the Jerusalem/Zion temple. Their opening lines echo the Song of the Sea.

### Exodus 15

<sup>13</sup> the people whom *you redeemed*;  
you guided them by your strength to  
your holy abode.

### Psalms 79 and 74

<sup>79:1</sup> God, nations have come into  
*your inheritance*;  
they have defiled your *holy*  
temple.

20. God “planting” his people, however, is also found in 2 Sam 7:10; Isa 5:2; Jer 2:21 (also with פִּיט); 11:17.

21. See, e.g., Day, “Pre-exilic Psalms,” 237–38. Unlike Ps 105, Ps 78 lacks the plagues of gnats (Exod 8:12–15 = P; Ps 105:31) and darkness (Exod 10:21–23 = E; Ps 105:28). The plague of boils (Exod 9:8–12 = P) is not mentioned in the Psalms.

<sup>17</sup> You brought them in and planted  
them on the *mountain of your*  
*inheritance*,

the place, O LORD, that you made  
your abode,

the *holy* place, O LORD, that your  
hands have established.

<sup>74:2</sup> Remember your congregation,  
which you acquired long ago,  
which *you redeemed* to be the tribe of  
*your inheritance*.

Remember *Mount Zion*, where you  
came to dwell.

But in Ps 74 the hymnic selection that forms the basis of the appeal remembers not the exodus but the mythic memory of the cosmic king's victory over the "sea" and "Leviathan" in the act of primeval creation.

#### Baal Cycle

Mot's message to Baal (KTU 1.5.1.1–  
4; UNP, 141):

1–4 When you killed *Litan*, the Flee-  
ing Serpent,

Annihilated the Twisty Serpent,  
The Potentate with Seven *Heads*,  
The heavens grew hot, they with-  
ered."

Anat's speech (UNP, 111):

38–40 Surely I fought *Yamm*, the  
Beloved of El.

Surely I finished off *River*, the Great  
God,

Surely I bound *Tunnan* [*tnn*] and  
destroyed (?) him.

#### Psalms 74

<sup>12</sup> Yet God my King is from of old,  
working salvation in the earth.

<sup>13</sup> You divided the *sea* [ים] by your  
might;  
you broke the *heads* of the *dragons*  
[תנינים] in the waters.

<sup>14</sup> You crushed *the heads of Leviathan*;  
you gave him as food for the crea-  
tures of the wilderness.

<sup>15</sup> You cut openings for springs and  
torrents;

you dried up ever-flowing *rivers*.

<sup>16</sup> Yours is the day, yours also the  
night;

you established the luminaries and  
the sun.

41–42 I fought the Twisty Serpent,  
 The Potentate with Seven *Heads*.  
 17 You have fixed all the bounds of  
 the earth;  
 you made summer and winter.

But this hymnic citation contains a significant development from the earlier storyline of the cosmic king: here God creates. The claim, “you established the luminaries and the sun,” echoes the Priestly account of creation in Gen 1, though the psalm retains a strong element of conflict with creatures of chaos.

#### POSTEXILIC PSALMS

With the exception of Ps 85 (also cf. Ps 126), the historical memories narrated in the postexilic psalms are not about the exile and restoration but about the distant past, that of Israel’s beginnings as a people.

Psalm 106 is a congregational confession and lament that closes with a petition for the diaspora: “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations” (v. 47). It consists primarily of historical memories that echo the hexateuchal storyline and beyond: Egypt, the Reed Sea, the wilderness—including the quail (Num 11), Dathan and Abiram (Num 16), the golden calf (Exod 32–34), murmuring at Kadesh-barnea (Num 14), Baal of Peor and Phinehas (Num 25), Meribah (Num 20), and the judges. In this recital Israel fails because they “forget” (Ps 106:7, 13, 21). And God “relented” in judgment because he “remembered his covenant” (Ps 106:45).

The adjacent historical psalm, Ps 105, is also probably postexilic because it echoes the Pentateuch in its final form. For example, God cuts with Abraham “an everlasting covenant,” a signature phrase of P (Gen 17:7, 19); and the plague sequence includes gnats (v. 31), found only in P. The recital runs from Abraham through the exodus and the wilderness journeys and closes with a single verse devoted to the settlement of “the lands of the nations.” While the closing verse states the people’s climatic purpose, “so they ... should observe his laws,” these laws are otherwise unidentified. Neither Sinai nor the giving of the law are part of the narrative sequence. The only “covenant” mentioned is Abraham’s (vv. 8–11).

The postexilic date of Ps 135 is evident from its distinction between the houses of Aaron and Levi (vv. 19–20). This hymn is also a recital of the hexateuchal storyline, including the striking of Egypt’s firstborn, Sihon,

Og, and the kingdoms of Canaan. But the exodus-conquest sequence is prefaced with claims of Yahweh as the cosmic king and God of the skies:

- <sup>5</sup> For I know that Yahweh is great;  
 our Lord is above all gods.  
<sup>6</sup> Whatever Yahweh pleases he does,  
 in heaven and on earth,  
 in the seas and all deeps.  
<sup>7</sup> He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth;  
 he makes lightnings for the rain  
 and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

Psalm 136 covers the same historical memories with similar phrasing, and it likewise prefaces this history with praise of the cosmic king over all divine beings.

- <sup>2</sup> O give thanks to the God of gods, ...  
<sup>3</sup> O give thanks to the Lord of lords, ...  
<sup>4</sup> who alone does great wonders. ...

Such claims are identical to the theological perspective featured in the pre-exilic psalms of Yahweh's kingship (Pss 95:3; 89:6–9; 96:4; 97:7, 9). Psalm 136 then adds praise of Yahweh's creative abilities, stylized in the language of the Priestly account of Gen 1: God "made the heavens," "the earth," "the great lights ... to rule over the day ... to rule over the night."

Emphasized in the following historical recitals of both psalms is Yahweh's vanquishing of "kings" and "kingdoms":

- <sup>135:10</sup> He struck down many nations  
 and killed mighty *kings*—  
<sup>11</sup> Sihon, *king* of the Amorites,  
 and Og, *king* of Bashan,  
 and all the *kingdoms* of Canaan.  
  
<sup>136:17</sup> who struck down great *kings*, ...  
<sup>18</sup> and killed famous *kings*, ...  
<sup>19</sup> Sihon, *king* of the Amorites, ...  
<sup>20</sup> and Og, *king* of Bashan.

The structuring of these psalms suggests that the cosmic claim of Yahweh's sovereignty is now understood to be evidenced in the historical



events of Yahweh’s “signs and wonders against Pharaoh” and his “striking down” of “many nations.” This combination of the mythological memory of Yahweh as cosmic king and the historical memory of the hexateuchal storyline makes possible a symbiosis that generates a radically new theology of Yahweh. Yahweh, by becoming *cosmic* king over all divine beings in the council, becomes the *political* king over all nations.<sup>22</sup> As a result, these and other postexilic psalms assert the most extensive claims regarding Yahweh’s sovereignty and “kingdom” found in the book of Psalms.<sup>23</sup>

CONCLUSIONS

First, some summary observations: Among the psalms that can be dated to the preexilic period (those alluding to cherubim-ark symbolism, psalms of Yahweh’s kingship, Ps 68, songs of Zion, and royal psalms), the prevailing traditions stem from the West Semitic storyline of the God of the skies and the sacred mountain. Also, the corporate laments concerning a battle defeat echo the ancient Hebrew poems. Exilic psalms, which lament the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, also echo the tradition of the God of the skies and the ancient poems. Postexilic psalms introduce the hexateuchal storyline, sometimes prefaced with cosmic kingship traditions.

Second, some inferences regarding Israelite religion:

Period	Prevailing Symbol and Source of Tradition	Roles of God and people
Preexilic	temple-palace	cosmic king
	performed psalms	worshippers
Postexilic	exodus-conquest	liberator
	Torah published via performed psalms and Torah scrolls	refugees from Egypt/ Babylon

22. A similar progression can be mapped as one follows the trajectory from Deut 4:19; 32:8–9, where each nation has its own patron deity, to Ps 82, where Yahweh takes charge over the nations.

23. See also Ps 115:3b = 135:6a; 115:4–8 = 135:15–18 (another psalm that refers to the “house of Aaron,” v. 10); 103:19; 145:11–13 (both of which cite the *book* of Exodus in 103:8; 145:8).

In this survey of memories in the Psalms, we must keep in mind that the key function of the psalmic liturgies was to foster the worship of God. Their interest lies in promoting an encounter with and an experience of the Transcendent. And so as poetry they engage imagination. In the preexilic period, the principal locus for the divine-human encounter was the temple (הֵיכָל), also symbolizing a palace and thus Yahweh as cosmic king and his people as those seeking an audience before his “face.”<sup>24</sup> The traditions informing the first temple’s “foundation myth” and the “texts” that were published there were the liturgies of the psalms, attended by rituals such as processions and sacrifices (as a form of “tribute” to the divine king).<sup>25</sup> But with the crisis of the temple’s destruction and the Babylonian exile, Israel turned to a different mode of connecting with God: they focused on the literary memories found in the scrolls of Torah. There they (re)discovered their identity as captives in Egypt, which was analogous to their circumstances in Babylonian captivity. And their return to the land under the Persians was analogous to their resettlement. Consequently, Yahweh’s role became that of liberator. In the postexilic period, Torah begins to eclipse temple.<sup>26</sup>

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24. See, e.g., Pss 24:6; 42:3; 84:8; and the liturgical calendars in Exod 23:15, 17; 34:20–24; Deut 16:16.

25. On the other hand, in Samuel–Kings the foundation story for the Jerusalem temple is that of David’s choice and Solomon’s construction.

26. Yet we should note that the historical psalms differ significantly from the hexateuchal storyline in two important “chapters.” The first concerns Sinai and the giving of the law. While theophany is a frequent motif in psalms, it is never associated with Sinai. “Sinai” appears only in Ps 68:9, 18, and there it is the location of Yahweh theophanic origins, as in the ancient poems of Judg 5:5 and Deut 33:2. “Horeb” is mentioned once as the location of the golden calf incident, not of the giving of the law (Ps 106:19). Yahweh’s laws are mentioned in 105:45, but the giving of the law is not part of the narrative sequence. The second deviation concerns the conquest of Cisjordan. The only historical psalm of the postexilic period even to mention the conquest of Canaan is Ps 135:11. Both Pss 135 and 136 feature the defeat of Sihon and Og in Transjordan (135:10–12; 136:17–22). In Ps 105 a single verse notes that Israel possessed the land Yahweh had granted (v. 44). Psalm 106 makes no mention of the conquest, though it may not be in its thematic interest to mention Israel’s failures. Hence it jumps to the judges period. The preexilic Ps 78 provides a general reference to the conquest in two verses (vv. 54–55), which echo Exod 15:7 and Ps 80:9. Moreover, as noted above, this hexateuchal storyline is disparaged in favor of Judah’s founding traditions of David and Zion.

Nevertheless, the tradition of the cosmic king—with its roots in the Late Bronze Age—persists. In preexilic Israel and Judah, the vanquishing of sea/rivers and the establishment of “right order” was extended from the cosmic sphere to the human sphere, specifically to the military battlefield (Pss 18; 68) and to justice in society (Pss 50; 97; cf. Ps 68). In the postexilic period, Yahweh’s *cosmic* kingship became the grounds for his *political* “kingdom” over all the kingdoms and nations of the earth. Hence, מַמְלָכָה/מַלְכוּת is first collocated with Yahweh in postexilic psalms (Pss 103:19; 145:11–13). His kingship over gods was translated into his kingship over nations.<sup>27</sup>

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27. We must be careful, however, to observe what God’s “kingdom” entails for postexilic Judah’s expectations regarding God’s role in their experience. Yahweh’s conquest of “kings” is presented in Pss 135–136 as grounds for praise, not for Judah to take action and anticipate divine intervention on behalf of their military. What is promised concerns more Yahweh’s governance and sovereignty (“he does what he pleases”) than his intervention in historical events. Even in this new construal of kingship, his transcendence is maintained and his status is independent of Judah’s. Those psalms making the highest claims for Yahweh’s sovereignty, noted above, also admit that the people of Yahweh may be in dire need (103:14–16; 135:14; 136:23; 145:14, 19) and even appear without a patron deity (115:2). What is promised is blessing (115:12–15) and food (103:5; 136:25; 145:15–16). Finally, we should observe that the “history” provided as evidence of Yahweh’s sovereignty is not that of the monarchic period, which may be supported by scribal documents of the royal archives, but that of the testimony contained in Israel’s prehistory of the Mosaic period.



“A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN...”:  
REFLECTIONS ON SOME PSALM TITLES  
IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Adrian H. W. Curtis

In a paper that emanated from a colloquium involving contributors from the universities of Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Sheffield, and Manchester, I offered some thoughts on the apparent allusions to historical events contained in the Hebrew book of Psalms.<sup>1</sup> This short paper will look at the thirteen or so psalm titles in the Hebrew Bible that appear to contain allusions to episodes in the story of David. The necessity for an approximation in the second sentence of this discussion highlights that there is not even complete agreement about their number, let alone their purpose and implication. There is widespread agreement on the presence of such allusions in Pss 3, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142. Most include Ps 7 (“which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjaminite” [NRSV]), but Brevard Childs has noted that here the preposition על is used, which elsewhere refers to the manner in which the psalm is to be performed, rather than to a “historical” context.<sup>2</sup> Some include Ps 30, part of whose title is usually understood to mean “A song at the dedication of the temple”; the use of the Hebrew בית (which could equally mean “of the house” rather than being a reference to the temple) has led to suggestions of a context in the life of David. For example, Elieser Slomovic suggested a possible link with the dedication of the area on which the temple was later

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1. Adrian Curtis, “La mosaïque de l’histoire d’Israël: Quelques considérations sur les allusions ‘historiques’ dans les Psaumes,” in *Intertextualités: La Bible en échos* (ed. Daniel Marguerat and Adrian Curtis; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000), 13–29.

2. Brevard S. Childs, “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis,” *JSS* 16 (1971): 137–38.

built according to 1 Chr 21:28–22:1.<sup>3</sup> But it seems wiser to concentrate on those psalms that can more convincingly be seen as attempts to relate to the life of David.

Of the thirteen titles, Cyril Rodd suggests rather confidently that “only one title (Ps 7) cannot be readily linked with the biblical narratives” (i.e., Samuel and Chronicles).<sup>4</sup> My purpose in this short paper is to question whether statements such as this can be justified, and to consider some possible implications if the answer is in the negative. In fact, whereas some of the titles are quite detailed, others are very vague, and the suggested links are problematic and/or tenuous. It is true that most commentators seek to establish such links, and in particular with the books of Samuel, but this sometimes involves a degree of imagination or mental contortion. Indeed, it is perhaps appropriate to ask whether the attempt to establish links with Samuel (or Chronicles—though it is on Samuel that most commentators seem to concentrate) should loom so large in the discussion of the superscriptions.

So let us look at these thirteen titles, beginning with Rodd’s exception, Ps 7: “which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjaminite.” There is no clear reference to such a person called Cush in Samuel or Chronicles, but this has not prevented attempts at making a link. The Targum identified Cush with Saul, and a number of recent commentators have suggested links with the Benjaminite Shimei, or more generally with Benjaminite opposition to David recorded in 2 Sam 15–20.<sup>5</sup> Howard Wallace mentions a possible link with Hushai (2 Sam 15:32–37; 17:5–16).<sup>6</sup> But it may be more appropriate to heed the cautionary comment of A. A. Anderson: “the editor may have had access to a more detailed account of David’s life or to legends about the great king of Israel.”<sup>7</sup>

Other titles are so vague as to make it difficult to be clear whether allusion is being made to an event known from Samuel or Chronicles. Psalm

3. Elieser Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding of the Formation of Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms,” *ZAW* 91 (1979): 369.

4. Cyril S. Rodd, “Psalms,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (ed. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 359.

5. See, e.g., John W. Rogerson and John W. McKay, *Psalms 1–50* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 37.

6. Howard N. Wallace, *Psalms* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 26.

7. A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (1972; 2 vols.; NCBC; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:93.

63 is headed, "when he was in the Wilderness of Judah," and various episodes in the context of David's flight from Saul (e.g., 1 Sam 23:14–15; 24:1–2) or from Absalom (2 Sam 15:23, 28; 16:2) have been proposed. Psalm 142 simply bears the information "when he was in the cave," whereas Ps 57 has the slightly fuller "when he fled from Saul, in the cave." Possible contexts might be the cave at Adullam (1 Sam 22:1) or at En-gedi (1 Sam 24:3), but this is not specified. One might argue that the use of the definite article suggests a specific cave that the reader/hearer would know, but it is more likely that this is an instance of the usage wherein "persons or things are treated as definite, the person simply from the part he is playing, and the thing from the use being made of it."<sup>8</sup>

The superscription to Ps 3 is perhaps a little more precise: "when he fled from his son Absalom." This suggests a link with the incidents recalled in 2 Sam 15–18, but without greater precision, although Childs suggests that there are some conceptual rather than specific verbal parallels, which may have led to the selection of that episode for mention in the title.<sup>9</sup> There appears to be greater precision in Ps 56, "when the Philistines seized him in Gath." This is often thought to relate to 1 Sam 21:10–15 and/or 27:1–12, although it is noted that in 1 Samuel David goes voluntarily to Gath. Similarly, Ps 52 ("when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, 'David has come to the house of Ahimelech'") seems to allude to events in 1 Sam 21–22, though it has been noted that the psalm does not fit well with Doeg's character and actions as described there.<sup>10</sup>

We meet a rather different situation in Ps 18 since the link with 2 Samuel is clear—a virtually identical version occurs as 2 Sam 22. Both include in their superscription, "on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul." Another difference from the psalms considered so far is that, whereas they seem to be trying to point to a particular incident or episode, here the reference is much more broadly to all David's victories. There are differences of opinion as to which is the more original or whether they come from a common source. David Firth has recently supported the view that they may be derived from a common source, which he tentatively calls "Royal

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8. John C. L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar: Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 27.

9. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 143–44.

10. For example, by Anderson, *Psalms*, 1:402–3.

War Songs.”<sup>11</sup> H. W. Hertzberg comments: “We might ask why it was the only one of the psalms ‘of David’ to find its way into the Books of Samuel. There are further psalms which are associated expressly with situations in David’s life.”<sup>12</sup> The implication seems to be that he regards the associations with particular episodes in the story of David as having been made relatively early, and perhaps too early!

Two psalm titles are much fuller than some, but the details raise questions. The superscription of Ps 34 includes: “when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.” This is frequently linked with 1 Sam 21:10–15, which presents David as pretending to be mad in the presence of a Philistine king. The problem is that in 1 Samuel the king is named Achish, and some have been at pains to offer a harmonizing solution. For example, could Abimelech have been the Semitic name of the king of Gath,<sup>13</sup> or else a dynastic title of Philistine kings?<sup>14</sup> It is not impossible that this could be a simple error of copying. The Vulgate has Ahimelech, a more understandable error of transcription, and it may be noteworthy that, in 1 Samuel, David’s flight to Achish is preceded by an episode involving the priest Ahimelech. But it may be apposite to note the cautionary comment of James Limburg, particularly the second part: “It is possible that the person providing the headings confused the two kings or perhaps we no longer understand the allusion.”<sup>15</sup>

The superscription to Ps 60 includes perhaps the fullest amount of information: “when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.” This is often related to 2 Sam 8:3–14 and also to 1 Chr 18:3–13, but there are differences, perhaps in the sequence of events (was the defeat of Aram-zobah first or second?) and more clearly in the number of Edomites killed in the Valley of Salt. Marvin Tate notes that the psalm’s title may reflect the long animosity between Israel and Edom,

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11. David G. Firth, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary; Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 515–16.

12. Hans W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel* (OTL; London: SCM, 1964), 393.

13. So Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50* (AB 16; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 205, who notes the mention in Gen 26:1 of a Philistine king named Abimelech. Wallace (*Psalms*, 78) suggests that Achish has been deliberately replaced by Abimelech, a figure whom Abraham and Isaac feared.

14. See Rogerson and McKay, *Psalms 1–50*, 154.

15. James Limburg, *Psalms* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 110.



and comments: "two exilic and post-exilic interests converged: that of David and his exploits and the condemnation of Edom."<sup>16</sup> He puts the difference in number down to a difference in tradition or to textual error.

The remaining three titles might perhaps be said with more confidence to fit readily with the story of David as recalled in the books of Samuel. Perhaps the clearest is Ps 51, "when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The link is with the episode recorded in 2 Sam 12:1–14. Psalm 54's superscription, "when the Ziphites went and told Saul, 'David is in hiding among us,'" relates to 1 Sam 23:19; 26:1. Finally, the title of Ps 59 ("when Saul ordered his house to be watched in order to kill him") can be linked with 1 Sam 19:11–17.

So, in summary, while some of the superscriptions correspond reasonably closely to episodes of the story of David as known in particular from 1–2 Samuel, others differ in points of detail, and some are very imprecise.

Not surprisingly, opinions have differed as to the origin and purpose of these "historical" titles. For those who assume Davidic authorship of the Psalms, there is presumably no need to doubt that the titles preserved an authentic recollection of the events or episodes that had inspired them. A variation on such a view has been advanced by Craig Broyles:

[T]he primary reason for supposing David wrote the Davidic psalms lies in the twelve or fourteen psalm superscriptions containing historical notes. ... We should first note that the musical and liturgical terminology contained in the superscriptions ... is paralleled only in Habakkuk 3:19 and especially 1–2 Chronicles and Ezra, both of which were postexilic works. It thus appears likely that the superscriptions were added in the early postexilic period. This historical distance, of course, does not imply their historical unreliability. But it does mean we must pay proper regard to the kind of history the Chronicler ... wrote.<sup>17</sup>

He goes on to suggest that, after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, the liturgical material of the psalms was preserved as literature and collected into an anthology of sacred writings: "The scribes naturally searched this new, sacred anthology for connections with other parts of the sacred canon, and the Hebrew superscription, *le dāwid*, naturally led

16. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990), 105.

17. Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBCOT; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 29.

them to 1–2 Samuel.”<sup>18</sup> Thus while he is willing to accept Davidic authorship, he sees the addition of the superscriptions as later reflection, though he does not rule out their historicity.

A scholar whose approach to the Psalms is very different but who has defended a Davidic date, if not a Davidic authorship, for some of the psalms under discussion is Michael Goulder,<sup>19</sup> who argues that the “Prayers of David” (Pss 51–72) were used in a liturgical procession around Jerusalem and its environs. He suggests that “the Prayers were indeed written ‘for David,’ in his lifetime, by one of his closest attendants, a priest; that they cover the last years of his life serially from the death of Uriah to the succession of Solomon; and that the Selahs in the text provided opportunities for the recitation of sections of the earliest form of the ‘Succession Narrative.’”<sup>20</sup> (We shall return to Goulder’s suggestion of a possible source of David traditions later.) His judgment with regard to the superscriptions is: “I accept the *idea* behind the historical notes in the Headings, *viz.* that a psalm can be understood only in the light of the circumstances for which it was composed. The *actual* historical notes I take to be late guesses, and mostly wrong; but the first and the last historical notes happen to be right, and to provide us with the key to the whole.”<sup>21</sup>

This is not the place to discuss Goulder’s liturgical approach; suffice it to say that he has not been widely followed, and there is perhaps some circularity of argument in his judgment on the accuracy of the titles.

Both Broyles and Goulder accept that the addition of “historical” notes is a much later activity than the composition of the psalms themselves. And in rather different ways both see the superscriptions as important in terms of understanding the psalms’ interpretation, Broyles in terms of relating them to other sacred texts, and Goulder in terms of the understanding of the context from which the psalm emerged. Albeit with different emphases, they, in common with many other commentators, see the superscriptions as reflecting a process of ongoing interpretation of the psalms with its beginnings preserved within the Hebrew Bible itself. That this process continued after the formation of the Hebrew Bible is shown by the presence of more such titles in the psalms from Qumran and in the Septuagint.

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18. *Ibid.*, 31.

19. Michael Goulder, *The Prayers of David (Psalms 51–72): Studies in the Psalter*, II (JSOTSup102; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

20. *Ibid.*, 9.

21. *Ibid.*, 25.

(There is not space here to list the additional titles in the Septuagint, but they are discussed by Slomovic.<sup>22</sup>) Childs also points to the "great expansion of titles in the Syriac Apocryphal Psalms, in the Targum and in the Peshiṭta."<sup>23</sup> A somewhat different phenomenon is to be seen in the Septuagint's additional Ps 151, which has been entitled: "This psalm is ascribed to David as his own composition (though it is outside the number), after he had fought in single combat with Goliath." It is noteworthy that the title of the Hebrew version of Ps 151, known from the Qumran Scroll 11QPs<sup>a</sup>, differs from that in the Septuagint: "A Hallelujah of David the son of Jesse." In the Syriac version, the title of Ps 54 relates it to a different event in the life of David ("when he sent Joab and his army to fight with Absalom") from that in the Hebrew Bible. This suggests that titles were not fixed and that there was some fluidity.

Many commentators, perhaps with variations of emphasis, see the titles as reflecting a process of interpretation. For example, John Eaton suggests that most of the titles seem to be deductions from statements within the particular psalm, but comments:

the instincts of these early exegetes are not insignificant, and when they link psalms to David's military campaigns (3, 18, 60) they may be working with a genuine recollection that some psalms originated as prayers of the kings in religious ceremonies on campaigns away from Jerusalem. While the kings will have had in their service sacred persons skilled in composing and offering for them prayers and praises, David himself, as tradition maintained, may have had here a special aptitude. Music and poetry, offered before the Lord, may have been among the gifts that won this skilful leader such fame and following.<sup>24</sup>

In his comments on the superscriptions of particular psalms, Eaton tends to use such phrases as "later theorizing from the text,"<sup>25</sup> "a deduction from the character of the psalm,"<sup>26</sup> or "another of the later speculations."<sup>27</sup> A slightly different emphasis is perhaps to be seen in the comments of Pat-

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22. Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding," 356–64.

23. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 143.

24. John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 7.

25. *Ibid.*, 69 (of Ps 3).

26. *Ibid.*, 206 (of Ps 51).

27. *Ibid.*, 220 (of Ps 57).

rick Miller, who suggests that the addition of “historical” titles is “a way of saying that the psalm over which the superscription is written makes sense in just such a context.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, James Limburg, in commenting on the superscription to Ps 3, suggests that the editor is saying, “This is the sort of prayer that David prayed ... when his life was in extreme danger.”<sup>29</sup>

Some have suggested that rather more specific types of interpretation are exhibited in these superscriptions, and two perhaps deserve particular mention. The first is that what is happening in the supply of such titles can be understood as *midrash*. A comment that is similar to the views of Miller and Limburg just noted is the one of Cas Vos but with this additional element.

In the style of the Midrashic exegetes, a link can be found between the words of the psalms and the Davidic tradition in Samuel. This manner of handling the texts proves a knowledgeable and spiritual acquaintance with tradition. The intention is that the supplicant should put himself in David’s place and pray a particular psalm with him, as David would have prayed it.<sup>30</sup>

Childs has likened the provision of superscriptions to midrashic exegesis, and concluded that “the Psalm titles do not appear to reflect independent historical tradition but are the result of an exegetical activity which derived its material from within the text itself.”<sup>31</sup> But having tested his hypothesis against the psalm titles in question, and taking into account some of the apparent discrepancies between the titles and the Samuel accounts, he is forced to conclude rather tamely that “the most important factor in the formation of the titles appears to be general parallels between the situation described in the Psalm and some incident in the life of David.”<sup>32</sup>

Slomovic argues that the phenomenon of adding titles to psalms can be understood in the light of what he terms “connective midrash.”<sup>33</sup> This is in light of his judgment that:

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28. Patrick D. Miller Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 53.

29. Limburg, *Psalms*, 8.

30. Cas J. A. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 48–49.

31. Childs, “Psalm Titles,” 143.

32. *Ibid.*, 147.

33. Slomovic, “Toward an Understanding,” 352.

The title of a Psalm which connects it with an event in the biblical narrative does not claim to create a perfect congruity between the event and the Psalm. It is evident that insofar as the non-psalmic prayers in the Bible are concerned, there exists a harmony between them and the historical setting. Psalmic prayers, on the other hand, seem to have only the flimsiest connection with the event.<sup>34</sup>

A brief examination of some examples from Midrash Tehillim leads him to suggest that linguistic and thematic analogies are important in establishing connections between psalms and particular people or events, in addition to "congruity of images," and also: "The rabbinic midrash may gloss over certain passages. It is not concerned with complete harmony between the Psalm and the connected unit. It selects mutual ingredients, points out their reciprocal relationships and omits those parts which do not possess a connectable element."<sup>35</sup>

Later he summarizes his understanding of "connective midrash" as a "midrashic process of placing certain psalms into specific historical situations because of their linguistic and thematic affinities," a process that he claims is also employed by the author of the books of Chronicles.<sup>36</sup> Such an approach may help to account for some of the discrepancies between more detailed titles and apparently related episodes from the books of Samuel, for example, but it is harder to relate it to some of the very brief and/or imprecise superscriptions.

It is noteworthy that, with the exception of Ps 18, the titles are added to laments. This has led Artur Weiser to suggest that there is perhaps an apologetic tendency at work.<sup>37</sup> But another approach that goes beyond this is the suggestion that the addition of "historical" superscriptions is part of a deliberate process of "Davidization" of the Psalter, and in particular book 2 (Pss 42–72).<sup>38</sup> This approach is taken up by Frank-Lothar Hossfeld

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34. Ibid., 351.

35. Ibid., 353.

36. Ibid., 378.

37. Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (trans. Herbert Hartwell; OTL; London: SCM, 1962), 98.

38. See, e.g., Martin Kleer, *"Der liebliche Sänger der Psalmen Israels": Untersuchungen zu David als Dichter und Beter der Psalmen* (Bodenheim: Philo, 1996); for a summary of the approach see Vos, *Theopoetry*, 48–49.

and Erich Zenger in the second volume of their *Hermeneia* commentary.<sup>39</sup> In the introduction, they describe a stage in the growth of the Psalter as follows:

The exilic collection Psalms 52–68\* was expanded in the fifth century into the Davidic Psalter including Psalms 51–72 by, on the one hand, being explicitly “Davidized,” and on the other hand by being given a beginning in Psalm 51 and a conclusion in Psalms 69–72, both with reference to David. ... The “Davidizing” was done in two ways: on the one hand the psalms received the superscription “Of David,” and on the other hand a number of psalms had additional biographical information added to the superscriptions, augmenting the particular psalm with references to the life of David as told in the books of Samuel. At this stage of redaction, “David” is not yet thought of as the author, but simply as the one praying these psalms.<sup>40</sup>

This approach, as is the case with some others noted above, assumes that the books of Samuel were available to those who added the superscriptions. This is also true of the approach of Vivian L. Johnson, who builds on the proposals of Childs and particularly Slomovic in a study of the superscriptions, and proposes something rather more than just a “Davidizing” but an attempt to reshape the portrayal of David in the Samuel narratives, making him appear much more prayerful and ready to confess his faults: “Having all thirteen psalms inserted in David’s narrative in Samuel provides a theological underpinning throughout his story.”<sup>41</sup> But was the source of information used in the titles necessarily the books of Samuel, given that we are dealing with an inner-biblical phenomenon? This view might imply either that the books of Samuel were complete and available for study and comparison at a relatively early date, or that the final form of the Psalter, including titles, was completed relatively late. The views about the superscriptions already noted have hinted at some other possibilities, for example, that of Goulder, whose proposed liturgical setting for the “Prayers of David” included readings from the earliest form of the “Succession Narrative.” He suggests that one of the sources behind the narrative was “an account of what

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39. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; *Hermeneia*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

40. *Ibid.*, 3.

41. Vivian L. Johnson, *David in Distress: His Portrait through the Historical Psalms* (LHBOTS 505; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 11.

we may provisionally call the Passion of David,"<sup>42</sup> which recounted a series of episodes that were recalled in his proposed liturgical procession.<sup>43</sup> Goulder's work is noted in the bibliographies provided for the psalms under discussion in book 2 of the Psalter in Samuel Terrien's commentary.<sup>44</sup> He appears, albeit tentatively, to accept the possible existence of a "Passion of David." For example, he says of Ps 56, "if one admits the hypothesis of a 'passion of David' that was ceremonially chanted in exilic and postexilic times, Psalm 56 might have been composed to commemorate the legendary king's tribulation."<sup>45</sup>

The proposed "Passion of David" is, of course, hypothetical and speculative. But it does raise the possibility of other sources than 1–2 Samuel being available, albeit that they may later have been incorporated into the books of Samuel. A variation is suggested in Terrien's comments on the superscription of Ps 60, and the discrepancy between the title (referring only to victories) and its contents (mentioning some humiliating defeats): "A possible explanation of this discrepancy may be that the oral traditions of David's successes were not yet written as part of 'the Samuel books' and that the superscription, in its own oral stage, belonged to a relatively early date of the Judahite monarchy."<sup>46</sup>

This alerts us to the possibility that those who added the superscriptions were aware of oral as well as written traditions, and that we should be wary of assuming that the only source for these editors, whether interpreting or Davidizing, would have been the books of Samuel in much the form in which they have been preserved in the Hebrew Bible. It may be relevant to recall the comment of Anderson regarding Ps 7, that the editor may have known a more detailed account of David's life or other legends about him.<sup>47</sup> Another possible source of information could have been the royal annals that the Hebrew Bible mentions (e.g., in 2 Kgs 12:19; 13:8). Particularly noteworthy is the reference to the "Annals of King David" in 1 Chr 27:24. And Peter Craigie comments, with regard to the title of Ps 7, "If the title has historical value ... the account may have been contained in the ancient and no longer extant sources named in 1 Chr 29:29."<sup>48</sup> There is not space here to elaborate on the wider issues of the sources used by the Chronicler. What is relevant for our present purpose is that the Chronicler seems to have been aware of sources other than

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42. Goulder, *Prayers of David*, 40.

43. *Ibid.*, 46.

44. Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

45. *Ibid.*, 431.

46. *Ibid.*, 448.

47. Anderson, *Psalms*, 1:93.

48. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 99.

1–2 Samuel. The precise nature and contents of such annals is not known, but it is inherently likely that such documents existed (on analogy with similar annals from elsewhere in the ancient Near East). Whether such annals might have preserved differing traditions is impossible to know. And it is equally impossible to be certain who would have had access to such documents. But we cannot rule out the possibility that those who added the “historical” superscriptions may have had some awareness of their contents.

The rather limited point that I am suggesting here is that these editors may have had access to, and reflected upon, a variety of types of material, and that we need to bear this in mind when, for example, we try to iron out apparent discrepancies that may simply reflect variant traditions, for instance, of a Benjaminite called Cush or a Philistine king Abimelech. Reflection on the life of David may not only have been based on those stories that happened to find their way into the Hebrew Bible.



“MOAB IS MY WASHPOT” (Ps 60:8 [MT 10]):  
ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MLF  
(MOABITE LIBERATION FRONT)

Susan E. Gillingham

“I stand to be corrected, but I believe that every interpretation of and commentary on this psalm ever written adopts the viewpoint of the text, and, moreover, assumes that the readers addressed by the scholarly commentator share the ideology of the text and its author.” So writes David Clines in his “Psalm 2 and the MLF (Moab Liberation Front).”<sup>1</sup> A study of the reception history of this psalm undoubtedly bears this out: David is indeed one of very few to question the ideological stance of the psalmist.<sup>2</sup> He looks at Ps 2 from the point of view of its opponents, and reads “Moab” as the symbolic name for a foreign people who seek liberation from their bondage to an Israelite king. He sees that “the Israelite response is unmistakably and smugly typical of an insensitive imperial despotism,” and notes the almost total blindness of commentators to the “Moabite” point of view.<sup>3</sup>

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1. David J. A. Clines, “Psalm 2 and the MLF (Moabite Liberation Front),” in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Gender, Culture, Theory 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 244.

2. This became very clear to me in my study of the reception of Ps 2 over two and a half millennia: see Susan Gillingham, *A Journey of Two Psalms. The Reception of Psalms 1 and 2 in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Those who have not unthinkingly adopted the standard viewpoint of this psalm are usually poets and artists rather than commentators.

3. Clines, “Psalm 2,” 248–49. One other later commentator who has written in the same vein is John Goldingay. In his *Psalms 42–89* (vol. 2 of *Psalms*; Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 105, he speaks of the psalm having “a dangerous capacity to legitimate oppressive imperial violence,” re-creating “its divine warrior mythic structure in social and ecclesial reality. It projects authoritarian, patriarchal, and exclusive structures.” Goldingay, how-

This is made even more pejorative by the depiction of Yahweh in this psalm, who guarantees Israel's world rule at the expense of all other nations—imitating a theology no different from the language and ambitious lust for power expressed by the deities of the Assyrians and Egyptians, for example. “Hell hath no fury like a deity scorned,” David observes with characteristic wit.<sup>4</sup> “When nations seeking independence are non-Israelite, and are seeking it from Israel, they should not have it. The poet is against it, the king is against it, and the god is against it. Psalm 2 is not in two minds on the matter.”<sup>5</sup> So the celebration of the liberation of one people is the denial of freedom to another: it is this theological and political persuasion, that God has favorites and will not tolerate others, that has perpetrated so much violence not only in ancient Near Eastern times but into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well. “It is a sad day for theism if the only language its adherents can find to express their sense of the divine is the language of oriental despotism.”<sup>6</sup>

I have cited David's interpretation of this psalm at length because his language and his employment of a thoroughgoing hermeneutics of suspicion have set him apart as an original and fearless commentator. I have tried to respond to what he says about Ps 2 elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> but what I want to do here is to take further his symbolic use of the “MLF” and apply it to another psalm that refers to Moab, literally and specifically, in the most disparaging way. Not only the interpretation of the Psalms but also the fate of Moab have been issues in David's very early works: two of his earliest articles were on the history of psalms scholarship,<sup>8</sup> and one of the first books he edited for the JSOT Supplement Series, together with John Sawyer, was on Midian, Moab, and Edom.<sup>9</sup> In neither of these earlier

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ever, argues that the ending of Ps 2 is an exhortation to all nations to renounce violence, so that they might find a new attitude of reverence and submission to God and to one another (105). Clines, by contrast, makes no such excuses.

4. Clines, “Psalm 2,” 260.

5. *Ibid.*, 262.

6. *Ibid.*, 274.

7. Gillingham, *Journey*, 179.

8. David J. A. Clines, “Psalm Research since 1955: I. The Psalms and the Cult,” *TynBul* 18 (1967): 103–26; *idem*, “Psalm Research since 1955: II. The Literary Genres,” *TynBul* 20 (1969): 105–25. Both are reprinted in *idem*, *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 292, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 2:639–64, 665–86, respectively.

9. David J. A. Clines and John F. A. Sawyer, eds., *Midian, Moab and Edom: The*

works was David quite as critical about the ideological nature of psalm studies and about the "rightful" place of foreign nations such as Moab in biblical theology. Today scholarly discourse has fewer constraints, and this gives me the opportunity to look further at Moab and the Psalms from a more radical point of view.

It did not take long before the phrase "Moab is my washpot" in Pss 60:8 (MT 10) and 108:9 (MT 10) began to make its claim as the title for this paper. Perhaps I had been subconsciously influenced by the popularization of this phrase in Stephen Fry's early autobiography—even though its appearance in Fry's title seems to have been chosen to signify its opaqueness in a story of his early life, which is both witty and honest about his shortcomings. Fry has never explained why he chose the title, and has never encouraged inquirers on his blog to find out more about what it might have meant.<sup>10</sup> It was probably intended to be a joke: it undoubtedly ridicules the language of the Bible and the religion it espouses.

Fry is correct in his observation that the phrase is opaque. Psalm 60 is likely to contain the earliest use of it (Ps 108 being a composite psalm that uses almost verbatim 57:7–11 [MT 8–12] in vv. 1–5 [MT 2–6] and 60:5–12 [MT 7–14] in vv. 6–13 [MT 7–14]), and so it is appropriate here to observe the phrase within the context of Ps 60 as a whole.<sup>11</sup> The lengthy superscription of this psalm (MT 1–2), about David's conflicts with the Aramites and Joab's slaying of thousands of Edomites, immediately reveals its military concerns, and suggests that this is likely to be a complex poem, fusing several ancient traditions about "holy warfare" into the one psalm. For example, the prayer of the people to God at the beginning and the end (vv. 1–3 [MT 3–5] and 10–12 [MT 12–14]) creates an opposite impression to what one might expect from the psalm's title: here, in the form of a communal lament, we read how the people have suffered some humiliating defeat in battle. This more negative framework at the start and end of the

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*History and Archaeology of Late Bronze and Iron Age Jordan and North-West Arabia* (JSOTSup 24; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983).

10. Stephen Fry, *Moab Is My Washpot* (London: Random House, 1997). The book was widely reviewed, and a typical account of its success is given by Fry, "Moab Is My Washpot." Online: <http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2951429-moab-is-my-washpot>.

11. Ps 83:6 (MT 7) is the only other reference to Moab in the Psalms in this vein; it refers to Moab as one of the many allies who aligned themselves against Israel, and uses a different source from Pss 60 and 108.

psalm contrasts with the middle of the psalm (vv. 6–8 [MT 8–10]) which upturns the mood of defeat and fits more with the superscription: God is now on the side of his own people, and a battle will soon be won.

Verse 5 (MT 7) introduces verses 6–8 (MT 8–10) with the theme of God the Divine Warrior: הושיעה ימיןך “Save [give victory] with your right hand!”<sup>12</sup> The speech form then changes from the people addressing God to God as the speaker (noting that אלהים is used throughout this psalm) addressing the people. That the following two verses (7 and 8 [MT 9 and 10]) are set in the form of a divine oracle, using the prophetic “I” form found several times in the Psalter, reminds us of where God similarly speaks in 2:6, 7–9: there also it is from his sanctuary that God speaks.<sup>13</sup> In Ps 60, as in Ps 2, we again have the sense of the fury of a deity being scorned. Here in the middle of the psalm, military might and the seizure of territory is paramount: victory is promised for three northern territories (Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim) in verse 7a and 7b (MT 9a and 9b) and for the one southern tribe of Judah (v. 7c [MT 9c]), while the three foreign peoples Moab and Edom to the southeast and Philistia to the west—are treated with utmost contempt (v. 8 [MT 10]):

<sup>7</sup> Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;  
Ephraim is my helmet;  
Judah is my scepter.

<sup>8</sup> Moab is my washbasin;  
on Edom I hurl my shoe;  
over Philistia I shout in triumph.

Although David would never dream of making historical speculations at this point, others have done so, and they have argued that *either* this is a late exilic re-creation of preexilic tensions between the northern and southern kingdoms that relate in effect to similar tensions in the Persian period;<sup>14</sup> *or* the oracle is a genuine reflection, perhaps added to and

12. The noun ימין is frequently used in the Psalms as a sign of God’s victory in battle; see, e.g., Pss 20:6 (MT 7); 98:1; 109:6; 118:15–16. See also Isa 41:10.

13. The authority of the prophetic voice, uttered from Zion, God’s dwelling place, is a common motif in the psalms: another example is Ps 132:14. See Rolf A. Jacobson, “Many Are Saying”: *The Function of Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Psalter* (JSOTSup 397; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 128.

14. For example, Graham S. Ogden, “Psalm 60,” *JSOT* 31 (1985): 83–94, who argues that Isa 63:1–6 is a response to this psalm.

adapted, of the actual tensions inherent between the northern and southern kingdoms, as described in 1 and 2 Kings and Isaiah of Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> If we set aside historical questions (which, with apologies to David, some of us still find interesting, despite their increasingly provisional nature), the psalm clearly evokes an interesting literary structure with the lament at the beginning and end and the oracle at its center, which reverses the mood of defeat and thus ascribes everything to divine authority.

The focus of our attention is on the oracle itself: in the NRSV Ps 60:8 (MT 10) states, "Moab is my washbasin." But what is intended here? The commentators are all but unanimous in agreeing that the whole oracle in verses 7–8 (MT 9–10) has several military metaphors, first describing God taking off his heavy armory—his helmet, his scepter (מַחֲקֶקֶי may mean "commander's staff" or "rod of war"), his shoes—and then describing his need to wash himself, both for physical and sacral reasons, after battle. So we read of the transcendent and sovereign Deity of Israel now relinquishing himself of his heavy armory and washing away the impurity that is the consequence of being on the battlefield.

The idea of God refreshing himself allows for a variety of interpretations of the phrase that is the focus of this paper. Some argue that the description מוֹאֵב סִיר רַחֲצִי refers to Moab as a cooking pot, which alludes to the food that the warriors returning from battle were deemed to deserve.<sup>16</sup> Some see סִיר רַחֲצִי as a reference to a vessel warriors would use to clean themselves of the mud and blood of military warfare.<sup>17</sup> Others

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15. See A. A. Anderson, *Book of Psalms* (1972; 2 vols.; NCBC; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:445; also Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary* [trans. Hilton C. Oswald; CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989], 5, who argues that this refers to the way in which old vassal states were brought under Yahweh's ownership.

16. For example, Goldingay (*Psalms* 42–89, 225) notes that the LXX translation, λέβης τῆς ἐλπίδος μου (lit. "my hope basin"), suggests a cooking utensil; he even cites Martin Luther (*First Lectures on the Psalms* [2 vols.; trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; Luther's Works 10–11; St. Louis: Concordia, 1974–1976]; 2:286–92), who comments that in this verse "we must deal here with the mystery of cooking." This is also a common interpretation in rabbinic commentaries: Abraham Ibn Ezra, for example, speaks of Moab being scoured in the same way that one scours a cooking pot: see Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Tehillim: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (1977; repr., Artscroll Tanach Series; Brooklyn: Mesorah, 2004), 754.

17. See Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005),

have expanded the metaphor so that סִיר רַחֲצִי is the basin in which victorious warriors, helped by a slave, washed their filthy and foul-smelling feet—a metaphor that in this verse has some continuity with the other metaphor of the derisive casting of the battle shoe over Edom.<sup>18</sup> This is not entirely unreasonable: the midrash on this psalm quotes Isa 11:14 and states that “Moab is like a pot which a man pushes away once he has washed his feet in it.”<sup>19</sup> The rabbis relished this metaphor: Radik goes further still and sees that the image is of God actually relieving himself over Moab: “I will treat Moab with contempt, like the putrid water of the *chamber pot* which is cast away in disgust.”<sup>20</sup> Whatever סִיר רַחֲצִי might mean, the metaphor undoubtedly serves the purpose of reducing Moab to some sort of subservient implement at the mercy of the victorious Elohim.

So, whether one takes the most odious metaphor of Moab being used as God’s urinal, or another equally abhorrent image—in the context of the ancient Near East—of the Moabites being used to wash God’s filthy feet after battle, or a rather different (but still disconcerting) domesticized representation of God using Moab for cooking his postwar victory celebrations, this is a verbal illustration of a deity that is both vivid and crude; its iconic referent is astonishing, given that it was used by a people who were taught that no physical image of their God could ever be made.<sup>21</sup>

So Ps 60:7–8 (MT 9–10) raises not only the issue of “insensitive imperial despotism,” the issue which David observed in Ps 2 (evident to an even greater degree in Ps 60, since in Ps 2 the “lusting for power” was over anonymous nations, and here it is violently explicit) but also the critical question of verbal iconography. For here the images of God’s abuse of other nations are even more vivid than in Ps 2.

100. The same interpretation is found in the midrash on this psalm; see William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (2 vols.; Yale Judaica Series; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:516.

18. See Charles A. Briggs and Emilie G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1907), 2:60.

19. See Braude, *Midrash*, 1:516. Rashi also takes this view; see Mayer I. Gruber, *Rashi’s Commentary on Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 421. Kimchi similarly interprets סִיר רַחֲצִי as a basin in which the conqueror washes his feet (or utensils) and so which is designated for menial service; see Avraham Cohen, ed., *The Book of Psalms* (rev. ed.; Soncino Books of the Bible; London: Soncino, 1992), 191.

20. See Feuer, *Tehillim*, 754.

21. Obvious examples include Exod 20:4–5/Deut 5:8–9; Isa 40:18–20; 44:9–20; Ps 115:3–8.

Turning first to the imagery: the crude portrayal of God as warrior is a good illustration of the ways in which a people steeped in iconoclastic teaching had frequently to accept a somewhat paradoxical portrayal of their God. The use of this imagery in Ps 60 suggests the psychological need for a people suffering a loss of national identity to portray God as victor rather than as vanquished, and so the language is particularly virulent. This is why metaphors of God as warrior, whether fighting from heaven or on the earth, pervade the Psalms, as Martin Klingbeil has made clear.<sup>22</sup> As William Brown states at the beginning of his book on metaphors in the Psalms, "Scholars ... find it paradoxical that despite Israel's iconophobia in the material realm the literary realm of Israel's faith abounds with images for God and the self."<sup>23</sup> One could even argue that the more stringent the attack on making false idols the greater the need to use metaphor and simile to explain, through the visual power of the imagination, that the God of Israel was greater in every way than the deities of the surrounding nations.

In describing God as a warrior, the poet faces another paradox: the more they seek to describe God's omnipotence and universal power, the more anthropomorphic (and, often, somewhat crude) the language he has to use. Although far from crude, Isaiah's depictions of God as creator offer interesting examples of this form of rhetoric.<sup>24</sup> And here in Ps 60 the authority of God over threatening powers such as Moab, Edom, and Philistia could not be expressed in more anthropomorphic terms. Whether the imagery means that he needs to wash himself with the support of a slave, or that he needs to relish his first wholesome postbattle repast, or

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22. See Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography* (OBO 169; Fribourg: University Press, 1999), 28–33. However, he makes no reference either to Ps 60 or to Ps 108 in this work.

23. See William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 4. However, Brown also has nothing to say about Ps 60:8 (MT 10). Similarly Stefan Wälchi, "Zorn Yhwhs im Psalter—eine Metapher des Leidens?" in *Metaphors in the Psalms* (ed. Pierre van Hecke and Antje Labahn; BETL 231; Leuven: Peeters, 2010) has nothing to say about this psalm other than it represents "Zorn als unbegründet" (276).

24. This is particularly evident in Isa 40–55: despite the stinging attack on idol making, the references to God as creator are couched in the most anthropomorphic terms; see, e.g., Isa 40:12–17, 21–24, set alongside a stinging indictment against idolatry in vv. 18–20.

that he needs to relieve himself after the war has been won, the end result is of a deity little different in matters of war from those depicted physically in pictures or formed from wood, metal, or stone. We might compare the poetic image in these verses with the bronze statuette of the god Resheph, dated between the eleventh and tenth centuries B.C.E., found at Megiddo, bearing a weapon in his raised right hand;<sup>25</sup> or perhaps even with the god Chemosh, about to thrust a spear into an enemy, the deity possibly depicted on a bas-relief on a basalt stela in the Transjordanian region of Moab, dating between the ninth and eighth century B.C.E.<sup>26</sup> The most surprising feature about the use of the image in Ps 60:8 (MT 10) is surely not its poetic iconography, but that it was preserved in the so-called Elohistic Psalter (Pss 42–83) to be used in prayer and worship in Second Temple Judaism.

We now return to the issue of the attitude to enemy nations in this psalm, where the ideology of the text requires some further evaluation. First, it is clear that this attitude to the Moabites (and indeed also to the Edomites and to the Philistines) is typical of what we find elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In the oracles against foreign nations in Amos 1–2, Moab is inveighed against for particular war crimes—ironically, committed not against Israel or Judah, but against Edom (Amos 2:1–3). Similarly in the foreign nation oracles in Isaiah 13–23, the utter desolation of Moab in chapters 15 and 16 is described in a lament form, corresponding with another oracle against Moab that also uses a lament form in Jer 48 (in the heart of another collection of foreign nation oracles [Jer 46–51]). The memory of warfare with Moab (again suggesting an archetypal motif, as Edom and Philistia are also included in each case) purportedly extends as far back as the victory over the Egyptians expressed through Song of the Sea (Exod 15:14–15).<sup>27</sup> Enmity with Moab is a recurrent motif in the his-

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25. Noting the reference to the “right hand” (יָמִין) in warfare in n. 12. The image is found in Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 102, pl. 3 (alongside their commentary on Ps 60). The source is from Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* [trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998]), 117, pl. 139.

26. See Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting*, 186–87, fig. 20, taken from Othmar Keel, Menakhem Shual, and Christoph Uehlinger, *Die Frühe Eisenzeit* (vol. 3 of *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel*; OBO 100; Fribourg: University Press, 1990), 321, fig. 97.

27. “In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. The peoples heard, they trembled; pangs



tory of Samuel and Kings;<sup>28</sup> it occurs in all three Major Prophets outside the oracles against the nations<sup>29</sup> and in postexilic books such as Ezra (9:1) and Nehemiah (13:1). So Ps 60:7–8 (MT 9–10) cannot be excused as an exceptional text: it is part of a recurrent motif where Moab is one of three typical enemies, drawn from popular folklore and traditions of ancient warfare. What makes Ps 60 particularly appalling is the graphic metaphor of God's further abuse of a defeated enemy nation.

Before we start to take the side of the victimized Moabites to view this psalm and the other references from the point of view of the enemy nations, however, we must pause to gain a broader perspective. Often the victim referred to in one context becomes the oppressor in another, and this is particularly the case in texts that are concerned with matters of warfare. For example, the Moabite Stone, or Mesha Stela, is little better in its description of the destruction of the cities of Ataroth and Nebo in northern Israel. Taking full advantage of the collapse of the Omri dynasty in the mid-ninth century, the inscription describes not only King Mesha's rebellion and his subsequent recovery of the land of Medeba from the Israelites, but also vividly describes the way King Mesha massacred the entire population of Ataroth and Nebo as a thank offering to his god Chemosh, who had granted him the victory.<sup>30</sup> To judge the involvement of Elohim in the military affairs of Moab also necessitates judging the involvement of Chemosh in the military affairs of Israel.

We might further argue: what of the way that Israel and Judah are each described as suffering pitifully at the hands of their own Divine Warrior? Even in Ps 60 they are partly victim, seen in the laments at the beginning and end of the psalm. Beyond this psalm, God is frequently depicted as being the military enemy of his own people. For example, in Amos the oracles against Judah and then against Israel immediately follow the one

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seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; trembling seized the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away."

28. For example, 2 Sam 8:2; 2 Kgs 1:1; 3:4–27; 13:20–21; 24:1–2.

29. For example, Isa 11:12–16; 25:10–12; Jer 9:25–26 (MT 24–25); 25:15–29; Ezek 25:8–11.

30. "And I made war against the town (Ataroth) and seized it. And I slew all the [people of] the town, for the pleasure of Chemosh and Moab.... And Chemosh said to me, Go seize Nebo upon Israel: and I went in the night and fought against it from the break of dawn till noon: and I took it, and slew all, 7000 men, [boys?], women, [girls], and female slaves, for to Ashtar-Chemosh I devoted them." Taken from "The Moabite Stone." Online: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/rp/rp202/rp20238.htm>.

against Moab (Amos 2:1–3, 4–5, 6–8), where each nation is to be similarly punished “for three transgressions ... and for four.” Each, ultimately, is to be purged by fire (Amos 2:2, 5; 5:6; 7:4). Similarly we only have to read the first few chapters of Isaiah to see how God repeatedly uses enemy nations to fight against Judah and Jerusalem: “Therefore says the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts, ... ‘I will turn my hand against you!’” (1:24–25); “For now the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts, is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah ... all support of bread, and all support of water” (3:1); and, “He will raise a signal for a nation far away, and whistle for a people at the ends of the earth; here they come, swiftly, speedily!” (5:26).<sup>31</sup> The first few chapters of Jeremiah reveal similar concerns. The first is in the vision of the boiling pot—in this case the liquid is to be poured over all the cities of Judah (Jer 1:13–18); the theme continues in the description of the arrival of the horseman and archer to lay in ruins the cities of Judah (4:22–29) and in the report of the devouring fire engulfing the house of the Lord and the house of Judah brought about by “a nation from far away ... an enduring nation, ... an ancient nation. ... Their quiver is like an open tomb; all of them are mighty warriors” (5:15–16; see also vv. 7–17).<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, responding to Divine Warrior imagery does not always mean that we have to take the side of the defeated enemy, and look at a psalm from the point of view of its opponents, as David suggests for Ps 2. Our difficulty is that the victim in one text is described as the victor oppressing the downtrodden and defeated in another, and vice versa. So much depends on the ideology of the speaker, and it perhaps is this that might prevent us taking sides at all. We are still left, of course, with the problem of divine violence, whether sanctioned by Chemosh, El, Elohim, Yah, or Yahweh, and here it is important to avoid justifying any of this as appropriate, whoever the recipient might be.<sup>33</sup> It is at this point I totally accept what David has frequently argued, that we have to enter into some

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31. Obviously this theme stretches far beyond the first five chapters; it is a dominant one up to Isa 39. It also plays a vital part in Isaiah’s contemporary Micah (1:3–9; 3:9–12).

32. Again this theme is integral to the entire book of Jeremiah: the selection of the first chapters is only to compare this with Isaiah.

33. See Eric A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 36–37. For example: “In a world that is already riddled with too many accounts of religiously motivated violence, texts like these need to be handled with care” (37).

critique of the text, rather than accept its ideology.<sup>34</sup> We must learn to become "resisting readers" of all biblical texts.<sup>35</sup> A text such as Ps 60:7–8 (MT 9–10) indicates just how important this is, particularly as there is no obvious critique of the propriety of people going to war anywhere in the Bible, for the writers took it for granted that God and violence were inextricably bound up together.<sup>36</sup>

One final thought. While I was trawling through many images of "foot washing" in order to see if there was anything corresponding to Ps 60:7–8 (MT 9–10) in ancient Near Eastern iconography (and the evidence is scarce), another image surfaced: that of Christ washing the disciples' feet. It provided a completely new insight into the radical nature of this symbolic act—that here the "Divine Warrior" is depicted as one who serves the enemy (I think here of the washing of Judas's feet, emphasized at the beginning of this passage) rather than imposing further humiliation on those who are already suffering. Probably my reading of John 13 needs some critical resistance as well. Nevertheless, celebrating a life of service is what this collection of papers is about, and so it is as good a place as any to end, as together we thank David for helping us to read biblical texts in a fresh light.

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34. Ibid., 56, citing Clines, *Interested Parties*, 19, 21.

35. Eryl W. Davies, "The Morally Dubious Passages of the Hebrew Bible: An Examination of Some Proposed Solutions," *CBR* 3 (2005): 222, cited in Siebert, *Violence*, 70–71.

36. Siebert, *Violence*, 119.



## SOLOMON: WISDOM'S MOST FAMOUS ASPIRANT

Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher

Wisdom's most established aspirant is also her most (in)famous disappointment. Equipped with a burning ambition to establish himself as a worthy successor on the throne of David and his ability for critical reflection, blessed with God's gift of a wise heart and the world's admiration, Solomon nonetheless deceives all hopes when he turns his back on Wisdom by following her rival "Lady Folly."

The image of Solomon as a wise king has been widely acknowledged. His role as wisdom's aspirant, however, is usually neglected. The many-voiced image of the great king presented in this story overwhelms the low-key portrait of Solomon as an inexperienced successor on the throne. Yet both concepts are part of Solomon's image as it is portrayed in 1 Kgs 1–11. While the image of the wisest king represents an external view, acknowledging his achievements, the image of a man searching for wisdom is part of Solomon's self-image. Introducing Solomon as a king still seeking wisdom opens an arc of suspense that reaches its climax only at the end of the story when Solomon misses his aim. As the story unfolds, it not only presents Solomon's wisdom and glory but simultaneously reveals an inherent line of uncertainty and open-endedness.

In the following survey I attempt to trace the different portraits of Solomon presented in this story, contrasting the glorious view on the king with the more critical image of an obedient but inexperienced Solomon.

### IMAGES OF THE KING

The story in 1 Kgs 1–11 presents Solomon from different points of view. His portrait resembles the view through a kaleidoscope reflecting his estimation in the various perspectives presented in the story. Thus the

narrating voice and various figures all contribute to the images of the king and his wisdom.

Solomon's portrayal rests mostly upon the presentation of the narrating voice. It shows Solomon as a king, able to take care of the organization of his kingdom, to bring prosperity and peace to his land and people, to carry out the building of the temple, and to administer justice. He is also said to possess immense knowledge, including science as well as fine arts and philosophy (1 Kgs 5:12–13), in such a way that he is wiser than any other men (5:10–11; 10:23–24) and able to stand up to any examination (10:1). This evaluation culminates in the summarizing remarks that people from all over the world come to hear Solomon's wisdom (5:14; 10:1; 10:24). Despite a detailed description of Solomon's actions and his achievements, the narration does not provide insight into Solomon's thoughts, wishes, or doubts but keeps a distant point of view throughout the story.

Solomon is portrayed as a strikingly quiet king. He hardly rises to speak and only offers a few glimpses on his plans, wishes, or fears. Even the narrating voice confines itself to a presentation of Solomon's activities, but it does not act as an external focalizer allowing insights into his thoughts. Information on the way that Solomon constructs his world is thus quite rare.<sup>1</sup> The only times a considerable amount of Solomon's direct speech is reported is in a dialogue with God (1 Kgs 3) and Solomon's prayer (1 Kgs 8). Both episodes show Solomon's wish to be an able king providing justice and welfare for his people. A wish for wealth or power, however, is never expressed in Solomon's own thoughts or words. His self-perception rather presents him as a humble man, wishing to listen and learn, fully aware that he is reliant on God's caring and mercy. This image is supplemented by the narrating voice's image of an obedient son following the ways and orders of his father (1 Kgs 2), which includes observing Yhwh's law, as David did (2:3; 3:3, 14). All other aspects of Solomon's private domain, especially his wisdom, are only presented by the narrating voice and other figures. Whether this perception corresponds to Solomon's self-perception is never told.<sup>2</sup>

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1. According to the "possible world theory," the figures of a story construct their own possible worlds. "Their actual world is reflected in their knowledge and beliefs, corrected in their wishes, replaced by a new reality in their dreams and hallucinations" (Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], 22).

2. This gap opens the possibility to expand the image of Solomon as it happens,

From Yhwh's point of view, Solomon is presented as David's son who still has to prove himself as a worthy successor. Although a positive attitude toward Solomon is obvious, God does not choose Solomon or put him on the throne.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, that the promise he receives is attached to an obligation emphasized by a threat of punishment cannot be overlooked (3:14; 9:3–9; 11:11).

Like Yhwh, David expresses his expectations of Solomon. His last words to his son also address him as a young man who has yet to show his abilities. He begins his speech with the request "be strong and become a man" (וְחִזַּקְתָּ וְהָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ),<sup>4</sup> and instructs his son where to start. He further introduces the first hints of Solomon's wisdom, urging him to "act according to his wisdom" (2:6) and calling him a "wise man" (2:9).

The most explicit approval of Solomon's wisdom is attributed to other rulers. From all the people admiring Solomon's wisdom (5:14; 10:24), two monarchs and their views are presented in detail, Hiram from Tyre (5:21) and the Queen of Sheba (10:7). Their words confirm the evaluation of the narrating voice—they recognize Solomon as a wise king. They furthermore take it for granted that Yhwh put Solomon on the throne (5:21; 10:9). From their external point of view, no doubt falls on Solomon's legitimation.

A short glimpse on the people's point of view offers a quite similar evaluation. There is, however, only one episode where the narrating voice presents the peoples' opinion. Hearing Solomon's judgment on the complicated case of one dead and one living child, "all Israel" acknowledges God's wisdom in the king's judgment and fear him (3:28). Their reaction shows that Solomon's desire has been answered and he is able to discern good and evil in order to provide justice. This aim of Solomon's wisdom, namely to bring justice to his people, is mentioned once more in the appraisal by the Queen of Sheba (10:9).

These different views of Solomon's wisdom emphasize two aspects of that wisdom: while Solomon's self-image, Yhwh's perspective, and his father David's point of view highlight the inexperienced young man who

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for instance, in Eccl 1:16. Here the description of the narrating voice, 1 Kgs 5:9–11, is turned into a self-statement by the king.

3. If it is "Yahweh's function as god to authorize the political authority of the king," he does so quite reluctantly in the Solomon story (David Clines, "Psalm 2 and the MLF [Moabite Liberation Front]," in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* [JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995], 252).

4. This expression is used as an encouragement in 1 Sam 4:9.

has yet to prove himself, his people as well as other monarchs acknowledge Solomon as an exceedingly wise king. These estimations are not presented as a development but they coexist describing different expectations. While the admiring view on Solomon's wisdom appreciates what he has already achieved, Yhwh, David, and Solomon himself emphasize the ongoing process of attaining wisdom.

#### WISDOM'S ASPIRANT

The image of the "young" and inexperienced Solomon is accentuated twice: in the last words of David he is asked to become a man; and in the dialogue with God, Solomon presents himself as a **נער קטן**. Both descriptions of a king not yet ready to rule raise the question of education and guidance quite urgently.

#### DOMINANT FATHER—OBEDIENT SON

The first model on how to become a man and a king is based on the relationship between father and son. David is presented as the father showing Solomon the (right) way, and Solomon fits the role of the obedient son. David's last words oblige Solomon to follow Yhwh's commandments in order to succeed in his reign (2:2) and to secure Yhwh's promise to David to establish his throne as an everlasting dynasty (2:3). The advice is handed out on two levels. First, a reminder to follow God's statutes points out the principle that every decision should observe God's rules as written in the "law of Moses" (2:3). The second counsel consists of specific instructions for dealing with three potentially dangerous men (2:5–9). This sequence suggests a logic arguing from the general to the particular. Following this kind of argumentation, David does not order Solomon to exact vengeance; he advises him to judge the mentioned men and bring them to their well-deserved fate (2:31–33). Removing evildoers from the community is presented as one of the king's duties in order to keep God's commands. By recognizing this context and acting adequately, Solomon should reveal his wisdom.

David proves himself a wise instructor by encouraging Solomon to live up to his father's expectations and to act according to his aptitude. The authoritative instruction leaves no doubt that David's advice is the correct way to act, and thus following his orders is wisdom. Furthermore, this advice is in line with Prov 20:8 and 26, where the duty of a king includes the distinction between the righteous and the evildoer and consequently



the elimination of the wicked from the community.<sup>5</sup> Solomon fulfills the expectations and proves himself the ideal son, listening to his father's teaching and keeping his commandments (cf. Prov 1:8; 4:1; 6:20; 13:1; 23:22). When Solomon carries out David's instructions he also adopts his father's line of argumentation and very carefully justifies the executions.

That David is a shining example for Solomon is emphasized once more in 1 Kgs 3:3. Loving God and walking in the statutes of David, thus following his ethical way of life,<sup>6</sup> are closely connected, and both statements are evaluated positively. The story blurs the difference between "walking in the statutes of David" and "keeping the commandments of Yhwh" by using them almost synonymously. When David instructs his son to keep God's commands (2:3), Solomon meets this request by following the statutes of his father (3:3).

Solomon defines himself through his father several times in the story.<sup>7</sup> Especially in the relationship between God and Solomon, it is always David who comes first, and Solomon is mentioned in his wake. Even in Solomon's own words, this order is observed. His reign is God's דסד for David (3:6).<sup>8</sup> Like Solomon's reign, his way before Yhwh is a mediated one. Solomon is portrayed as a son struggling to follow his father and to live up to his shining example. The differences between Solomon and David are emphasized several times. David received an unrestricted promise (2 Sam 7:12–15), but his descendants did not. In order to secure David's dynasty, they constantly have to prove themselves worthy to follow David (8:25; 9:4–9).

Despite the effort to show David as the exemplary father and Solomon as the ideal son, this presentation is not without a touch of doubt. The slightly mismatched combination of fatherly advice (1 Kgs 2:3–9), as well as the expression "walking in the statutes of David,"<sup>9</sup> offers a starting point for a critical *relecture*. The challenging question whether David's

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5. Cf. Stefan Wälchli, *Der weise König Salomo: Eine Studie zu den Erzählungen von der Weisheit Salomos in ihrem alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Kontext* (BWANT 141; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999), 178–79.

6. Jutta Hausmann, *Studien zum Menschenbild der älteren Weisheit* (Spr. 10ff) (FAT 7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 122.

7. Cf. also Solomon's self-introduction to Hiram (5:17–19).

8. By putting the reference to 2 Sam 7:12 into Solomon's own words, the narrating voice presents Solomon's subordination as filial obedience.

9. Other texts use the expression "walking in somebody's statutes" to refer to self-made laws and criticize such a behavior (cf. 2 Kgs 17:19; Mic 6:16).

advice is a wise counsel or whether the daring combination of God's law with his own ambitions for his dynasty is nothing more than a self-made law, namely, "David's statutes," is not expressed explicitly. The discrepancy between such questionable advice and an unquestioned compliance raises first doubts on Solomon's wisdom. Furthermore, despite Solomon's awareness that Israel might not be able to meet the expectations and fail (8:31ff.), his own possible failure does not come into focus. It remains a blind spot troubling the readers.

### A HEARING HEART

The core of Solomon's wisdom is presented as an oneiric dialogue with Yhwh (1 Kgs 3:5–14).<sup>10</sup> The dreamlike quality of this encounter is emphasized when God invites him to name his great dream. In his reply Solomon presents himself as a "small lad" (נֶעָר קָטָן), inexperienced in leading a people (vv. 7–8). He therefore asks for a "hearing heart" (לֵב שֹׁמֵעַ) in order to judge his people and to discern between good and evil (v. 9). With this wish, he asks to become an aspirant of wisdom par excellence. Several times Wisdom literature highlights the heart as the center of knowledge, and the place to remember the Torah; it points out how desirable a wise heart is (cf., e.g., Prov 22:17–18; 23:12, 15; 29:8; Eccl 9:1), and encourages its audience: "stretch out your heart to discernment" (Prov 2:2). The ability to hear and listen is also shown as an appropriate wise behavior (e.g., 8:33; 15:31; 22:17). It is not only the pupil or inexperienced who should listen but in particular the wise man (1:5; 12:15). Additionally, the value of a wise reprover is emphasized (25:12).

Solomon wants a hearing heart not for his own purpose but to fulfill his duty as king, judge, and military leader.<sup>11</sup> Reading this wish with reference to Eccl 10:16, a warning about a boy (נֶעָר) in the role of a king, we see Solomon portrayed as a cautious and self-critical young man. Furthermore, he is ambitious and wants to become Wisdom's disciple. This speech already shows Solomon as a wise man. Although he is already king

10. Dreams are an approved way of God addressing people (cf. 1 Sam 28:6); however, they are prone to raise doubts (cf. Deut 13:1–6; Jer 23:25–32; 29:8).

11. The wisdom that Solomon is asking for fits into a tradition of wisdom proclaiming that a just administration may produce a life-sustaining environment for all. See Walter Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Icon of Human Achievement* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 113.

and his kingdom is well established (1 Kgs 2:46), he presents himself as someone eager to learn and thus provides insight into his own inadequacy but also his knowledge on how to overcome it. This image of a humble and cautious man is continued in Solomon's prayer. Here he again shows his awareness of possible shortcomings and his anticipatory attempt to solve the problem.

The narrating voice tells us that God approves of this wish (3:10). When God answers (v. 11) he first repeats Solomon's request with a small variation: "you asked ... for understanding to hear judgment [הבין לשמע משפט],"<sup>12</sup> thereby further emphasizing the aspect of hearing.<sup>13</sup> What he grants Solomon is even more than he had asked for (vv. 12–13). The process Solomon envisioned—becoming wise, learning to judge and lead his people—however, is not mentioned again; instead God promises him a wise and discerning heart.

The wish for a listening heart in order to discern good and evil puts the desire for wisdom in a nutshell: one wishes for a critical awareness combined with the ability to understand and to evaluate all things perceived. In Gen 3:5–6 the desire "to know good and evil" is fulfilled only after a breach of commandment leading to severe consequences and making it quite obvious that the search for this ultimate point of view has just begun. Solomon's wish recognizes the knowledge gained in Gen 3 and (only) asks for the ability to cope with the difficult task. Once again, "knowing good and evil" is presented as a challenge but not as a possession.<sup>14</sup>

The explicit reference that Solomon recognized this encounter as a dream (1 Kgs 3:15) emphasizes that the whole dialogue mirrors Solomon's wish-world. Whether his desire is granted is yet to be seen.<sup>15</sup> Following the dream's promise, a double image of Solomon unfolds. On the one hand, he now becomes the exemplary wise king whose fame spreads throughout the whole world; on the other hand, Solomon still struggles to meet wisdom's challenge.

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12. The phrase "to hear judgment/justice" occurs only here. Similar are Ps 119:7, בלמדי משפטי צדקך "to learn your righteous judgments"; Ps 119:106, to keep (שמר) your righteous judgments; Prov 2:8, to guard (נצר) the paths of judgment.

13. It is not "doing [עשה] judgment," but to hear, to learn, and to keep justice.

14. Hugh Pyper reads the allusion to Gen 3 as a challenge to the appropriateness of desiring wisdom ("Judging the Wisdom of Solomon: The Two-Way Effect of Intertextuality," *JOT* 59 [1993]: 31).

15. Cf. *ibid.*, 30.

## THE WISE KING

The portrait of the great king is presented as a consequence of Solomon's wisdom. Not only does he prove himself a wise judge, worthy ruler, and builder of the temple, he also accumulates enormous wealth and fame.

The wish God grants Solomon in his dream constitutes a crucial element in the development and the legitimation of Solomon's reign. The story in 1 Kgs 1–11 never mentions that God has chosen Solomon or put him on the throne. It is always Solomon or somebody else (Hiram, Queen of Sheba) interpreting Solomon's reign as divine choice. The encounter with God in his dream, however, comes close to a divine selection. When God approves of Solomon's answer and grants him wisdom, it is at least a confirmation that God supports Solomon's attempt to follow David, and it is a divine gift that makes Solomon a great king. This dream sequence further offers a rare insight into Solomon's knowledge. He recognizes the dream and acknowledges it as God's word (3:15). As in Jacob's dream (Gen 28), the contour of Solomon's future is revealed. In the following events Solomon's reign is presented as "a time of unparalleled peace and prosperity,"<sup>16</sup> like a "Golden Age ... as cultural dream work, as wish-fulfillment."<sup>17</sup>

The gift of wisdom is also a source of wealth. The story makes an effort to show that wealth comes to Solomon almost by itself. Other kings bring their tributes and presents (1 Kgs 5:1; 10:10, 25), and Solomon's own ships bring in gold and silver (10:22). The narrating voice presents the accumulating wealth with admiration, but it does not show Solomon's attitude. The lack of any insight into his thoughts makes him appear almost indifferent to wealth.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the whole story, Solomon's prosperity is seen positively as an accompanying symptom of wisdom (cf. Prov 3:16). In this way, God's promise is fulfilled; riches are God's gift Solomon had not asked for.

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16. Pauline Viviano, "Glory Lost," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium* (ed. Lowell K. Handy; Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 11; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 344.

17. David Jobling, "The Value of Solomon's Age for the Biblical Reader," in Handy, *Age of Solomon*, 472.

18. Kim Ian Parker understands the accumulating wealth as a sign of self-aggrandizement ("Solomon as Philosopher King? The Nexus of Law and Wisdom in 1 Kings 1–11," *JOT 53* [1992]: 85).

The wise Solomon is able to become the ideal king who provides justice, righteousness, and stability as expected (cf. Prov 16:10, 12; 20:28; 29:4).<sup>19</sup> A few summaries further emphasize that Solomon's reign led to prosperity and happiness for Israel and Judah (1 Kgs 4:20; 5:5; 8:65–66). "For at least one brief moment in Israel's history, the entire nation is united under its ideal king."<sup>20</sup> Wisdom's proclamation: "Through me kings reign and rulers decree just laws; through me princes rule, great men and all the righteous judges" (Prov 8:15–16), appears to have come true.

The image of Solomon as an exceedingly wise man is pointed out by the narrating voice presenting Solomon's fields of knowledge as something he speaks about (1 Kgs 5:12–13). The narrative portrays Solomon not only as a wise king but also as teacher of wisdom to whom others come to listen (5:14; 10:24). During her visit, the Queen of Sheba further confirms this image of Solomon, who constantly emits wise speech (10:8). Although Solomon is presented as a fountain of wisdom, this image does not correspond to the pedagogically oriented image of a wisdom teacher in sapiential literature. The image of Solomon is more the sapiential sovereign impressing and entertaining his audience. "By the end of ch. 10 Solomon's inflated 'wisdom' is no longer judicial, proverbial or economic. It is simply the indeterminate element of Solomon's 'character' that makes him desirable, attracting gift-bearing admirers like a magnet."<sup>21</sup>

Solomon matches the image of a wise king more than any other biblical sovereign. Fitted with wisdom by the Deity, he gains a national and international reputation, builds the temple and cities, establishes an efficient administration, helps everybody to prosperity, and establishes peace in his kingdom.

### WISDOM CHALLENGED

Three times Solomon's wisdom is put to the test. It starts with a seemingly unsolvable law case, continues with an intellectual royal inspection, and ends with alluring suggestions. All three incidents are presented by women, thus alluding to a prototypically challenging aspect from the beginning.

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19. Cf. Stuart Lasine, "The Ups and Downs of Monarchical Justice: Solomon and Jehoram in an Intertextual World," *JSOT* 59 (1993): 37–53.

20. Parker, "Philosopher King," 82.

21. Lasine, "Ups and Downs," 44 n. 7.

## A LAW CASE (1 KGS 3:16–28)

The first test of Solomon's wisdom is presented by two women applying to Solomon as judge. The challenge Solomon has to meet is to decide between two contradictory statements with no further evidence or witnesses. However, not only is the welfare of a child at stake, but this case also challenges the fundamental value of motherly love, and it shows the limits of any ability to make decisions.<sup>22</sup>

By reaching a verdict, Solomon proves that he is able to convince his audience and to reestablish order to a chaotic situation. "Managed by wisdom, the proper distinctions are made and socially acceptable relationships symbolically established."<sup>23</sup> Although the women's contradictory statements are never unraveled and the circumstances leading to the death of one child are not solved, the readers are able to see Solomon's verdict as a solution of the case. The way Solomon reaches his verdict might appear brutal and inept at first sight, but it triggers the necessary responses from the women and the audience. The people are willing to applaud the strategy because Solomon cleverly uses commonsense psychology that is based on the assumption of an "inherent stability of human nature." Whether Solomon's solution gets at the truth of the situation is never learned. Yet the audience wants to believe in the "compassionate self-sacrifice of a genuine mother."<sup>24</sup> With the desire for stable categories restored and the anxiety of not being able to decide between truth and falsehood stilled, the people are willing to admit that "the wisdom of God was in his midst" (1 Kgs 3:28). In this way they confirm that Solomon is a wise king whose source of righteousness is God (Prov 21:1).

## A STATE VISIT (1 KGS 10:1–10, 13)

After Solomon was able to successfully prove his wisdom on a national level, the next challenge has an international context.<sup>25</sup> The Queen of Sheba is introduced by the narrating voice as a wealthy monarch, a wise

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22. Ibid., 38.

23. Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (JSOTSup 320; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 168.

24. Pyper, "Wisdom of Solomon," 26.

25. Cf. Andreas Kunz-Lübcke, *Salomo: Von der Weisheit eines Frauenliebhabers* (Biblische Gestalten 8; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004), 247.

and strange woman, and a critic, who has come to test Solomon's wisdom. However, the challenge the queen stands for, the testing of Solomon's wisdom with riddles, is not depicted. Once more the narrating voice only presents a summary stating that Solomon had answers for all her questions (10:2) and thus proved himself as a wise man (Prov 1:6). The queen praises Solomon and expresses all the admiration that is expected from a foreign monarch on a state visit. Hence she confirms that Solomon is among the greatest of kings. Placed at the end of Solomon's successful reign, this story turns out to be the culmination of Solomon's fame and the reversal point in one. The approval of the wise, powerful, and wealthy Queen of Sheba strongly supports Solomon's reputation as a monarch. However, that the most elaborate description of a state visit presents a queen adds a dimension of strangeness and unpredictability to this story. Although the image of the alluring strange woman is not explored in this story, it is alluded to and foreshadows a turning point.<sup>26</sup>

#### THE STRANGE WOMEN (1 Kgs 11:1–8)

The last and final challenge is set in Solomon's family, the private sphere of his harem. Unlike the previous events, it is not unfolded as an episode but only summarized by the narrating voice focusing on the outcome. When Solomon fails, he is no longer granted any sympathy. Corresponding to his former glorious image, his condemnation is exuberant.

The last challenge Solomon has to meet is a prototypical situation of every wisdom aspirant. He is confronted with alluring foreign women (cf. Prov 5:1–6). The size of the royal harem (1 Kgs 11:1) not only emphasizes Solomon's prosperity but also points out the overpowering threat of foreign women, who could turn his heart.<sup>27</sup> It is stated twice that Solomon loved (אהב) these women (vv. 1, 2).<sup>28</sup> The prohibition to marry foreign women

26. Cf. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, "She Came to Test Him with Hard Questions': Foreign Women and Their View on Israel," *BibInt* 15 (2007): 139–41.

27. Cf. Stuart Lasine, "The King of Desire: Indeterminacy, Audience, and the Solomon Narrative," *Semeia* 71 (1995): 94.

28. The verb אהב is used five times to describe a relationship in the Solomon story. Solomon loved Yhwh (3:3); Hiram had loved David (5:15); the Queen of Sheba states that Yhwh loves Israel forever (10:9); and in 11:1–2 it is twice noted that Solomon loved many foreign women. Solomon's emotional affection to these women is expressed in the phrase דבק ... לאהבה. The combination of the verbs אהב and דבק

is still cited as a warning. The readers are reminded that such women are dangerous because they threaten to turn a man's heart to their deities.<sup>29</sup>

As long as Solomon loved Yhwh, he was on the safe side. He, however, failed in the end (v. 14).<sup>30</sup> Although he had been aware of the danger that his people might turn away from Yhwh (cf. 8:57–58), he seems not to have been aware of his own risk.

#### REMEMBERING SOLOMON

Solomon's portrait represents all the stages of someone searching for wisdom: he resembles the inexperienced man, the son listening to his father, the sovereign who brings justice and prosperity to his people, and the unrivaled wise king. All these aspects are present simultaneously and mutually dependent. However, Solomon's portrait also includes the fool, unable to resist women. The story's construction of Solomon's worldview offers a glimpse into the man behind the glorious image that others construct of him. It shows a man who could not live up to the expectations of the great king others take him for.

The seemingly stable image of a wise king is contrasted by the more dynamic image of an aspirant who still might fail. The dialogue between these two images is a constant reminder that wisdom cannot be possessed permanently, but has to be strived for continuously. If wisdom is defined as "sustained critical reflection on lived experience in order to discern the hidden shape of reality,"<sup>31</sup> the image of Solomon as wisdom's aspirant could be read as such a critical perspective. In this way, the double-voiced image of Solomon emphasizes the value of wisdom. It shows an exemplary case of what could be achieved, but it also accentuates the pitfalls and blind spots. Solomon is a wise king but he still remains wisdom's aspirant. The double perspective permits one to hold onto an ideal image, but simultaneously it enables a critical observation of kings in office and it also

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usually refers to a relationship between humans and God (Deut 11:22; 30:20; Josh 22:5).

29. The image of the strange and alien woman in Prov 7 explicitly states that she turns/bends the heart of a young, naive man (v. 21) and he follows her like an ox for slaughter (v. 22).

30. The fall of the great king is also remembered in Neh 13:26; Sir 47:18–19. Cf. Lasine, "King of Desire," 104.

31. Brueggemann, *Solomon*, 105.



encourages a critical view on the memory of great kings, advising caution regarding too homogeneous an image. It does not diminish their greatness or achievements but neither does it conceal their faults.

Unlike David, Solomon does not become a (biblical) role model for a king: he failed and destabilized the great kingdom. Still, this does not prevent him from being remembered as an exemplary wise king, leaving the temple and his wisdom as his legacy.<sup>32</sup> In this way, the image of Solomon is able to outlive the political existence of the kingdom. He already has lost his realm, but his legendary wisdom was able to live on in the kingless social configuration of the postexilic period.<sup>33</sup> The image of the fallible man searching for wisdom adds a critical but also confident vantage point: it encourages looking behind seemingly well-established images, and it still holds on to the optimistic opinion that it is possible to gain wisdom and with it justice, prosperity, and peace.

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32. When sapiential literature picked up Solomon as its patron, it obviously was not a problem to build on this image and to add the only image of a wise man that Solomon is still lacking, namely as a teacher of wisdom.

33. Camp, *Strange*, 185.



## THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR: THE ELIHU SPEECHES IN PERSONAL VOICE PERSPECTIVE\*

Mayer I. Gruber

In the second of his three monumental volumes on the book of Job in the Word Bible Commentary series, David Clines notes that, in the modern period, Elias Busitas in 1772 was the first scholar to suggest that the Elihu speeches found in Job, chapters 32–37, constituted later editions to the book of Job.<sup>1</sup>

As Clines points out, among the reasons commonly advanced in favor of the idea that the Elihu speeches are not integral to the original design of the book of Job, we may mention three arguments:<sup>2</sup>

1. Unlike the other speakers in the book, Elihu has not been referred to in the narrative prologue, and will not be mentioned in the epilogue.

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\* It is an honor and a pleasure for me to present this study in honor of David J. A. Clines, who exemplifies that rare combination of meticulous scholarship, openness, friendliness, seriousness about the things that matter, and a delightful sense of humor, which make him a model of what people ought to be and what biblical scholars, in particular, should strive to be.

1. David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37* (WBC 18A; Waco, Tex.: Word, 2006), 708. The commentary to which Clines refers there is *Sermonum Eliae Busitae carminibus religiosi antiquissimis intertextorum ex Jobi capp. 23–37* (Rostock: 1789–1790). As noted by Clines, Elias Busitas was anticipated by Gersonides (1288–1344) in his commentary, ad loc. For that commentary see Abraham L. Lassen, *The Commentary of Levi ben Gerson (Gersonides) on the Book of Job* (New York: Bloch, 1946). With Clines see the extensive discussion in H. M. Wahl, “Seit wann gelten die Elihureden (Hi. 32–37) als Einschub?” *BN* 63 (1992): 58–61; M. Witte, “Noch einmal: Seit wann gelten die Elihureden im Hiobbuch (Kap. 32–37) als Einschub?” *BN* 67 (1993): 20–25.

2. Clines, *Job 21–37*, 708–9.

2. The speeches of Elihu could be omitted without loss to the book, and one can even say that “the dramatic power of the book is heightened by the omission of his speeches.”<sup>3</sup>
3. The style of the Elihu speeches and narrative differs from that of the book elsewhere; it is “prolix, laboured and tautological; the power and brilliancy which are so conspicuous in the poem generally are sensibly wanting.”<sup>4</sup>

Clines responds that:

1. An editor capable of inserting the Elihu speeches in an existing book of Job would be capable also of making minimal adjustments to prologue and epilogue to incorporate his character within the framework of the book.
2. A judgment of the dramatic dynamics of the book is a matter of opinion.
3. The point is conceded that Elihu is differently portrayed from the other friends; but the poet is capable enough to have managed to create a distinctive figure in the young man Elihu, and there is no argument here in favor of another author.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Clines points out that in recent years there has been a backlash against the almost universal relegation of the Elihu speeches to the realm of the secondary intrusion. Scholars whom Clines mentions as part of the backlash are Norman Habel, J. Gerald Janzen, Robert Gordis, David Noel Freedman, and Edwin M. Good.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Good argues:

Elihu’s significance lies in two points. First, he interprets suffering somewhat differently from the friends, though his proposal does not carry the debate forward any distance. Second, he heightens our anxiety about the

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3. Here Clines quotes James Strahan, *The Book of Job Interpreted* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913), 267.

4. Cf. George Buchanan Gray in Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), xlvii. Gray is quoting Driver’s *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (10th ed.; 1900; repr., New York: Meridian, 1956), 429; Driver seems to have influenced Strahan, *Job*, 24.

5. Clines, *Job 21–37*, 709.

6. *Ibid.*

deity's response to Job's curses, intervening at this monotonous length between our expectations that the god will appear and his actual appearance. The longer Elihu talks, the more nervous we get that the deity might not appear. That raising of emotional temperature justifies Elihu's presence structurally and provides him with a dramatic function.<sup>7</sup>

We must recall that the exclusion of the Elihu speeches from the original design of the author of the book of Job fits in well with earlier tendencies to atomize the elements in the present book of Job, so as to sever the prose prologue and epilogue from the book, and to go so far as to assert that the author of the symposium between Job and his three friends in chapters 3–31 never saw the prose prologue.

Consequently, Moses Buttenwieser, back in 1922, found it worthwhile to list in his commentary fourteen of the most prominent modern critical scholars of Hebrew Scripture who saw the prologue and the epilogue as integral to the design of the author of the poetry contained in chapters 3–31.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Buttenwieser found it necessary to remind readers that, lest there be any doubt, the picture of Job as bereft of his children and himself severely ill, the situations that create the setting for the visit of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (in 2:11–13), is not unique to the prologue. It is taken for granted and even mentioned explicitly in the symposium. For example, Job describes his illness in 7:5: "My flesh is covered with maggots and clods of earth; my skin is broken and festering."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, in 19:17–20, the tragic hero of the book of Job declares, "My odor is repulsive to my wife; I am loathsome to my womb mates<sup>10</sup> ... my bones stick to my flesh." Moreover, Bildad mentions the death of Job's children in 8:4, "If your children sinned against him [God], he dispatched them for their

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7. Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job, with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 321.

8. Moses Buttenwieser, *The Book of Job* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 5. These distinguished commentators are H. Ewald, A. Merx, O. Zöckler, Franz Delitzsch, E. Reuss, A. Dillmann, A. B. Davidson, J. F. Genung, J. Meinhold, A. Klostermann, K. Kautzsch, J. Hontheim, and Karl Steuernagel.

9. Translation follows NJPS.

10. I take בְּנֵי בִטְנִי taken to mean "siblings," i.e., "the children who shared, not necessarily simultaneously as twins, the very womb from which I emerged at birth"; this interpretation is reflected in the rendering "my own brothers" found in NIV (1984) and the New American Standard Bible (1971).

transgression.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the tragic hero of the book of Job mentions, in 29:5, his children surrounding him (when they were alive and God was at Job’s side) as a thing of the past.

On more than one occasion, I presented orally my argument that the book of Job is less a symposium on the problem of evil and more a description of what goes wrong when, with the best of intentions, three old friends go to visit the sick and comfort the mourner but they end up insulting him. Members of the audience responded to this with radical amazement to learn that the poetry of the book of Job actually refers to a visit to the house of mourning and/or sickbed, and not to a theological symposium as one might expect to be conducted at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.<sup>12</sup> In the end God vindicates Job in his refusal to be cowed by his friends’ insulting behavior. Unfortunately, as happens in real life, not only do the friends, who came with the best of intentions but got carried away, insult Job. He also insults them back, when for example he tells them in 13:5, “Would that you people would keep silent. That silence would count as wisdom.”

And so, as I argued, the book of Job is not a symposium in which learned theologians debate whether God can be justified in the face of sickness and death. It is rather a credible demonstration of what can go wrong in a hospital visit or visit to the house of mourning, complete without theologians’ justification of God, but with God’s justification of Job, whose friends add insult to injury.<sup>13</sup>

I should point out that what inspired my own obsession with the book of Job was only in part my fascination with the study of the book of Job as carried on by my mentors, H. L. Ginsberg and Robert Gordis. My obsession was fostered also by what is today called not only life experience but personal voice criticism.<sup>14</sup> I believe that I first came to understand what

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11. Translation follows NJPS.

12. For the fully footnoted version of my arguments see Mayer I. Gruber, “The Book of Job as Anthropodicy,” *BN* 136 (2008): 59–71.

13. *Ibid.*

14. For my contributions to personal voice criticism see, inter alia, “A Re-evaluation of Hosea 1–2: Philology Informed by Life Experience,” in *The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger; London: Routledge, 1999), 170–82; idem, “The Personal Voice of the Listening Heart,” in *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism* (ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger; Leiden: Deo, 2002), 97–104; see also “Three Failed Dialogues from the Biblical World,” *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 22 (1998): 51–64; “Human and Divine Wisdom in the Book of Job,” in *Boundaries of the Ancient*

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have done to Job from my experience as a student rabbi in Harrison, New York, in the winter of 1970. The remains of the son of a prominent member of the synagogue were brought home from Stowe, Vermont, after a fatal skiing accident. The parents, to use the Jewish expression, sat shivah, which is to say that, like Job and his friends in Job 2:13, they sat either on the floor or on low benches or cushions for seven (Heb. *shiv'ah*) days, as their friends, relatives, and neighbors came to express their condolences. The difference is that before Job's friends responded to Job's death wish in chapter 3 with their series of insults, Job and his friends sat on the ground in silence for seven days and seven nights. The mother of the victim of the skiing accident had no such luck. A lady walked straight up to her and said, "Why are you making such a fuss? You have five other children!" At that moment I fully understood that the highfalutin philology I had learned from Robert Gordis, H. L. Ginsberg, and Moshe Held, all of blessed memory, could be put to very good use in showing, on the basis of Job 42 in particular and the book of Job as a whole, that insulting a mourner is not biblically correct, and that empathetic listening, which is what Job asks of his friends, is indeed biblically correct, especially during a hospital call or during a visit to a house of mourning.

What is now called personal voice criticism helped me to convey to scholars, students, and lay audiences the truth that biblical philology can only strengthen the arguments that indeed, the Job of the poetry, no less than the Job of the prose prologue and epilogue, is both sick and bereft. In the same way, one day in Beer Sheva a year or so ago, I came to understand just what might be the meaning of Elihu's intrusion in chapters 32–37. In Job 32 Elihu introduces himself to us because the author of the prose framework never mentions him. Likewise, God, Job, and the three other named persons who came to visit Job—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—all ignore both Elihu's presence and his message.

Consequently, I now call Elihu the unexpected comforter. What happened to me in this role of unexpected comforter? Someone I know from the workplace and from around town, whom we will call for convenience Dr. Green, passed away, and I went to pay my respects. Having learned from Jewish rules (derived, in fact, from Job 2:13) that one is not supposed to open one's mouth in a house of mourning unless and until addressed

by the mourner or mourners, I sat in silence until addressed.<sup>15</sup> Finally, a son-in-law of the deceased addressed me to inform me that I was sitting in the wrong kind of chair. It was a half-low chair that could not obviously be recognized as a mourner's special low chair. I replied that from the book of Job, we learn that Job and his friends sat on the floor together for seven days and seven nights, and that no one said anything until addressed by a member of the family—and that now I was free to tell them that I shared their loss. The young man replied, "We do not go by that." I truly believe that what he did not go by was my sitting in the wrong kind of chair. Subsequently, one of the daughters said, "My husband did not approve of the chair you sat in." I replied, "I can live with that, too. And I share your loss." After another fifteen minutes, I said the appropriate words recited upon leaving a house of mourning and went on my way. Later, one of my neighbors who had been present throughout this scenario said to me that later on the widow of the deceased had asked, "Who was that unidentified visitor?" The neighbor replied to the widow, "He is Professor Gruber." The widow responded, "Oh! Too bad that I did not know. My husband really admired him." The neighbor apologized to me for not introducing me, and I told her not to worry about it, as it was not her problem.

Then I said to myself, "Wait a minute!" Deliberately or otherwise, in the book of Job in its present form, we have not only what becomes a very unpleasant series of diatribes exchanged between Job and his three well-known friends, but a depiction of what happens when the supposed outsider appears—perhaps he was a friend of one of the three daughters or one of the seven sons of whom Job was bereft. Often she or he is ignored, and the mourners are not to be blamed. They are not situated there to host and entertain, but to be listened to with empathy when and if they have something to say.

Perhaps one might say that Job could have behaved better toward his famous friends, rather than telling them to shut up. However, as to Job's silence in the face of Elihu's unsolicited message, Elihu himself justifies this very silence when he asks the rhetorical question in Job 37:20, "Can a man say anything when he is confused?" I found this translation in the

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15. For the rule and its sources in rabbinic literature and the literature of halakah see b. Mo'ed Qaṭan 28b; Shulḥan Aruk, Yoreh De'ah 376:1; see also Gruber, "Book of Job as Anthropodicy," 63 n. 10; idem, "Job, Book of," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (ed. Fred Skolnik; 22 vols.; 2nd ed.; Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 11:356a, s.v. "In Halakhah and Liturgy."



NJPS prepared by Moshe Greenberg, Jonas Greenfield, and Nahum M. Sarna, all of blessed memory. I find it adumbrated in Gordis's commentary; he compares the verb *יִבְלֶעַ* "he will be confused" to the use of the same root in Isa 19:3; 28:7; Pss 55:10; 107:27.<sup>16</sup> I would now go one step further and suggest that in 37:19–20 Elihu addresses not Job but God, and he asks God in 37:19a, "Teach us what we shall say to him [i.e., Job]." Elihu certainly was not asking Job to tell us what to say to God. After all, Elihu has come to answer Job, not to ask him what to say to God.

Elihu continues in 37:19b, "We cannot draw up our case because of the all-embracing darkness."<sup>17</sup> There follows immediately Elihu's two-part rhetorical question in 37:20: "Can he [Job] be told anything when I speak? Can he say anything when he is confused?" Apparently, Elihu has surmised from Job's body language that he, Elihu, has not gotten through to Job.

The second half of the rhetorical question addressed to God is, following NJPS, "Can a man say anything when he is confused?" Here Elihu suggests that his inability to get through to Job does not derive from the fact that he, Elihu, is the unanticipated comforter unmentioned in the prologue and the epilogue, and never addressed by either Job or Job's three named friends. On the contrary, Elihu tells us, his inability to get through to Job is a function of the fact that Job is in severe physical pain because of his illness, and in severe distress over the loss of his children and virtually everything he possessed. Perhaps Elihu might have stopped here. However, Elihu, like the rest of us, was human, and therefore, after asking for God's help, Elihu sought to have the last word in 37:21–24, which is another panegyric to God reminiscent of Eliphaz's words in 5:9–16 and the words of Zophar in 11:7–12.

We might well consider the possibility that, by design or not, the book of Job as we know it portrays not only the mourner and the three famous failed comforters, but also the words of the unexpected comforter, who might have said just the right thing had he stopped at 37:20 with the words, "Can a person say anything when she/he is confused?" The obvious answer to this rhetorical question is that neither Job nor his three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—should be blamed for having insulted each other

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16. Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (Moresheet Series 2; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 429.

17. Gordis's translation, *ibid.*, 410, 431.

in a conversation that got out of hand. However, the canonical book of Job ending in Job 42 will not let Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar off quite so easily. Likewise, it will not let us, the readers of the book of Job, off so easily in our interpersonal encounters. Instead, it asks that Job pray to God to forgive them for having repeatedly insulted a person who was extremely sick and bereft of seven sons and three daughters. One of the many abiding messages of the book of Job is, therefore, that we should all be careful to think and think again before opening our mouths to anyone else wherever we might be, even if circumstances make us more than a bit confused.

## READING AS AN EARTH BEING: REREADING GENESIS 2–3—AGAIN

Norman C. Habel

I am honored to contribute to this Festschrift for a fellow Australian. I especially appreciate the support David has given for the publication of the Earth Bible series and the forthcoming Earth Bible commentaries. And I applaud his scholarly contributions to the interpretation of many biblical texts, especially the book of Job.

The reception of Gen 2–3 has been a hermeneutical issue for several thousand years. The orientation of the readers of this text has changed radically, from generation to generation and from culture to culture, especially in recent years.

In 1963 I was invited to deliver a paper on this text to a body of religious heavyweights and spell out “the meaning of the text then and there.” A formidable task indeed! These religious leaders expected I would be critical of historical criticism. When I suggested that the text might be “more than history,” even in the mind of the original readers, one of the church dignitaries suggested I might be guilty of heresy.

For more than sixty years I have received this text personally and professionally to ascertain its possible meaning in a range of diverse contexts. During my days at the seminary we even found a promise of the Messiah embedded in the curses of chapter 3 (3:15). During my teaching career I read the text as a Lutheran lecturer, a biblical exegete, and a religious studies professor. In recent years, I have read the text employing the techniques of ecological hermeneutics, techniques articulated in my new commentary, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth*.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I plan to take another step and receive the text as an Earth being.

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1. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011.

## MY BEING

I am not only a human being; I am also an Earth being, one among millions of other Earth beings, past, present, and future. As an Earth being, I belong to a fragile web of interconnected and interdependent fragments and forces on this planet that reach deep into cosmic time and space. I am born of Earth and composed of soil, air, and water.

I am made of the very matter that permeates this planet. And a fragment of matter that emanated in primordial times from somewhere in the cosmos constitutes the living planet we call Earth; that same matter evolved into conscious Earth beings who reflect the spiritual embedded in the material.

Being an Earth being means:

I have evolved from Earth; Earth is my mother.

I am dependent on Earth; Earth is my habitat, my life source.

I am kin with all other living beings on Earth.

I am welcome on Earth; Earth is my host and my home.

I now plan to read Gen 2–3 aware of these dimensions of my self, my identity as an Earth being, rather than a human being who assumes superiority over other living species. I plan to explore how, in this text, God relates to me as an Earth being, to my mother Earth, and my fellow Earth beings.

## MY MOTHER

The story begins with my mother, Earth, who is barren, devoid of rain, and without anyone to take care of the *'ādāmā*, my mother's fertile domain (Gen 2:5–6). This image is parallel in many ways to the portrayal of Earth as a once barren piece of star dust, an embryonic planet from which life impulses emerged and Earth beings evolved.

From the *'ādāmā*, the fertile soil of my mother, God, like a primal potter, molds *'ādām*, the first Earth creature (Gen 2:7). The Earth nature of this first creature is apparent from his name, *'ādām*, “Earth being” or “Earth one.” In the language of this myth, my mother's *'ādāmā* gives birth to *'ādām*.

God then breathes air into the nostrils of this Earth being, who comes to life. This air or breath from God is not a spiritual entity, but the very

atmosphere we breathe as Earth beings.<sup>2</sup> This breath/air/atmosphere is still part of Mother Earth today and still sustains us. In this passage human beings are Earth beings (*'ādām*) made up of soil and air.

Then, at the impulse of God, my mother gives birth to a forest called Eden (2:8–9). The forest consists of a range of trees, some of which are expressions of beauty and splendor while others serve to provide sustenance for Earth beings. From the very beginning—according to this myth and to contemporary ecology—my mother has given birth to, and nurtured, forests that are vital to the life of the planet.

Two mysterious trees are also planted in this forest, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. The presence of these trees highlights the character of this narrative as myth, as embracing the domain of primordial mystery in the primordial world of nature, a world in which Earth beings are in personal dialogue with the Divine.

### MY MISSION

The mission of the first Earth being was to take care of his mother's forests (Gen 2:15). According to the narrator, God placed the first Earth being in the forest to *'ābad* and *šāmar*. These two verbs are crucial to appreciate the mission or calling of the first Earth being. The usual meaning of *'ābad* is “to serve” as would a servant in a palace or a priest in a temple. The focus seems to be on caring and nurture, not exploitation or dominion.

The verb *šāmar* normally means “to preserve, keep, or sustain.” The mission of the first Earth being then is to serve and sustain the fertile forests of Mother Earth. As an Earth being living in the current environmental crisis, this mission still resonates with me. I hear Earth calling me to care for her fields and her forests. Earth, it seems, also receives this text as relevant today as she calls us home to sustain her.

God then decides that the first Earth being should have a partner to support him in this calling. To this end, God forms more Earth beings from the *'ādāmā*, the fertile domain of Earth. These include animals and birds of every species. All of these Earth beings are then brought to the

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2. Theodore Hiebert, “Air, the First Sacred Thing: The Conception of *ruach* in the Hebrew Scriptures,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger; SBLSymS 46; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 9–19.

first Earth being, who names his brothers and sisters. The naming of these Earth beings is not an expression of authority over them, but of kinship and relationship. All living creatures are my kin, evolving from the same *'ādāmā* of Earth.

After naming these new Earth beings, the first Earth being becomes aware that these new Earth beings are of a somewhat different nature and not really suitable to be personal partners who can consciously support him in his mission. It is important to note that these Earth beings are not inferior creatures, but potential “partners” who can work with the first Earth being.

My mission, like that of the first Earth being, is not therefore one of authority over other Earth creatures, but one of potential partnership with them and with Mother Earth. The primal calling that Adam heard from the Creator is the calling I now hear from Earth herself. Earth is calling me when I receive this text personally in the context of an Earth battered by human greed.

A new Earth being, a woman, is then created by God to be a personal partner to sustain this mission in the forest of Eden. Matter from the first Earth being is selected by God to mold this final Earth being—a woman.

#### MY BROTHER

One of the Earth beings that is born of Mother Earth is my brother, the snake. I probably think of the snake as a brother because of the long history of reception of this text. I could, of course, think of the snake as a feminine Earth being, my sister. Why not? In line, however, with my reception tradition, I shall continue to describe the snake as my brother.

Now my brother happens to be very smart (Gen 3:1), or in the wisdom language of the text, very *'ārûm*, a term that means “astute, insightful, clever.” A relevant text from the book of Proverbs reads: “The simple believe everything, but the astute [*'ārûm*] consider their steps” (Prov 14:15).

My brother, the snake, represents the voice of wisdom. The snake is an astute voice in the context of a world that knows only good and is apparently ignorant of another world of good and bad realities. The snake, like God, seems to be “in the know.” To declare my brother devious in any way is to devalue, without justification, one of the children of *'ādāmā*.

It is the wisdom of the snake that sets him apart; my brother apparently knows more about the ways of God than humans do and becomes

the agent for revealing reality.<sup>3</sup> The opening question of the snake, therefore, is one designed to challenge the “simple” understanding of reality known to the primal pair. In Socratic fashion he asks the woman whether God has forbidden humans to eat from all the trees in the forest, a question that she can answer and be led into further conversation.

My brother suggests, with good reason, that eating will lead to enlightenment. Eyes will be opened to realities heretofore unknown. This possibility makes the option exciting and enticing. And the enlightenment promised is precisely what happens at the climax of this scene. Eating the fruit means taking the risk of Earth beings seeing a world beyond the innocence of Eden.

With eyes open to new realities, life is more than the good and innocent world of Eden. Life is about knowing and experiencing both sides of reality, good and bad, pleasure and pain, life and death. Outside Eden there is a radically different ecosystem and set of social values. Again, my brother does not lie!

It is common for interpreters of this text to follow the lead of past receivers who viewed my brother as Satan incarnate in reptile form. But the text refers only to an Earth being, a friendly snake! And that Earth being, like many others, including the ant (Prov 6:6), is an agent that mediates wisdom. As an Earth being, I am also interested in exploring nature to discern its distinctive ways, the wisdom embedded in the domains and beings of nature.<sup>4</sup> Yes, I am still in tune with an Earth brother or sister who will help me gain enlightenment through the wisdom implanted in nature.

### MY BODY

As a result of eating from the tree, the primal pair does not drop dead, but experiences a new reality: their eyes are opened. They see the world as never before. They know something about both the good and the bad, about who they are as Earth beings and what life means with other Earth beings. They realize they are naked Earth beings and must do something about it. They are no longer “simple” and innocent but on the way to wisdom, knowing something of the “good and evil” in life that God already knows.

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3. Cameron Howard, “Animal Speech as Revelation in Genesis 3 and Numbers 22,” in Habel and Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, 21–30.

4. Norman C. Habel, “The Implications of God Discovering Wisdom in Earth,” in *Job 28: Cognition in Context* (ed. Ellen van Wolde; BIS 64; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 281–98.

They are now aware of themselves as a distinct species of Earth being conscious of themselves as naked. And, as Carol Newsom points out, “nakedness” as a concept is normally applied only by human beings to human beings.<sup>5</sup> The man and the woman become conscious of themselves as a discrete species, namely, human beings. Before their eyes were opened, all Earth beings—the humans and the animals—apparently lived together with no such consciousness. And that moment is one that evolutionary scientists discern as the evolution of human consciousness.

This eye-opening experience, this consciousness of self as human, separates the man and the woman—whether for good or ill—from the rest of the Earth beings, not in a dualistic way but in terms of known evolutionary classifications. Humans, who once lived in innocent harmony with all other naked creatures, are now clothed, capable of shame and a sense of differentiation.

This new consciousness may perhaps be identified as the birth of anthropocentrism and the root of ecological sin.<sup>6</sup> The ideal world of Eden, where all species live naked and in harmony, has changed. The post-Eden world of reality involves human beings conscious of their apparent separateness from other Earth beings from the moment of their enlightenment.

As I receive this text, I become acutely conscious of my own body as a crucial part of my identity as an Earth being. In the evolution of Earth beings, my body along with my mind is distinguished from—but not necessarily superior to—all other Earth beings. My body is animated soil with an enlightened mind like that of the first Earth being.

### MY PAIN

The most painful lines of this narrative for me as an Earth being are the curses pronounced by God (Gen 3:14–19). My brother told the truth and enabled the enlightenment of the primal pair. Yet my brother is cursed more than any other Earth being. He is condemned to crawl on his belly all his life and experience the humiliation of eating “dust,” the very soil of life from Mother Earth with which the first Earth being was made (2:7).

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5. Carol A. Newsom, “Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 2–3,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst; Earth Bible 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 69.

6. *Ibid.*, 70.



I feel the pain of my brother, who in no way deserves to be designated a “soil sucker.”

Just as painful is the divine message to the woman. Her body is to experience pain in childbirth, a reality that is common to all Earth beings outside Eden. Even more uncomfortable is the announcement that she, as the female Earth being, will lust after her male counterpart and that he will rule over her (Gen 3:16).

This pronouncement separates human Earth beings into two distinct identities that reflect an ancient social view of reality rather than a consciousness of the natural order of Earth beings. Just as all Earth beings are interconnected and complement one another in the ecosystems of this planet, so too male and female human beings are partner Earth beings—in the mission to preserve our planet.

The third curse is perhaps the most painful of all, if I read as an Earth being. The fertile ground of Mother Earth is cursed! Mother Earth has done nothing to deserve this curse; she is the life source of all Earth beings. Why should she suffer because of the action of one male human being? Why should she be the scapegoat?

In spite of the fact that *’ādāmā* is the source of life in Eden, the fertile ground from which humans are made, and where the forest garden is planted, and in spite of the mission of *’ādām* to “serve” and preserve this forest garden, it is *’ādāmā* who receives the curse. Not only does *’ādāmā* give birth to *’ādām*, but like many a mother, she suffers for her child. Nowhere has *’ādāmā* been implicated in the actions that have provoked the divine curses; she is an innocent bystander! As a child of Mother Earth, I am appalled!

The cruelty in this context is that *’ādāmā* suffers at the hands of a God who changes the way of life for humans from forest living to arduous agriculture. It is God who creates alienation between *’ādām* and *’ādāmā*, between Earth beings and Earth. According to the narrator, it seems, the enlightenment of humans is translated by God into the devaluation of nature.

Instead of simply enjoying the fruits of the forest, *’ādām* must now toil in such a way as to produce “field crops” to survive. In that process, *’ādāmā* will also produce thorns and thistles, which will make agriculture more difficult. In fact, thorns and thistles thrive especially where soil has been disturbed. The fertility ecosystem of *’ādāmā* is upset by the venture of this Earth being into arduous agriculture—at the instigation of this God.

The pain I feel is one of empathy for my mother Earth, who must suffer a curse from God that makes life difficult for humans. How can I

receive this God into my world? The potential abuse of Earth is here laid at the feet of God.

### MY RETURN

The close of the curses (3:19) includes lines often associated with death and funerals as the celebrant intones “ashes to ashes and dust to dust.” The key line, however, speaks of the first Earth being returning home to Mother Earth, to the very soil (*’ădāmâ*) from which he emerged. That Earth here welcomes her child back home is well articulated by Shirley Wurst in her article “Beloved Come Back to Me.”<sup>7</sup>

As an Earth being, I recognize in this tradition an expression of the ecological reality intrinsic to all Earth beings. We are all of Earth and return to Earth.

That return, however, is not only the final event of our lives, as Job asserts: “Naked I came from my mother [Earth]’s womb and naked I shall return there” (Job 1:21). Our return to Earth is a continuous process throughout our lives. The matter of Earth in our bodies is recycled every seven years, as John Seed and Joanna Macy make clear:

**Earth**—matter made from rock and soil. It too is pulled by the moon as the magma circulates through the planet heart and roots suck molecules into biology. Earth pours through us, replacing each cell in the body every seven years. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we ingest, incorporate and excrete the earth, are made from earth. I am that. You are that.<sup>8</sup>

I have also come to realize that as Earth beings we are not separate or disconnected from the various forces and domains of nature. We are totally dependent on the various ecosystems of Earth for survival, ecosystems that have existed for millennia. The movement of oxygen in the atmosphere is necessary for us to breathe. The movement of moisture in the clouds and the seas is essential for us to enjoy a drink. The movement of worms in the soil is vital for us to receive our daily bread. We are Earth beings refined by the microbes of the *’ădāmâ* who welcomes us home.

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7. Shirley Wurst, “Beloved Come Back to Me: Ground’s Theme Song in Genesis 3?” in Habel and Wurst, *Earth Story in Genesis*, 87–104.

8. John Seed and Joanna Macy, “Gaia Meditations,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* (ed. Roger S. Gottlieb; New York: Routledge, 1996), 501.

## MY WORLD

After hearing the curses pronounced by God, the primal pair is acutely aware of themselves as Earth beings in a new world outside of Eden. In preparation for entering that world, they are faced with a cruel trick. God kills fellow Earth beings, removes their hides, and clothes the naked couple with skin garments. The first couple lives in the skins of their kin, hardly a positive way of preserving good relations!

God then admits that what my brother predicted has come true. The first Earth beings have indeed been enlightened and have become "like one of us, knowing good and bad" (Gen 3:22). Being like God relates to a new human consciousness, a level of knowledge that distinguishes humans from other Earth beings. In the once harmonious ecosystem of Eden, there are now rival beings who are like God and who present a challenge to the role of God in the forest.

If these beings now eat from the tree of life, which is apparently equivalent to a "god tree," these Earth creatures, who have become enlightened human beings, may also become divine beings and live forever, something God will not tolerate. The solution is to expel these Earth beings, and presumably all other Earth beings, from the forest of Eden. Outside Eden is a different world than the harmonious ecosystem of Eden.

The world outside Eden is portrayed as decidedly anthropocentric, a world where the primal intimacy of all dimensions of nature present in Eden is replaced by conflicting forces, at the center of which are enlightened humans and a Deity who accepts the new way of life rather than seeking to restore the original. Significantly, a vital continuity persists between Eden and the outside world. The first Earth being (*'ādām*) is to serve/work *'ādāmā* from which he was taken. The mission of human beings to "serve" the Earth and the fertile ground called *'ādāmā* survives the expulsion from Eden. Human beings are a species of Earth being who are responsible for serving and preserving the *'ādāmā*.

As an Earth being, I have a sense that at this point in the narrative God seems to temper the earlier curse and recognize that the primal bond between the first Earth beings (*'ādām*) and the fertile soil of Earth (*'ādāmā*) should persist.

If I now, at the end of the narrative, ask who has been my host and welcomed me as an Earth being in the plot of the narrative, I am faced with a dilemma. I would expect that God would make me feel welcome at the table of life throughout the sequence of events.

Initially God's hospitality is generous—a beautiful forest for a home, an abundance of forest food, and numerous companions. God's generosity, however, does not extend to two personal trees in the midst of the forest. I am privileged to care for the home I have been given and so celebrate God's hospitality.

In due course, however, I am thrown out of my initial home by my host. My host even pronounces a curse on the very home I am about to inhabit. In my new world, I do not receive the same welcome. I am obliged as an Earth being to bond with the *'ādāmā*, the fertile soil of my mother, and nurture her so that she will in turn nurture me. In this narrative, I bond with her rather than God.

#### MY RECEPTION

Literary scholars have long received this text as a myth of origin typical of ancient societies. Ecologists have detected a hint of primitive science. Some psychologists and anthropologists may discern here the imagination of an emerging human consciousness. For me this passage still resonates with mystery when I dare to receive it as a memory of human origins. In contemporary terms, that mystery might be summarized as follows: Deep in the past, a primal Impulse animated matter (my being) within a newborn planet (my mother) until Earth beings (my kin) evolved with a consciousness to sense the suffering of Mother Earth (my pain) and to preserve (my mission) this habitat (my world), where I am to be buried (my return) for the benefit of future Earth beings.

And so I close My Reception with a blessing:

May the primal soil  
refined by the microbes of Mother Earth,  
recycled through the membranes of my body  
and animated by my living breath  
become a blessing to Earth beings  
into the future.

## SELF-DEFENSE AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE DEPICTION OF BATTLES IN JOSHUA AND ESTHER\*

Paul J. Kissling

Although most traditional scholarship, situated as it has been in militaristic societies, describes the battles depicted in Joshua as a “conquest,” in fact the two major phases of that “conquest” are self-defense, first against an attack by a coalition of kings from the south of Canaan against the Gibeonites, who had recently joined Israel, and then defense against an attack on all of Israel by a coalition of kings from the north. The absorption of outsiders preceding an anticipated battle, the hyperbolic language of total destruction, the rules regarding the spoils of war, the extraordinary (divine) interventions, and the self-defensive nature of the battles are motifs that Esther shares with Joshua. In this essay I explore the implicit message of such texts for the Diaspora existence and identity of the Jewish people, whether that be relatively early as in the case of the “exilic” Joshua, or later as in Esther.

While the book of Esther has been examined for its intertextual echoing of the Saul narrative,<sup>1</sup> the Joseph narrative,<sup>2</sup> and to a lesser extent the story of Moses,<sup>3</sup> there has been relatively little reflection, so far as I am

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\* An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Joshua and Judges study group at the SBL Annual Meeting in San Francisco on November 19, 2009.

1. See Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 115; Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, *Ruth and Esther* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 111–12.

2. Paul L. Redditt, “Esther, Book of,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 194–96. Redditt (195) notes: “Hebrew phrases are virtually identical in Esther 1:3 and Gen. 40:20; in 3:4 and Gen. 39:10; in 1:21 and Gen. 41:37; in 2:3 and Gen. 41:35; in 3:10//8:2 and Gen. 41:42; or similar in 4:16 and Gen. 43:14.”

3. See, e.g., Jona Schellekens, “Accession Days and Holidays: The Origins of the

aware, on the implications of the intertextual echoing of the narratives of and about Joshua. And yet the parallels are manifold. After examining these intertextual echoes and taking a lead from John Howard Yoder, I will address the issue of how Esther's reading of Joshua might offer clues as to how both of these texts might function for the identity formation of those who share a common Diaspora existence.

Intertextuality and intertextual echoing can be defined both narrowly in the manner of Richard Hays<sup>4</sup> or more broadly in the tradition of Julia Kristeva,<sup>5</sup> who is usually given credit for inventing the term.

Richard Hays has helpfully provided seven tests for hearing intertextual echoes of Israel's Scriptures in the letters of Paul. While his tests are not designed to be used on Hebrew Bible texts, which are much more difficult to achieve consensus on dating and the specifics of authorship and original historical context, in this case they provide a useful template for evaluating the plausibility of my reading. I assume it is safe to presume that Esther was written after Joshua and so was, at least potentially, available to the author(s) of Esther (Hays's criterion 1). The evidence to be presented argues for substantial volume and recurrence (Hays's criteria 2 and 3) as well as thematic coherence (Hays's criterion 4). Given the new exodus/new entrance motif in other postexilic literature, historical plausibility should not be an issue (Hays's criterion 5). I have not yet tried to examine the issue in the history of interpretation (Hays's criterion 6), although contemporary scholarly research has demonstrated the fruitfulness of intertextual analysis of Esther in light of other books in the Former Prophets or Deuteronomistic History. The criterion of "satisfaction" is fraught with difficulties, but a plausible case can be made that my reading potentially illuminates the surrounding discourse (Hays's criterion 7).

If we adopt Kristeva's broader definition, the intertextuality between Joshua and Esther illuminates both works and reminds us that intertextuality should not be limited to the temporally backward direction.

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Jewish Festival of Purim," *JBL* 128 (2009): 115–34; and Karen H. Jobes, "Esther 1: Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 160–70.

4. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29–32.

5. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (ed. Leon S. Roudiez; trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

So far as I know we have no way of accessing whether the intertextuality that I see was in the mind of the author, if an author there was.

### INTERTEXTUAL ECHOING OF JOSHUA IN ESTHER

#### SELF-DEFENSE

Although the tradition of referring to the entrance of Israel into the land, as recorded in the book of Joshua, as a “conquest” has a long and distinguished history,<sup>6</sup> according to most the historical reality,<sup>7</sup> and I would add the text of Joshua itself,<sup>8</sup> presents a much more complex picture. The so-called conquest begins with a series of three encounters initiated by Israel, of which they win two, Jericho and the second attempt at Ai. Following a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem,<sup>9</sup> the kings of the entire land “gathered together with one accord to fight Joshua and Israel” (Josh 9:1–2). Notice that they intend to attack Israel! The Gibeonites, on the other hand and under false pretenses, manage to join Israel through a covenant, although in a socially inferior position. The so-called southern phase of the conquest arises when a coalition of five kings in the south attacked the Gibeonites for making peace with Joshua and the Israelites (10:4, 5), their original intentions to attack Israel being waylaid by the success of the Gibeonite subterfuge. When a request for help is sent to Joshua, he responds, and under Yahweh’s encouragement defeats the coalition through divine miracle, including sending a divine panic (10:10), throwing down large stones (10:11), and extending daylight (10:12–14).<sup>10</sup>

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6. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 249; Ernst Sellin and Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. David Green; Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 197; Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), ch. 12. See recently John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), ch. 9, where he routinely refers to the “conquest.”

7. See, e.g., Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (London: SCM, 1979).

8. See L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

9. My reading is not materially affected if the Greek is followed and this event in the narrative world is either immediately after the crossing of the Jordan, or some other time. See on this, e.g., Pekka Pitkannen, *Joshua* (Apollon Old Testament Commentary 6; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 185.

10. If indeed this is to be understood literally.

After defeating a series of southern kings, Joshua and Israel returned to Gilgal (10:43). After hearing of the defeat of the southern kings who had attacked Gibeon, a coalition of northern kings gathered at Merom to fight with Israel (11:1–5). Once again it is the inhabitants of the land who initiated the fighting. The so-called conquest is actually largely a self-defensive affair with Israel being attacked by both southern and northern coalitions of kings in Canaan.<sup>11</sup> The book of Esther similarly portrays the battle that the Jews wage as a self-defensive one.

#### THEY DID NOT TAKE THE PLUNDER

It is customary for interpreters of Esther to note the parallels between the Jewish refusal to take the plunder when they killed their enemies in Esth 9:10, 15, 16, and the narrative in 1 Sam 15, in which Saul did not kill his enemy, Agag, and took the plunder. Typical of this approach is Michael V. Fox:

Earlier they gathered *lišloah yad*, literally, to “send forth their hand”—to attack—their enemies (9:2); now they refrain from “sending forth their hand” to take booty. This refusal is a sort of free-will offering, by which the Jews wipe away the stain of the greed of the Israelites who defeated the Amalekites in Saul’s time (1 Sam 15). Saul spared Agag; Mordecai and Esther destroy Haman the Agagite. Saul took booty and blamed the people (1 Sam 15:15); now the Jews surpass their leader’s expectations by refusing to take booty. To be sure, the reversal is not perfect: the enemies are not Amalekites ... and the author does not say that the Jews *destroyed* the spoil. ... But the contrast is enough to show that the Jews are undoing their ancestors’ failure: the ancestors took spoil, their descendants now refrain from it.<sup>12</sup>

But this reading does not adequately take account of how the book of Joshua is (also) echoed here. The Amalekites were the first to attack Israel as they came out of Egypt (Exod 17), a battle in which Joshua exercised leadership (Exod 17:9). When it comes to the book of Joshua, the spoils of Jericho were not to be touched, but were to go into the sanctuary treasury.

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11. Collins (*Introduction*, 543) is simply wrong to assert: “The conquest narratives in Joshua, which may be equally fictional, are even more problematic, since the slaughter is unprovoked.”

12. Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 115.



This was later modified, but only as a concession due to Israel's disobedience in the Achan episode.

#### ABSORPTION OF OUTSIDERS WHO FEARED THEM

Commentators often notice the echo of "the ancient motif of the neighboring nations frightened by the victorious exodus of Israel and cowering at their approach (e.g., Exod. 15:14–16; Josh. 2:8–11; Ps. 105:38)."<sup>13</sup> But what seems usually to be missed is that this fear resulted in the joining or at least the identification of outsiders with Israel because of that fear both in Esther (8:17b) and in Joshua. We have two examples of this in Joshua, the family of Rahab (Josh 2:8–14; 6:22–25), and the Gibeonites (9:3–27). Both Rahab and Gibeon acknowledge the fear that they had of Israel (9:24),<sup>14</sup> and both ended up living in Israel "to this day" (6:25; 9:27—both using the phrase עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה).

Many commentators are loath to regard Esth 8:17b as asserting conversion to Judaism. But Clines's arguments in favor of conversion are usually not addressed. He notes:

Their conversion to Judaism cannot be represented as insincere, for there is still no advantage to be gained in being a Jew; the first decree still stands, and the second decree gives the Jews rights only against those who attack them. Their fear is not that they will suffer at the hands of the Jews, for they are safe if they are not enemies of the Jews. Their fear must be a religious awe such as falls on the inhabitants of Canaan (Jos. 2:9) and Transjordan (Exod. 15:16) and Egypt (Ps. 105:38).<sup>15</sup>

The Septuagint of Esth 8:17b reads, καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν περιετέμοντο καὶ ιουδαίζον διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ιουδαίων, that is, they were both circum-

13. Jon D. Levenson, *Esther* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 120.

14. The specific vocabulary varies. In Josh 9:24 the Gibeonites use the word גִּיבֹנִים.

15. David J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 318–19. Note Levenson's comment on Esth 9:2 (*Esther*, 120): "The difference here is that the Gentiles are afraid not of the God of Israel, but of Israel themselves and of their representative, Mordecai (8:17; 9:2, 3). Gerlemann is correct to speak of a certain desacralization of holy war in Esther, but this must not be taken to mean that the fear in question was thought to be accounted for by purely naturalistic reasoning. Rather, it is another manifestation of the mysterious charisma that protects the Jews throughout the story."

cised and identified themselves as Jews. Adele Berlin attributes this to the later Hellenistic context of the Greek versions where religious conversions to Judaism did take place, and so “the Greek versions have understood this verse in the context of their own times and practices.”<sup>16</sup> But given Berlin’s own identification of the genre of Esther as comedy, one need not reject the view of the Greek versions out of hand. The issue is not whether conversion to Judaism is historically plausible for the Persian period in Berlin’s view (Berlin’s dating for Esther). The issue is whether conversion to Judaism is being suggested by Esther even if such a suggestion might be intended or be read to be a little comical or at least hyperbolic for the Persian period.

#### A FOREIGN WOMAN (SURPRISINGLY?) ATTESTS THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT BE DEFEATED

In both Joshua and Esther a woman whom one might presume to be among the nation’s enemies surprisingly attests that the Jewish people would not be defeated in battle. In Joshua that woman is Rahab, whose confession of faith in Yahweh would make the most orthodox Israelite proud (Josh 2:8–11). In Esther it is Zeresh, the wife of Haman, who had suggested in 5:14 that her husband construct a 75-foot gallows to hang Mordecai upon,<sup>17</sup> only to testify in 6:13, “Since Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is from the seed of the Jews, you will not overpower him, but will surely fall before him.”<sup>18</sup>

#### ISRAEL COMES INTO A NEW LAND AFTER EXPULSION FROM ANOTHER IN THE CONTEXT OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

The situation facing Israel in both Joshua and Esther flows from the nation being expelled from another land (respectively: from Egypt to Canaan, from Judah to Persia) in the context of a divine judgment, in the case of Joshua on Israel’s oppressors, in the case of the book of Esther on the nation of Israel itself.

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16. Adele Berlin, *Esther* (JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 80.

17. The same verb (תלה) used of the impaling of the defeated foes in Josh 8:29 and 10:26 is echoed in Esth 9:14.

18. My literalistic translation.

RELATIVE NEWCOMERS IN A HOSTILE LAND AND/OR OF  
LOWER SOCIAL CLASS

In both Joshua and Esther the Jews have come into a land where those in charge of that land are potentially hostile. They are not regarded as insiders within the social strata of that society. Gottwald's theory, if at least partly on target, about the genesis of Israel within the land of Canaan rather than merely from the outside would place Israel in the time of Joshua and the Jews in the Persian Empire in a similar sort of social situation.<sup>19</sup> Both groups were newcomers in a potentially hostile land and with limited access to the higher levels of societal power and prestige. This would be true, but to a lesser extent, even if Gottwald is completely or largely wrong.

## NEW MOSES

I have argued elsewhere that Joshua is portrayed in the book of Joshua as a sort of new Moses.<sup>20</sup> In the book of Esther both Mordecai and to a lesser extent Esther are portrayed as characters reminiscent of Moses. The Joshua and Esther narratives are thus joined by their common use of a typological correspondence between the central character(s) and Moses.

Jona Schellekens has argued for a deliberate correspondence between the portrayal of Moses and the portrayal of Mordecai.<sup>21</sup> His agenda for doing so is to argue that the book now called Esther originated to celebrate the accession of Mordecai the Benjaminite and Saulide as king of the Jews in exile over against rivals who descended from the line of David. While his historical argument is debatable, his discussion of the intertextual echoing between these two figures is salient. In both the story of Moses and that of Mordecai, the foreign king fears the disloyalty of the Jews. In both, someone powerful from the court tries to kill the hero, but ironically the place where the hero was to be killed ends up being the place where the powerful person is killed. The powerful enemy tries to kill all of the Jews, not just the hero. In both cases a woman within the royal household saves the hero. Mordecai is a Moses-like hero.

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19. Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (London: T&T Clark, 1999), 489–590.

20. Paul J. Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History* (JSOTSup 224; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 69–95.

21. Schellekens, "Accession Days," 120.

But it is not only Mordecai who is characterized as Moses-like. Karen Jobes argues that Esther as a character also reminds the reader of Moses:

The edict of death went out on the thirteenth of Nisan (Esther 3:12), ironically, the very eve of Passover (the fourteenth of Nisan). ... Both Esther (Esther 4:10–14) and Moses (Ex 3:11; 4:10, 13; 6:12, 30) are hesitant in their response to step into leadership; both benefit from the wealth of the Gentiles (Esther 8:1–3; Ex 12:36); the success that the Lord grants to both stirs up fear in their enemies (Esther 9:2–3; Ex 15:14–15); and the events centered on Esther and Moses both result in the institution of a festival, Purim and Passover respectively.<sup>22</sup>

She does not mention that both Esther and Moses are portrayed as living from youth into adulthood at the court of the king without the court knowing of their Jewish ancestry, all the while forces within the court are trying to annihilate the Jewish people. Both were orphans of sorts, although in different ways. Both were raised by relatives who had access to the court.

While most of these correspondences listed would be as true of Mordecai as they are of Esther, there are enough unique instances to suggest that Esther, as well as Mordecai, is being portrayed as a sort of new Moses. The book shares this typological connection to Moses with the book of Joshua.

## HYPERBOLE

### Hyperbole in Joshua

Although its nature and level are very different, Joshua and Esther share another characteristic. As pieces of literature designed to aid in the identity formation of a social group, both narratives engage in hyperbole in regard to the defeat of their enemies. The former in its final form is part of a narrative that explains why the nation that Yahweh gifted with Canaan ended up expelled from that land by the Assyrians and Babylonians. The stories of Israel taking the land are designed to show Yahweh's blessing when they depend on him to win their battles and are faithful to the Torah of Moses and show his curse when they are unfaithful to the Torah and seek to ensure their collective future through strategic alliances and

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22. Jobes, "Esther 1: Book of," 166.

political machinations. The hyperbolic rhetoric in Joshua of total victory (11:23; 21:44–45) is balanced by passages that give a more realistic assessment of the actual extent of Israel's control of the land of Canaan (13:1; 15:6, 63—Jebusites in Jerusalem; 16:10—Canaanites in Gezer; 17:12—Canaanites in Manasseh).

Lawson Younger cautions against overreading conquest narratives without regard to what we can know about their transmission code from ancient Near Eastern parallels.<sup>23</sup> The description of “fear,” for example, is nothing unique in a battle account, or that the god fights for his nation, or that there is exaggeration in the language used to describe the extent of the conquest, or hyperbole in the extent of control (in time and space) of the conquered land, or in the fact that celestial phenomena show the support of the gods.

### Hyperbole and Comic Exaggeration in Esther

Esther shares with Joshua a common ancient Near Eastern transmission code in which hyperbole in the description of victory in battle is a given. But Esther goes far beyond Joshua in the extent and depth of its exaggeration. Interpreters are divided on the question of a precise genre identification for Esther, some preferring comedy,<sup>24</sup> others literary carnival,<sup>25</sup> still others historical novella, Diaspora novel,<sup>26</sup> farce, parody, folklore, or court legend.<sup>27</sup> In any event, the many humorous touches that have been suggested cannot all be explained away.

It may be that Erich Gruen exaggerates the extent of the hyperbole on occasion, but his underlying thesis is not thereby undermined. To take but one example, Gruen describes the elaborate preparations that the beauty contestants went through before spending a night with Ahasuerus:

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23. K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (JSOTSup 98; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 241–66.

24. Berlin, *Esther*, xvi.

25. Kenneth Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnivalesque* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

26. Mary E. Mills, “Household and Table: Diasporic Boundaries in Daniel and Esther,” *CBQ* 68 (2006): 408–20.

27. Linda Day, “Esther, Book of,” *NIDB* 2:317–20.

And quite a preparation it was. Ahasuerus was evidently not looking for some apple-cheeked, fresh-faced youngster. The contestants would undergo beauty treatments and immersion in cosmetics for a year—six months with myrrh and another six with perfumes and lotions! One might expect a bit of sprucing up for the sexual encounter, but a year's worth of makeup seems somewhat excessive. This must be a spoof of the seraglio.<sup>28</sup>

In its exaggeration about the extent of the Jews' victory, Esther echoes the Joshua narrative. But in other ways it indicates the need to go beyond the horizons of Joshua in light of the Jewish experience of continuing Diaspora. By the time of Esther the Jewish people are no longer in a position to take the land by force even if the source of that force is chiefly divine miracle. Since literal conquest is not an option for a community in long-term Diaspora, Esther takes exaggeration of victory in battle to the literary extreme. Esther goes beyond Joshua in hyperbole, and in its take on how a Diaspora Jew(ess) negotiates the boundaries between the two worlds in which (s)he must live.

One issue where Esther goes beyond Joshua is the issue of intermarriage. Joshua allows intermarriage only in the case of those who recognize Yahweh's purpose, such as Rahab and the Gibeonites. In Esther the joining is in the opposite direction, where a Jewish woman hides her ethnic and religious identity while marrying the king of the empire who is her people's biggest potential threat. In both books adjustments are made to the strict application of the rules enforcing social separation. The goods that are banned at Jericho are later allowed at Ai (Josh 6:15–22; 8:2). The people who are under the ban escape by professing confidence in Yahweh's plan for Israel and/or by tricking the nation into promising to protect them. But in Esther the adjustments are much more extreme as laws about marriage and eating are put aside by the Jewish people themselves.

#### HOW DOES THE BOOK OF ESTHER READ JOSHUA?

Given the numerous echoes of Joshua in Esther, one pertinent question is, How does the book of Esther read the book of Joshua? Certainly Esther regards the situation that the Jewish people face in Diaspora as in many

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28. Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 140–48, on the (comic) exaggeration in the book of Esther.

ways parallel to the situation that Israel faced in the time of Joshua. But the situations are also different and call for different responses. John Howard Yoder has addressed the issue of how a Christian committed to nonviolence, as I am, might approach war texts in the Old Testament. In his classic essay, "If Abraham Is Our Father,"<sup>29</sup> Yoder surveys several traditional explanations for war in the Old Testament (all but the last of which he regards as inadequate) for those who agree "that the demand of the New Testament is for nonresistance."<sup>30</sup> He rejects the notion that God merely changes the rules as dispensations change,<sup>31</sup> or that, like divorce, war was tolerated because of the hardness of Israel's hearts. He also repudiates the notion that only advanced cultures with moral refinement are able to reject violence. More significantly, he rejects the common approach of a division of realms in which the Christian is personally nonviolent, but in the civic order violence is appropriate, even for the Christian.

Yoder argues for what he terms the "concrete historical anthropological meaning" of these texts.<sup>32</sup> For Yoder reading backward into the Old Testament from the perspective of the New distorts our understanding. He uses the command to sacrifice Isaac as an example. Something we regard as inherently immoral, particularly so because of "modern Western personalism," especially in regard to "the deep sentimental attachment of the father to the son,"<sup>33</sup> is misunderstood if we do not take account of the historical circumstances under which the command was given. He then analogously explains the holy war of ancient Israel as a religious ritual that was based on ad hoc charismatic events and not the result of planning. Yahweh fought the holy wars, not Israel. Yoder then traces the progress of revelation to argue: "The holy war of Israel is the concrete experience of not needing any other crutches for one's identity and community as a people than trust in Jahweh as king, who makes it unnecessary to have earthly kings like the neighboring nations."<sup>34</sup> He also notes that the book

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29. John Howard Yoder, "If Abraham Is Our Father," in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (1971; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 91–111. See also his unpublished lecture, "From the Wars of Joshua to Jewish Pacifism." My thanks to John Nugent for making the latter available to me.

30. "If Abraham," 92.

31. *Ibid.*, 93.

32. *Ibid.*, 100.

33. *Ibid.*, 102.

34. *Ibid.*, 107.

of Chronicles and the later prophets “do not derive from the tradition [of holy war] the conclusion, ‘Israel slaughtered the Amalekites and therefore we should put to death all the enemies of God.’”<sup>35</sup>

Instead, the lesson as seen in Chronicles’ portrayal of Jehoshaphat in battle and Ezra’s refusal to take armed guards with him to protect him<sup>36</sup> is that the Jewish people should trust Yahweh to protect them in their current circumstances. One does not prepare for battle in the typical way through planning, a standing army, military alliances, and so on.

While Yoder does not address, so far as I am aware, the book of Esther, his suggestion may be apropos if we recognize that Esther, as some form of comedy or satire, is not recommending that Diaspora Jews literally take up arms in self-defense to solve their problems. Esther instead suggests, I would argue, that one learns to laugh at the empire. Israel in the book of Joshua faced very different circumstances than did Diaspora Jewry. Despite the similarities of the two, the responses called for are also very different.

#### HOW ESTHER’S READING OF JOSHUA IN THIS WAY CONTRIBUTES TO IDENTITY FORMATION

##### DO NOT READ LITERALISTICALLY (OR SELECTIVELY AND MILITARISTICALLY)

First, Esther’s reading of and beyond Joshua suggests that the depictions of battles in the book of Joshua are not to be translated into a strategy of violent revolt in the Diaspora. This is not merely pragmatic. The refusal of the spoil in Esther connects the book’s readers to the tradition of Yahweh war in the book of Joshua at Jericho. Yahweh fights such battles and commands Israel’s participation in a kind of religious ritual. This seems no justification for the Diaspora community to initiate a revolt.

The problem is that no matter how it was intended, Esther can indeed be read as justification for violence. But if that is granted it would seem to follow that such violence is advocated only under extreme circumstances and only in self-defense. Such a reading rejects the notion of comedy or something similar in the book of Esther.

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35. *Ibid.*, 106.

36. See “From the Wars of Joshua,” 8–9.



## READ IMAGINATIVELY

If the recent spate of interpretation that sees the satire and humor in Esther is even partially on target, Esther would seem to call on its readers to read descriptions of battles with a healthy dose of satirical awareness. At a basic level, laughing at one's enemies by exaggerating one's own actual success in battle and the stupidity of one's enemies is a way of coping. Timothy Beal, drawing on Kenneth Craig's carnivalesque reading of Esther,<sup>37</sup> argues that the carnival atmosphere of Purim underwritten by the book of Esther suggests a fantasy world in which moral, economic, ethnic, and sexual hierarchies are radically undermined.<sup>38</sup> Even life and death are redefined in a festival celebrating "pregnant death," which leads to birth and renewal. For a day or two each year Diaspora Jewry need not accept things as they are but is called upon to imagine and celebrate a world where things are different. In that world women have real power, villains wear black hats, kings can be easily manipulated, and rules are made to be broken. Gruen has taken this a little further:

The story does indeed have implications for diaspora existence. The whimsicality that portrays rulers as buffoons, Jews as flawed, and high state policy as comic travesty suggests confidence and self-possession in both author and readership. Life in the Persian empire (or its representations in a subsequent diaspora) was comfortable enough to generate witty parody and healthy hilarity. Not a bad recommendation.<sup>39</sup>

## READ THE REQUIREMENTS OF SOCIAL SEPARATION SITUATIONALLY

By echoing the narrative of Israel's initial entrance into the land of Canaan in the book of Joshua, Esther invites its readers to read the book in conversation with that narrative. In that conversation there are areas of agreement and disagreement. One area of disagreement is exactly where the lines of social separation between Jews and those from other nations who live around them must be placed. For Joshua those boundary lines are, in theory at least, drawn quite strictly. For Esther this is not the case. Mary

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37. Craig, *Reading Esther*.

38. Beal, *Esther*, 113.

39. Gruen, *Diaspora*, 140–48.

Mills classifies Esther as a diasporic novel, and as such it “deals with border crossing, where the border to be crossed is that between host and home community and between insider and outsider status. The implied reader of diasporic novellas is interested in how a person can maintain two identities and how that process provides either safety or danger for the common social body.”<sup>40</sup>

While both Joshua and Esther realize the reality of the borders between Israel and others is more porous than the theory might suggest, in Esther, unlike Daniel, there seems to be no need to take distinctive social stands about not eating meals with and even marrying non-Israelites. Esther suggests that the situation, rather than strict application of timeless laws, must be the determining factor for Diaspora existence.

#### READ LITURGICALLY

One of the obvious purposes of the book of Esther as we have it is to explain the foundation for a “nonbiblical” feast and to ensure and/or encourage its perpetuation among Diaspora Jews. It therefore advocates the rehearsal or reactualization of a postbiblical act of deliverance in the context of diasporic Jewish worship. Even when God seems to be absent, as in Esther, there is a discernible, if invisible, hand at work. The incorporation of the reading of Esther into Jewry’s religious calendar is a message in itself. Instead of resorting to revolution and violence at a literal level, the community is called upon to engage in the simulated violence of the Feast of Purim. Joshua Burns has argued suggestively that the book of Esther lent itself to a common mode of cultural recontextualization suggestive of a documented medieval phenomenon known as a Special Purim where Jewish people celebrated a Purim in honor of some later event in which they discerned divine deliverance reminiscent of the deliverance in Esther.<sup>41</sup>

The turn to victory enacted in the liturgy (Purim) replaces the liturgical enactment of a literal victory (as was the case with Israel in the book of Joshua at Jericho). As Berlin suggests: “Carnival permits the release of one’s urge for violence and revenge in a way that channels the violence so

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40. Mills, “Household and Table,” 408.

41. Joshua Ezra Burns, “The Special Purim and the Reception of the Book of Esther in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Eras,” *JSJ* 37 (2006): 1–34.

that it is not actually destructive.<sup>42</sup> War as ritual in the book of Joshua becomes ritual reenactment as a replacement for war in the Festival of Purim in the book of Esther.

#### CONCLUSION

Neither the book of Joshua nor the book of Esther should be read in their canonical context as justification for contemporary war. Whether the exile is fresh in the memory, as is probably the case with the book of Joshua, or the nation knows itself to be in permanent Diaspora, as Esther suggests, Israel fights in Diaspora only under the constraints of the Yahweh war tradition. But there is a difference. In the case of Esther Jewry is no longer called upon to conquer the land as a tool of God's judgment. Therefore the call to take the land is gone. Even so, in Diaspora God is still in charge of winning Israel's battles for them, and the book of Esther suggests that he will do so even if in an incognito fashion.

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42. Berlin, *Esther*, xxii.



## EGYPT-WATCHING: ORIENTALISM IN THE HEBREW BIBLE\*

Diana Lipton

In *Orientalism*,<sup>1</sup> Edward Said set out his influential account of the way that the West views the East, a perspective characterized by fantasies of licentiousness and rampant sexuality, heightened human fecundity and agricultural abundance, dubious moral values, wealthy despotic rulers, and practitioners of the unnatural arts. Later on, in *Culture and Imperialism*,<sup>2</sup> Said joined his critics in nuancing some aspects of his work. Most significantly, he broke down the East-West dichotomy that lay at the heart of his earlier manifesto. Orientalism was not after all a matter of geographic direction—the way the West regards the East—but of differentiation, the way one group regards its essential, inevitably inferior, “other.” Indispensable to Said’s account, however, and present in every version of Orientalism, is some form of imperialism. While Orientalism is expressed *culturally* through literature, art, music, and the scholarly output of the academy, it is driven *politically* by the desire to control. The Orientalist’s goal—explicit or implicit, conscious, semiconscious, or unconscious—is not to represent the Orient as it really is, or even to present it in his or her own image, but rather to degrade the Orient and its inhabitants to the extent that it is possible to conclude that their only hope for salvation lies with the occidental other. Oriental phenomena are presented not as objective data or even as entertaining curiosities, but as part of a bigger project of diminishing,

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\* It is a privilege and a pleasure to dedicate this paper to David Clines with gratitude for his many and various inspiring contributions to biblical studies.

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

2. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

disempowering, oppressing, taking advantage of, dominating, and, ultimately, controlling the Oriental other.<sup>3</sup>

While biblical scholars and modes of biblical exegesis have been critiqued in recent years for their Orientalist perspectives,<sup>4</sup> along with early Zionists who gave the Bible an ideological role in the creation of the modern state of Israel,<sup>5</sup> little or no attention has been paid to Orientalism within the Hebrew Bible (hereafter “Bible”) itself. In this paper I hope to show that Said’s account of Orientalism is remarkably close to the Bible’s representation of Egypt, biblical Israel’s ultimate “other.”<sup>6</sup> But strikingly missing from the Bible—in addition to the East-West dimension, which, as noted, in any case ceased to be fundamental—is Orientalism’s imperialist motivation. Indeed, the opposite is the case; Israelites<sup>7</sup> are the slaves of Egypt, not its overlords. They seek liberation from Egypt with all that entails, but they never seek to dominate it.

### GOING DOWN EAST

No-one will fail to note how “East” has always signified danger and threat during this period [1950s in the West, especially the United States], even as it has meant the traditional Orient.<sup>8</sup>

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3. In order to make my case in the allotted space, I shall refer hereafter only to Said’s *Orientalism* and not at all to his own later work, to the critical response to his work, or to its myriad applications by other scholars.

4. R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Orientalism, Ethnonationalism and Transnationalism: Shifting Identities and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; BIS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 419–31.

5. Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

6. For an impressive assessment of Egypt’s role as Israel’s “other” (but without reference to Orientalism), see F. V. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch’s Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel’s Identity* (JSOTSup 361; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

7. For the sake of clarity, I use the terms *Israel* and *Israelites* in this paper as general designations for the various places and characters involved. Other designations would be more accurate—e.g., Canaan, Judah, pre-Israelites, proto-Israelites, or Hebrews—but they would obscure the thrust of my argument.

8. Said, *Orientalism*, 26.

Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”).<sup>9</sup>

Said’s core conception began with a spatial relationship: Orientalism is a mode of (limited) interaction between two points of the compass, East and West, in which the former is always inferior. Although a negative perception of the East is arguably present in the Bible—for example, Cain goes “east of Eden” (Gen 4:16) in the world’s first flight from justice—Said’s East-West paradigm cannot operate for Israel and Egypt. Egypt is southwest of Israel. Yet biblical Israel’s characteristic Orientation to Egypt is arguably close in spirit, if not on the compass, to Said’s model (especially in its nuanced incarnation): Israelites typically “go down” to Egypt (e.g., Gen 12:10; 39:1; 42:2, 3). This descent may reflect a naturalistic experience of the journey involved and, at the same time, may not entail the respective values (good and bad) often associated with “up” and “down.” Nevertheless, it is plausible that the biblical narrative intends a negative value judgment, or at least a shift from the familiar to the strange, when Israel “goes down” to Egypt, not unlike the Orientalist notion of going East.

#### WHAT ORIENTALS ARE LIKE

Recalling the challenge of J. M. Robertson, the member of Tyneside, Balfour himself put Robertson’s question again: “What right have you to take up these airs of superiority with regard to people whom you choose to call Oriental?” The choice of “Oriental” was canonical; it had been employed by Chaucer and Mandeville, by Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, and Byron. It designated Asia or the East, geographically, morally, culturally. One could speak in Europe of an Oriental personality, an Oriental atmosphere, an Oriental tale, Oriental despotism, or an Oriental mode of production, and be understood.<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of whether the verb “to go down” carries negative connotations in the Bible, there are many indications that Egypt was seen as a dangerous destination. On his way *down* to Egypt—indecently soon after being summoned to the promised land—Abraham tells Sarah to pretend that she is his sister (Gen 12:13). His two justifications for what turns out to

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9. Ibid., 43.

10. Said, *Orientalism*, 31–32.

be a problematic request demonstrate a low regard of Egypt in terms that chime with Said's Orientalism. Abraham's first explanation attributes to Egyptians both licentiousness and immorality: the country's lustful inhabitants will see his beautiful wife and kill him to get her (12:11–13). The second entails a worldview in which Egyptians traffic anything and everything. Abraham can sell his wife, or at least her services, in Egypt and reap the benefits (12:13). It is not only Abraham's prejudices that are characteristically Orientalist here. Equally Orientalist is that they lead Abraham to immoral behavior that mirrors the immorality he attributes to the Egyptians. Based on his perception about Egyptians, Abraham acts like a liar and a pimp (12:13), jeopardizing his wife's safety and honor (12:19), and bringing undeserved calamity in the form of mighty plagues to an innocent people in their own land (12:17). There is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy in all of this. Readers will never know whether the Egyptians would have taken Sarah had Abraham been honest with them from the outset, but his deception ensures that his negative expectations are fulfilled (12:19). This resonates with Said's claim that occidental caricatures of Oriental morality often function to license behavior that would be deemed unacceptable or impossible "at home."<sup>11</sup>

The Bible offers no justification for Abraham's negative impression of Egypt. It cannot have been based on personal experience; this was presumably his first visit. At any rate, readers must have been expected to share Abraham's perspective, or at least find it self-evident that he would hold it, even when it turns out to be misguided. To be sure, he is not completely off the mark. Pharaoh seems to have servants who roam the country in search of female companions for him (Gen 12:14–15), indicating a predilection for women and perhaps a predisposition for trafficking. Yet the narrator gives no hint—other than Abraham's justifications to Sarah, which are not reliable evidence—that the Egyptians are wife stealers, still less murderers. Surprisingly, however, no explicit narrative correction is forthcoming. This too is characteristic of Orientalism; unfounded claims about "what the Orient is like" are widely disseminated and continue to be accepted long after they have been undermined.

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11. See *ibid.*, 190 (cited below).



## THE LICENTIOUS ORIENT

In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy. Emma Bovary and Frederic Moreau pine for what in their drab (or harried) bourgeois lives they do not have, and what they realize they want comes easily to their daydreams packed inside oriental clichés: harems, princesses, prices, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments and so on. ... [O]nce again the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex.<sup>12</sup>

Genesis 12 is not the only biblical text that attributes licentiousness and heightened sexuality to Egyptians. In Gen 39 a married Egyptian woman attempts to seduce her Israelite employee. Though a negative figure in the history of interpretation, Potiphar's wife could easily star in the wish-fulfillment dreams of many young men. Lustful, shameless, and bold, the Egyptian Mrs. Robinson does not let her husband (albeit a eunuch according to 39:1) stand between her and the object of her sexual desires (39:7, 12). Ezekiel fantasizes about the well-endowed (or perhaps "big" as in "lustful") Egyptians who tempt young Israelite women (Ezek 16:26), and the Egyptian men with members "like those of asses and stallions" (Ezek 23:20) who "fondled Oholibah's nipples in her youth" (Ezek 23:21).<sup>13</sup> And the prohibitions in Lev 18 concerning incest, adultery, and other inappropriate sexual relations open with a warning against imitating what the Egyptians (and Canaanites) did in the land, presumably something sexually deviant from an Israelite point of view. In the Bible, unlike most of the nineteenth-century Orientalists discussed by Said, fantasies about Egyptians are acted out and have long-term practical consequences. Joseph manages to resist the temptation of committing adultery with Potiphar's wife, but marries the daughter of Potifera, an Egyptian priest (Gen 41:45), while Solomon marries the daughter of a pharaoh (1 Kgs 3:1), albeit more plausibly for political advantage than for sexual benefit. Israel may leave Egypt, but part of Egypt remains within Israel.

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12. Ibid.

13. Biblical citations are taken from *Tanakh* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

## THE ACQUIESCENT ORIENT

To the West, Asia had represented silent distance and alienation.<sup>14</sup>

Such an Orient was silent, available to Europe for the realization of projects that involved but were never directly responsible to the native inhabitants, and unable to resist the projects, images, or mere descriptions devised for it. ... Earlier ... I called such a relation between Western writing (and its consequences) and Oriental silence the result of and the sign of the West's great cultural strength, its will to power over the Orient.<sup>15</sup>

The Oriental woman is an occasion and an opportunity for Flaubert's musings; he is entranced by her self-sufficiency, by her emotional carelessness, and also by what, lying next to him, she allows him to think. Less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity ... she could say—were she able to speak—“je ne suis pas une femme, je suis un monde.” ... Looked at from another angle Kuchuk is a disturbing symbol of fecundity, peculiarly Oriental in her luxuriant and seemingly unbounded sexuality. Yet ... Kuchuk was doomed to remain barren, corrupting, without issue.<sup>16</sup>

Said shows how Orientalists typically pair heightened sexuality with low resistance. The object of desire voices no objection but, like Kuchuk, shows a “display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity.”<sup>17</sup> This combination of femininity and inexpressiveness can be found in the Bible's portrayal of Abraham's Egyptian concubine, Hagar (Gen 16:1–16; 21:1–21). After years of childlessness, Sarah tells Abraham to take her Egyptian maidservant as a concubine. Hagar becomes pregnant right away, her fecundity a stark contrast to Sarah's barrenness. Sarah becomes jealous and sends her away (twice). Throughout all this, Hagar is almost silent. The narrator reports only three utterances, one to herself (21:16) and two addressed to God (16:8, 13). Otherwise, no one consults her and she volunteers nothing. Silence seems to be a curse that afflicts women in Egypt as well as Egyptian women. Although Sarah has plenty to say in other

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14. Said, *Orientalism*, 91.

15. *Ibid.*, 94.

16. *Ibid.*, 187.

17. *Ibid.*

situations, especially those concerning Hagar (16:2, 5; 21:9), she is totally silent in Egypt during her stay in Pharaoh's house.

#### PENETRATING THE ORIENT

"I must unite with a guileless young girl who is of this sacred soil, which is our first homeland; I must bathe myself in the vivifying springs of humanity, from which poetry and the faith of our fathers flowed forth!" ... Nerval invests himself in the Orient, producing not so much a novelistic narrative as an everlasting intention—never fully realized—to fuse mind with physical action. ... Connected physically and sympathetically to the Orient, Nerval wanders informally through its riches and its (principally feminine) ambience, locating in Egypt especially that "maternal center, at once mysterious and accessible" from which all wisdom derives.<sup>18</sup>

The point is here that the space of weaker or undeveloped regions like the Orient was viewed as something inviting French interest, penetration, insemination—in short, colonization.<sup>19</sup>

On Said's account, Orientalists typically extrapolate from the characteristics they attribute to a country's female inhabitants to the country itself. Had Flaubert's Kuchuk been able to speak, she would have said that she was "not a woman but a world,"<sup>20</sup> and the guileless girl with whom Nerval wants to sleep is, for him, part and parcel of Egypt's sacred soil.<sup>21</sup> Egypt is often portrayed in the Bible as a garden, sometimes even the garden to end, or begin, all gardens, the garden of Eden (Gen 13:10; Ezek 31:1–14, 32). The wilderness wanderers recall with longing the fruit and vegetables they ate in Egypt: "We remember ... the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic" (Num 11:5). They are warned that the promised land will be different from Egypt in this respect: "For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There the grain [lit. 'seed'] you sowed had to be watered by your own labors [lit. 'with your foot'], like a vegetable garden" (Deut 11:10).

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18. *Ibid.*, 182.

19. *Ibid.*, 219.

20. *Ibid.*, 187, cited above.

21. *Ibid.*, 182, cited above.

Like Egyptian women, the land of Egypt is fertile and yields its fruits easily (as a garden, unlike agrarian farming land, is wont to do), and the agricultural methods that maintain this state of affairs are described in language that evokes sex. In the verse from Deuteronomy just cited, “foot” may be a euphemism for phallus, and “sowing” for sex, while “seed” often signifies offspring and “moisture” is associated with sexual activity and fertility (cf. Gen 2:6; 18:12). The land of Egypt as represented in the Bible, like the Orient as perceived by Orientalists, “invites interest, penetration, insemination.”<sup>22</sup> An explicit use of sexual language in relation to the land can be found in the Joseph story when Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies who have come to see the “*nakedness* of the land” (Gen 42:9, 12; cf. Lev 18:6, where the same term applies to incest).

#### ACQUIRING THE ORIENT

I am interested in showing how modern Orientalism, unlike the precolonial awareness of Dante and d’Herbelot, embodies a systematic discipline of accumulation. And far from this being exclusively and intellectual or theoretical feature, it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories.<sup>23</sup>

According to Said, Orientalist visitors to the “Orient” typically accumulate people and territories. As testified by the collections of many European museums and private collectors, they also accumulate material possessions. Accumulation features prominently in biblical representations of Egypt; Israelites rarely leave empty-handed. Abraham exits in fear and loathing (on both sides), but with the “sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses and camels” (Gen 12:16) that he acquired from Pharaoh. When the Israelites leave Egypt, they are fleeing for their lives from a different pharaoh, but still they find time to borrow silver and gold from the neighbors (Exod 12:35–36). On both occasions, Israel’s plunder is “liberated” (Exod 12:36), not stolen, from local inhabitants who have been intimidated by divine plagues (Gen 12:17; Exod 7–12).

Two points are worth making. First, when Israelites go to Egypt, they accumulate people and possessions, but they do not accumulate Egyptian territories. Second, the objects and people (and animals) they

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22. Ibid., 219, fuller citation above.

23. Ibid., 123.

accumulate in Egypt create difficulties for them later on. The possessions Abraham takes out of Egypt are an obstacle to peaceful coexistence for Lot and Abraham (Gen 13:6–7), and the gold that the Israelites borrow from their Egyptian neighbors seems to be the source of the earrings they use to make the golden calf (Exod 32:2–4). Israelite accumulation in Egypt, then, is limited and problematic, and does not extend to long-term landownership.

#### THE WEAK STRONG ORIENT

The other feature of Oriental-European relations was that Europe was always in a position of strength, not to say domination. ... True, the relationship of strong to weak could be disguised or mitigated, as when Balfour acknowledged the “greatness” of Oriental civilizations. But the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen—in the West ... —to be one between a strong and a weak partner.<sup>24</sup>

Accumulation requires abundance. Israelites can acquire possessions in Egypt because Egypt is rich in both human and material resources. Oriental abundance is typically shown as concentrated in the hands of a ruler; and, at the same time, the ruler’s wealth stands for the wealth of the country in general. From an Orientalist point of view, rulers are rich despots, overseers of lavish building projects, possessors of powerful armies, large harems, and innumerable slaves, and dependent upon large and complex courts. The Bible’s best examples of such figures are probably Babylonian and Persian—Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel and Ahasuerus in Esther—but Egyptian rulers certainly fit the mold. The array of slaves, animals, and gold and silver with which Pharaoh sends Abraham packing indicates that he must be wealthy (Gen 12:16). Joseph’s Pharaoh has an abundance of agricultural land at his disposal (even before Joseph’s interventions), and stages dramatic displays to underline his power, as when Joseph is paraded through the streets. The exodus Pharaoh seems still wealthier and more despotic. His interest in building store or treasure cities (Exod 1:11) suggests great wealth, and of course he has slaves and a mighty army with horsemen and chariots (Exod 14:23; 15:4). Similarly graphic descriptions of Egypt’s (once) great army can be found in Jeremiah (46:1–9).

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24. *Ibid.*, 40.

Evidence that this Egyptian style of kingship is deemed problematic may be gleaned from two different biblical accounts of what to avoid in a monarch. Deuteronomy 17:15 excludes unspecified “foreigners” from Israel’s throne, but the ensuing warning about people who will be “sent back to Egypt for additional horses” suggests that the law is aimed at Egyptians in particular. Samuel’s cautionary catalogue about the ways of a king (1 Sam 8:11–17) may allude to Solomon, but it describes Pharaoh:

He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will serve as outrunners for his chariots. He will appoint them as his chiefs of thousands and of fifties; or they will have to plow his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his courtiers. He will take a tenth part of your grain and vintage and give it to his eunuchs and courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, your choice young men, and your asses, and put them to work for him. He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves.

In typical Orientalist fashion Samuel speaks about what is impressive about Egypt only to undermine it: the Orient is great in material and human resources but weak in character.

#### KNOWING THE ORIENT

[K]nowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control.<sup>25</sup>

For even in Burton’s prose we are never directly *given* the Orient; everything about it is presented to us by way of Burton’s knowledgeable (and often prurient) interventions, which remind us repeatedly how he had taken over the management of Oriental life for the purposes of his narrative. And it is this fact—for in the *Pilgrimage* it is a fact—that elevates Burton’s consciousness to a position of supremacy over the Orient. In that position his individuality perforce encounters, and indeed merges with, the voice of Empire, which is itself a system of rules, codes, and concrete

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25. *Ibid.*, 36.

epistemological habits. Thus when Burton tells us in the *Pilgrimage* that “Egypt is a treasure to be won” . . . we must recognize how the voice of the highly idiosyncratic master of Oriental knowledge informs, feeds into the voice of European ambition for rule over the Orient.<sup>26</sup>

The Oriental matrix of knowledge and power underlies a familiar biblical type scene: at times of crisis, royal advisors fail and Israelites step into the breach. In the Joseph story, none of the magicians and wise men of Egypt can interpret Pharaoh’s dreams (Gen 41:8), the key to managing his country’s natural resources during the years of famine. With God’s help, Joseph succeeds where the Egyptian experts fail (Gen 41:25). In the exodus narrative, Pharaoh’s magicians are powerless to counter the plagues, and Moses demonstrates his power in part by his capacity to control the disasters he initiated (see, for example, his dealing with the frogs in Exod 8:4–10). The dependency of supposedly all-knowing, all-seeing rulers upon impotent aides hints at royal vulnerability in more ways than one. Most obviously, let down by his advisors, the ruler is shown to be incapable of ruling well. More subtly, the ruler’s vulnerability calls into question his claim to the resources under his control. That he cannot carry out his responsibilities in relation to his property means that he may no longer not deserve it. This line of thinking resonates strongly with the Orientalist attitudes that made the British Empire and others like it possible. European powers discredited Oriental rulers and their courts, demonstrating their inability to manage—and by extension their unworthiness to possess—their land and resources, and proceeded to take over with their efficient occidental systems of governance.

Yet there are important differences between the imperialist patterns identified by Said and the biblical typology outlined above. First, Said’s Orientalists may familiarize themselves with all that is primitive, irrational, dark, and dangerous about Oriental systems of governance, but their power lies in their ability to differentiate themselves from all that. They provide an efficient civil service in place of a eunuchs and snake charmers, economic forecasters instead of magicians and wise men. In the Bible, too, Egyptian and other courtiers conform to the exotic Orientalist stereotypes just mentioned, acquiring knowledge and power by means of the irrational arts. But in the Bible Israelites demonstrate their superiority by beating the Egyptians at their own game, not by introducing a new

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26. Ibid., 196.

game with a different set of rules. Moses and Aaron outcharm Pharaoh's snake charmers; they do not poison the snakes. The Joseph story shows Pharaoh's dream interpreters to be incompetent, but dream interpretation itself is not discredited. Indeed, Joseph's superior skill in this paradigmatically Egyptian science saves Egypt from famine and is the platform from which he ascends to effective control of all Egypt.

The second telling difference between Orientalist imperialism and the perspective of the Joseph story concerns the beneficiaries of foreign intervention. In some respects, the Joseph story fits the Orientalist model almost perfectly. A foreign emissary (Joseph), possessed of an esoteric knowledge of local customs (dream interpretation), enters the land and sets up a complex bureaucracy (selling land for the promise of future food, Gen 41:33–35; 47:20). In stark contrast to the Orientalist colonials discussed by Said, however, Joseph does not take control of Egypt's resources for his own gain or for the advantage of his own people. To be sure, Joseph and his family benefit for a limited time from "protectia" (47:11–12); but in both short-term and long-term, Pharaoh is the real winner (47:20). This is nowhere clearer than in Exod 1, where Pharaoh is a despot and Joseph and his family have already been forgotten.

#### INSIDE-OUTSIDE THE ORIENT

Yet the Orientalist remained outside the Orient, which, however much it was made to appear intelligible, remained beyond the Occident. The cultural, temporal, and geographical distance was expressed in metaphors of depth, secrecy, and sexual promise: phrases like "the veils of an Eastern bride" or "the inscrutable Orient" passed into the common language.<sup>27</sup>

Orientalists may dress in flowing robes and matching headgear, ride camels, live in tents, and sleep with local girls and boys, but they never become Oriental. Joseph and Moses come as close as possible to becoming Egyptian—they live among Egyptians, dress like Egyptians, speak Egyptian, and keep Egyptian customs (for example, Joseph gives his father an Egyptian-style funeral, Gen 50:7–11; and is himself embalmed in Egypt, Gen 50:26)—but, despite all their knowledge, influence and ability to pass, Egypt retains its separate identity, they remain outsiders, and—a crucial

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27. *Ibid.*, 222.



test—their children identify as Israelites, not Egyptians. With respect to outsider-insiders, too, the Bible is Orientalist when it comes to Israelites in Egypt.

#### ORIENTALISM AND IMPERIALISM

Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern the Orient, we will encounter few surprises. ... During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Orientalists became a more serious quantity, because by then the reaches of imaginative and actual geography had shrunk, because the Oriental-European relationship was determined by an unstoppable European expansion in search of markets, resources, and colonies, and finally, because Orientalism had accomplished its self-metamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution.<sup>28</sup>

The Bible views Egypt from a wide range of characteristic Orientalist perspectives. According to Said, all Orientalist productions share the common goal of dominating their subjects; Orientalism is a tool of imperialism. Here the Bible departs radically from Said's model. As much as it looks at Egypt through Orientalist lenses, the Bible is utterly devoid of imperial or colonial ambitions when it comes to its next-door neighbor. Egypt is consistently presented as a mighty superpower. Even when its rulers are shown to be vulnerable, there is no hint that they might be replaced by Israelites. The Egyptian army drowns in the Red Sea, but no one suggests returning to Egypt to colonize it. (The Israelites who think of going back are contemplating a return to life in slavery.) Even Israel's most triumphalist statement with respect to Egypt, the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–18), exhibits no imperialist designs. Deliverance from Egypt (15:1–12) is celebrated not as an end in itself but as the prelude to Israel's safe overland passage (15:13–16) to the place where it will receive the terms and conditions of its subjugation to God (15:17). Israel's slave-master relationship with Egypt survives long after its liberation, reinforced by strategically placed references—at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, for example (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6)—to Israel's slavery in the Egyptian house of bondage. The message to take away from this story is not, as it so easily could have been, one of tables turned: the slaves are now the masters. Instead Israel's history

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28. *Ibid.*, 95.

of subjugation in Egypt functions to underline its twin obligations to serve God and treat disadvantaged minorities well (Exod 22:20).

In those rare cases where the Bible dares to imagine an Egypt overpowered, it is not Israel but Nebuchadrezzar, king of *Babylon*, who will defeat, plunder, and ravage the land of Egypt (Ezek 29–32). Ezekiel describes Pharaoh as a dying monster who will be dragged from the Nile and flung into the desert (29:1–5; 32:1–6). The land of Egypt will be made desolate and its people scattered (29:12), and the women of the nations will sing a dirge over Egypt and its people (32:16). To be sure, there is plenty of Orientalist degradation coupled with control and domination here, but not the slightest hint Israel will play a role in Egypt's downfall or benefit from it in any way. On the contrary, the imperial force that will overthrow Egypt is Babylon, Israel's own captor:

For thus said the Lord GOD: *The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you.* I will cause your multitude to fall by the swords of warriors, all the most ruthless among the nations. They shall ravage the splendor of Egypt, and all her masses shall be wiped out. I will make all her cattle vanish from beside abundant waters. The feet of man shall not muddy them any more, nor shall the hoofs of cattle muddy them. (Ezek 32:11–13)<sup>29</sup>

Like Ezekiel (Ezek 29:6), Jeremiah seeks to discourage Israel from making a political alliance with Egypt against Babylon. He characterizes resistance to Babylon as a refusal to accept divine punishment. Israel can neither turn to Egypt for help nor flee to Egypt to avoid exile in Babylon; Judeans who think of leaving Judah to settle in Egypt or going to Egypt to avoid going to Babylon will encounter in Egypt all the punishments—sword, famine, and so forth—that they would have met in Judah or Babylon (Jer 42:13–22). Indeed, God will ultimately deliver Egypt itself into the hands of the very enemies that the Judeans are trying to avoid:

And say to them, “Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, I am sending for My servant King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and I will set his throne over these stones which I have embedded [at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace]. He will spread out his pavilion over them. He will come and attack the land of Egypt, delivering those destined for the plague, to the plague, those destined for captivity, to captivity, and those

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29. See also Ezek 29:17–20; 30:10–11, 23–25.

destined for the sword, to the sword. And I will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt; he will burn them down and carry them off. He shall wrap himself up in the land of Egypt, as a shepherd wraps himself up in his garment. And he shall depart from there in safety. (Jer 43:10–12).

As the Bible fantasizes about controlling and dominating Egypt, it fantasizes that Egypt will be controlled and dominated by Babylon, another of Israel's enemies. Egypt is a place of arrogant rulers (Ezek 29:1–3), mighty armies (Jer 46:3–9), extravagant wealth (Ezek 29:19; 30:4), lush and fertile land (Ezek 31:1–9; 32:13), palaces and temples (Jer 43:11, 13), exotic gods (Jer 43:11) and goddesses (Jer 44:19), all of them ripe for subjugation, destruction, and plunder:

Assuredly, thus said the Lord GOD: I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon. He shall carry off her wealth and take her spoil and seize her booty; and she shall be the recompense of his army. As the wage for which he labored, for what they did for Me, I give him the land of Egypt—declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek 29:19–20)

There is no shortage of Israelite Orientalism in these chapters of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, but not a breath of Israelite imperialism.

### CONCLUSION

My analysis in this paper points in two directions. In one direction, it is suggestive about Orientalism. It reinforces Said's later conviction that Orientalism is primarily a matter of an essential other, rather than East and West. It indicates that Orientalist perspectives took shape much earlier than is generally envisaged. It shows that the Bible is a rich resource for the study of Orientalism. (This paper has barely skimmed the surface, not even touching upon biblical perspectives of Babylon and Persia, which are in some respects richer veins to mine.) And, most importantly I think, it demonstrates that Orientalism can be political and ideological—it is clear that a great deal of ancient Near Eastern political history lies behind the Bible's presentation of Egypt—without being in the least imperialist or colonial. Orientalism seems to be much more than a tool of imperialism.

In the other direction, my analysis in this paper is suggestive about the Bible. It shows, I hope, that Orientalism is a productive lens through which to examine a wide range (much wider than indicated here) of

significant biblical texts. It deepens our appreciation of the functions of specific language, imagery, and themes in the Bible, especially those concerning the wealth, military power, and agricultural and human fecundity of the “other.” It is instructive about the role played by Egypt in the formation of Israel’s national identity. And it extends our understanding of the Bible’s attitude toward the “other” in general by shining a spotlight on Egypt, Israel’s essential other.

To end on a personal note, it also gives an unanticipated twist to the argument of a chapter in my book *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales*,<sup>30</sup> namely, that the book of Exodus is as much concerned with assimilation as with annihilation. I am grateful all over again to David Clines (and to Cheryl Exum) for publishing that earlier work at Sheffield Phoenix Press and thereby helping me to continue to contemplate Egypt.

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30. Diana Lipton, “‘The Heart Enticed’: The Exodus from Egypt as a Response to the Threat of Assimilation,” in *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 13–49.

## READING BACK AND FORTH: GENDER TROUBLE IN JEREMIAH 2–3

Christl M. Maier

The scholarly interests of David Clines are varied and cover a wide range of methods, starting from philological and text-critical analyses, source- and redaction-critical studies, literary inquiries, to ideological criticism. His two-volume anthology *On the Way to the Postmodern* impressively demonstrates David's exegetical and hermeneutical competence.<sup>1</sup> In order to cover that range of approaches, the editors of this Festschrift sought to classify its contributions under six different rubrics. Interestingly, all colleagues whom we asked to write a "historical" piece either had to decline due to their overcommitment to other tasks or in the end decided to deliver an essay that could be labeled "literary" or "exegetical." Is this mere coincidence or is it indicative of a growing caution among scholars to date biblical texts and even to differentiate them source-critically? In German scholarship at least, such restraint can hardly be felt, but every SBL meeting deepens my awareness that literary methods, reception history as well as feminist, postcolonial, and queer perspectives are much more popular than the so-called historical-critical approach. When I read book reviews of studies that employ historical-critical methods, I often encounter the reviewer either challenging the method in general or, if he or she concurs with the method, critiquing the results and proposing a different view. Given the inquiries into ideology, rhetoric and reader-response, source- and redaction-critical analyses appear more and more speculative and less plausible. This is just to describe my perception; I would not want to judge on this divide.

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1. David J. A. Clines, *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 292, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

In this essay, I try to combine a feminist perspective with the method of redaction criticism in order to unravel the variety of voices in Jer 2–3. Marveling at David Clines’s ability to coin titles, I name my reading strategy “back and forth” in order to indicate that I aim at honoring my current European cultural context, which David called “reading from left to right,”<sup>2</sup> as well as the ancient cultural context, that is, “reading from right to left,” as the Hebrew script runs.

### 1. WHAT IS “TROUBLING” IN JEREMIAH 2–3?

Jeremiah 2–3 is a text that offers discomfiting portraits of both its audience and the divine character whose words are presented by the prophetic voice. The two chapters contain accusations of the implied audience and try to explain the necessity of its punishment by YHWH. Not only with regard to contents but also to form, Jer 2–3 is disturbing due to abrupt changes of addressees and topics. I call this feature “gender trouble” because masculine and feminine forms variably describe the audience as a daughter (3:19a) or sons (3:14–20, 21–22), as a single male person (2:14–15, 28; cf. 4:1–2), a group (2:4–13, 26–27, 29–32; 3, 12; cf. 4:3–4) or a sexually promiscuous woman (2:2, 16–25, 33–37; 3:1–5, 6–13). In prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, the female personification of a collective, a city, or a land is well known.<sup>3</sup> The abrupt alternation in Jer 2–3, however, renders the text difficult to follow, at least for modern readers, who certainly have views on sex and gender roles that differ strongly from the views of ancient readers. In the following, I will examine traditional redaction-critical studies (2) and feminist literary studies (3) with regard to how they interpret the gendered characters. Then I will offer a possible historical setting for Jer 2:14–19 (4) and analyze the marriage metaphor in Jer 2–3 (5).

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2. See David J. A. Clines, “The Ten Commandments, Reading from Left to Right,” in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26–45.

3. For a tradition history of the female personification of Jerusalem see Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008). The depiction of Israel and Judah as YHWH’s wives is analyzed by Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between Yhwh and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003).

## 2. GENDER REVERSAL AS A SIGN OF REDACTION

Traditional redaction-critical studies usually differentiate source-critically along the gender lines and explain the mix of forms as resulting from redactional activities. The most sophisticated redaction-historical analysis of Jer 2–3 is provided by Mark E. Biddle, who finds four subsequent layers that mirror a continuous reworking of some small portions of text after the demise of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.<sup>4</sup> Biddle regards passages that address an unnamed female figure (2:14–25, 33–37) as the oldest layer of material and attributes them to a “*Schuldübernahme* redaction,” which blames the personified people of Judah for their own demise, whereas YHWH is declared fault-free.<sup>5</sup> In sexually explicit language, the female addressee’s abandonment of YHWH is characterized as “whoring” with foreign nations called her “lovers.” Moreover, Biddle assigns most of Jer 3 to a second phase of continuous reworking that focuses on repentance,<sup>6</sup> while the plural addressees in 2:4–13, 26–32 are allocated to a “generations redaction.”<sup>7</sup> Lastly, the chapters were framed by 2:2b–3 and 4:1 in order to serve as an introduction to the “foe from the north” material in Jer 4–6. Therefore, Biddle takes the shifts of gender as crucial for source-critical decisions but does not question the sexualized portrait of Judah.

Although he also favors a redaction-critical approach, Marvin Sweeney criticizes Biddle’s source-critical decisions along the gender lines and especially the post-catastrophe dating of most passages.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Sweeney argues that the gender shift is a rhetorical device: “the interplay between masculine and feminine address forms for Israel in this text may be deliberate, in that they refer respectively to the sociopolitical reality of Israel as a people and to the metaphorical portrayal of Israel as YHWH’s bride.”<sup>9</sup>

4. Mark E. Biddle, *A Redaction History of Jeremiah 2:1–4:2* (AThANT 77; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), esp. the chart on p. 207.

5. Ibid., 55, 207–9. The basic layer that is reworked by this redaction consists of Jer 2:20a, 21–22, 23b, 24, 25a, 33b, 34.

6. See ibid., 83–121, 209–11, esp. 116: “no two units in Jeremiah 3 may safely be said to stem from a single hand ... nor [may] any unit in Jeremiah 3 be identified with one of the redactional layers of Jeremiah 2.”

7. See ibid., 127–45, 212–13.

8. Marvin A. Sweeney, “Structure and Redaction in Jeremiah 2–6,” in *Troubling Jeremiah* (ed. A. R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O’Connor, and Louis Stulman; JSOT-Sup 260; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 200–218.

9. Ibid., 206.

In Sweeney's view, the first singular narrative reports in Jer 2:1; 3:6–10; and 3:11 mark the basic structural divisions of Jer 2–6. From an analogy between “apostate Israel” and “treacherous Judah” established in 3:6–11 Sweeney concludes that in Jer 2–3 “a text addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel has been reworked to address the southern kingdom of Judah.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, he dates the bulk of the two chapters (except 2:1–2a<sup>1</sup>, 28; 3:6–10, 11; 4:3–4) to the time of King Josiah, who in his view attempted to restore the former northern kingdom to Davidic rule.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Dieter Böhler regards Jer 2–3 as a carefully structured sermon of the young Jeremiah who uses the gendered addresses for different accusations: In passages that use singular or plural masculine forms, the prophet would accuse the northern kingdom of religious apostasy, whereas in passages that address the female character he would denounce political alliances with other nations.<sup>12</sup> Böhler bases his identification of the female character on 3:19; she represents the landless daughter, that is, the Israelites during the early exodus period (2:2; 3:19) and after the fall of the northern kingdom (2:16, 17–19, 20–25, 33–37; 3:1–5). Like Sweeney, Böhler interprets the appeal to Israel in 3:14–15 (masc. pl.) and the call to return to YHWH in 4:1–2 as prophetic propaganda for King Josiah's plan to combine Israelite territory and its inhabitants into Judah.<sup>13</sup>

In her monograph on Jeremiah, Maria Häusl concurs with Böhler in arguing that the gender shift in Jer 2–3 is rhetorical rather than a sign of redaction and that the chapters cannot be separated source-critically, as Biddle argues.<sup>14</sup> In her view, the three characters refer to the people of Israel from different perspectives. As a single male, Israel is characterized positively as chosen by YHWH, the firstfruits of the harvest (2:3) or a deplorable slave (2:14). The masculine plural passages refer to the leading social class that is reproached for irresponsible handling of their duties.<sup>15</sup>

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10. Ibid., 212.

11. Ibid., 214–15. For a similar dating of Jer 2–3 with even less reasoning see also Rainer Albertz, “Jer 2–6 und die Frühzeitverkündigung Jeremias,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 20–47.

12. Dieter Böhler, “Geschlechterdifferenz und Landbesitz: Strukturuntersuchungen zu Jer 2,2–4,2,” in *Jeremia und die “deuteronomistische Bewegung”* (ed. Walter Groß; BBB 98; Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1995), 91–127.

13. Ibid., 121, 125.

14. Maria Häusl, *Bilder der Not: Weiblichkeits- und Geschlechtermetaphorik im Buch Jeremia* (BibS[F] 37; Freiburg: Herder, 2003), esp. 300–356.

15. Ibid., 309–10.



The female character represents the collective that has abandoned its deity and thus remains intentionally nameless. Contrary to Böhler, however, Häusl identifies “Israel” with the exilic remnant of Judah and thus dates the core of the chapters, like Biddle, to the exilic period.<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, the different theses about the redaction history of Jer 2–3 demonstrate the general difficulty in differentiating source-critically and dating passages that are highly metaphorical. Clearly, even at this time the ancient redactors struggled with identifying the unnamed female character addressed in 2:14–25, 33–37.<sup>17</sup> While the prose passage in 3:6–11\* allows her identification with either Israel (i.e., the northern kingdom) or Judah by presenting both as “sisters,” the introduction in 2:1–2a $\alpha$  names Jerusalem as addressee of the following speech. As this introduction has no equivalent in the Old Greek and the following passages in Jer 2–3 refer to the history of Israel as a people, not to Jerusalem, it is most probably a late premasoretic addition that correlates Jer 2–3 to Jer 4–6, which explicitly address Jerusalem and Judah.<sup>18</sup> Despite Böhler’s and Häusl’s critique of Biddle and their analysis of the text’s rhetoric, their studies also indicate that 2:1–4:2 is not a literary unit but a redacted text, which in its final form may refer to several situations in Judah’s history.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting, however, that the two male scholars do not take issue with the sexualized metaphors and their possibly negative reception by modern readers, while the female scholar discusses such rhetorical effects. Only with the advent of feminist approaches has the use of sexualized metaphors been problematized and their impact on the minds and feelings of modern readers studied. The following review will underscore this statement but also disclose that most feminist studies neglect the diachronic analysis of the texts.

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16. Ibid., 336–37.

17. There are several verses in which the Masoretes altered a written form (Kethib) into one with a different gender (Qere), e.g., 2:15; 3:19.

18. Similarly Böhler, “Geschlechterdifferenz,” 118.

19. Häusl (*Bilder der Not*, 306) takes 2:28 and the prose passages 3:6–12a $\alpha$ , 14–18 as later insertions. Similarly, Böhler (“Geschlechterdifferenz,” 118) lists 2:2a, 28; 3:6–12, 16–18 among the additions.

## 3. THE RHETORIC OF GENDER AND ITS IMPACT ON MODERN READERS

In an article on Hos 2 published in 1995, Drorah Setel used the term *pornography* for the prophetic personification of a collective as a nymphomaniac female character.<sup>20</sup> Other feminist scholars have taken up the term with regard to Jer 2–3; 13:20–27; Ezek 16; and 23. For instance, Athalya Brenner argues that the comparison of the unnamed female addressee in Jer 2:23–25 with a she-camel in lust is prophetic pornography that exhibits female sexuality as irregular, abnormal, animalistic, “natural,” and earthy: “The metaphorized female creature is motivated by lust rather than by love or the accepted conventions of human normative social behaviour. In other words, female sexuality is objectified in this passage.”<sup>21</sup>

I agree with Brenner and others that the portrait of the female character’s sexuality is androcentric and misrepresents women and female sexuality. Moreover, the portrait of YHWH as punishing his people for “whoring” with other lovers can easily be misunderstood as a common biblical idea of how to treat an adulterous wife. Yet, being informed readers, feminist scholars in my view should point out that these passages neither talk about real women nor provide any meaningful contribution to the postmodern discourse on gender relations in the Western hemisphere. I would suggest distinguishing with Gerlinde Baumann between the “explanation” of a metaphor, that is, exploring its historical sense within the ancient cultural context, and the metaphor’s “interpretation,” that is, its assessment from the perspective of today’s readers and thus a postmodern cultural context.<sup>22</sup>

The metaphor’s ancient cultural context is political pressure and military threat, to which both the northern kingdom and Judah were subject

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20. Drorah T. Setel, “Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea,” in *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible* (ed. Letty Russell; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 86–95.

21. Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (BIS 1; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 182. Brenner’s assessment is taken up by Angela Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah: A Feminist-Literary Reading* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 33–34; and Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 125–26.

22. See Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 44–46; idem, *Gottesbilder der Gewalt im Alten Testament verstehen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 15–17, 79–83.

by the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian imperialist regimes.<sup>23</sup> In the context of imperial warfare and its exploitation of remote territories, masculinity connoted strength, power, and honor, whereas femininity was associated with frailty, powerlessness, and the potentiality for shame. Addressing the people of Judah as an adulterous woman can thus be seen as a prophetic polemic that aims at shaming the male leaders of the community and in historical retrospect mirrors their disgraceful defeat and loss of power.<sup>24</sup>

What Jer 2–3 may mean for ancient readers who survived the fall of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon is explored by Pete Diamond and Kathleen O'Connor, who critically assess the impact of this gender-specific rhetoric on ancient and modern readers.<sup>25</sup> They see the material of Jer 2–3 organized by the root metaphor of a broken marriage and suggest that its implied audience is the returnees from Babylon living in Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> In appealing to them as the children of YHWH's faithless wives, the composition "constructs a rhetoric of sympathy for husband Yhwh" and encourages the children to "side with their father" by representing the mother in an unsympathetic way.<sup>27</sup> While Diamond and O'Connor acknowledge that the text's rhetoric may be conventional for ancient readers, they point to its harmful effect on modern recipients. They find not only the sexualized depiction of the people but also the portrait of God immensely problematic because Jer 2–3 unfold "a male projection of betrayal and evil unto women," and the female character is "the principal tool used in a rhetoric of shaming to encode the infidelities of male Israel."<sup>28</sup>

While I agree with Diamond and O'Connor's interpretation of the extant Masoretic Text, I would argue that there is not just *one* implied

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23. For more details on the ancient context see Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Ezekiel in Abu Ghraib: Rereading Ezekiel 16:37–39 in the Context of Imperial Conquest," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality* (ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine L. Patton; SBLSymS 31; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 141–57; Ruth Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur* (VTSup 154; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 158–248.

24. See Maier, *Daughter Zion*, 103–6.

25. A. R. Pete Diamond and Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Unfaithful Passions: Coding Women Coding Men in Jeremiah 2–3 (4.2)," in Diamond et al., *Troubling Jeremiah*, 123–45.

26. *Ibid.*, 138–42.

27. *Ibid.*, 142–43.

28. *Ibid.*, 143.

audience in Jer 2–3 but *several subsequent* audiences, which were instructed about the human-divine relationship in preexilic, exilic, and postexilic times.

#### 4. A POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HISTORICAL SETTING (JER 2:14–19)

In Jer 2–3 the *identified* addressees are named “Israel” (2:3, 14, 31), “house of Israel” (2:4, 26; 3:20), “sons of Israel” (3:21), and “house of Jacob” (2:4). Apart from the late introduction in 2:1–2aa, the prose passage 3:6–11, and a gloss in 2:28,<sup>29</sup> the female character is *not identified* in the text.

So far, scholars have made three different identifications of the female character: the landless daughter of Israel, that is, the remnant of the northern kingdom (Sweeney and Böhrer); exilic Judah (Biddle and Häusler); and the postexilic returnees from Babylon (Diamond and O’Connor). To this list I would add another possible candidate, namely the people of Judah before its fall, because I read 2:14–19 as a late preexilic piece of prophetic propaganda.

<sup>14</sup> Is Israel a slave? Is he a home-born servant?

Why then has he become plunder?

<sup>15</sup> Lions roared against him, they roared loudly.

They made his land a waste; his cities are in ruins,<sup>30</sup> without inhabitant.

<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the people of Memphis and Tahpanhes will pasture the crown of your [second fem. sg.] head.

<sup>17</sup> Do you not bring this upon yourself by forsaking YHWH, your God, while he led you in the way?

<sup>18</sup> Now, what do you gain by going to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Shichor?<sup>31</sup>

Or what do you gain by going to Assyria, to drink the waters of the Euphrates?

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29. From Jer 4:5 onward, the female figure denotes Jerusalem or Daughter Zion. Only in 2:28 is the male addressee (see the second masc. sg. suffixes) identified with (female) Judah; the Old Greek adds Jerusalem as in the parallel phrase 11:13.

30. I read with the Qere a third person plural perfect *niphal* of the verb נָצַח II “to be destroyed.” The Old Greek and the Vulgate also read a plural form.

31. Shichor, “Horus,” refers to the name of a lake or canal in the eastern Nile Delta (cf. Josh 13:3; Isa 23:3). See Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (ed. Rudolf Meyer and Johannes Renz; 18th ed.; Berlin: Springer, 1987–), 1347.

<sup>19</sup> Your wickedness will punish you, and your apostasies will convict you.  
 Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake YHWH, your  
 God;  
 the fear of me is not in you, says my Lord, YHWH Sabaoth.

The passage contains an obvious shift in gender: Israel is characterized as masculine, a male slave, whereas verses 16–19 directly address the female character. The metaphors in verses 14–15 employ an image of war: the “roaring lions,” animals of prey, denote the enemies who devoured the people and destroyed the cities. In my view, the verses look back at the “enslavement” of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians (cf. the Hebrew *qatal* forms). Verse 16 names two Egyptian cities, Memphis and Tahpanhes, which were well known in the seventh century.<sup>32</sup> Verse 17 delivers a warning that the female character will experience the same lot as the people of the northern kingdom if she abandons YHWH. The next two questions are rhetorical and describe the female character as alternating her way between the Nile Delta and the Euphrates, between Egypt and either the Assyrians or their Babylonian successors. Verse 19 negatively evaluates her search for water, a metaphor for nourishment, and calls the female character to admit her wrongdoing.

Rhetorically, the past devastation of Israel’s territory (2:15) serves as a warning to the female character, who at present is accused of seeking alliances with the great empires. Thus the unnamed female character is different from Israel and can plausibly be identified with the people of Judah. After the fall of the northern kingdom, the Judean monarchs remained political allies of the empires in Egypt and Mesopotamia: While Manasseh was an Assyrian vassal (cf. 2 Kgs 21:5), Josiah was a probably subject to the Egyptian king (2 Kgs 23:29). Both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah broke the vassal oath sworn to the Babylonian king (2 Kgs 24:1, 20) while hoping for Egyptian help (2 Kgs 24:7; cf. Ezek 17:15).

While I agree with Sweeney and Böhler that Jer 2:14–19 plausibly mirrors a preexilic situation, I cannot detect any correlation with King Josiah since the reference to Israel in 2:14–15 serves only as a comparison for the fate that awaits the people of Judah if they do not change their current

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32. See Donald B. Redford, “Memphis,” *ABD* 4:689–91; Richard N. Jones and Zbigniew Fiema, “Tahpanhes,” *ABD* 6:308–9; Manfred Görg, “Tachpanhes,” *Neues Bibel-Lexikon* (ed. Manfred Görg and Bernhard Lang; 3 vols.; Zurich: Benziger, 1994–2001), 3:767.

policy. In this passage, the female character is not explicitly sexualized; what she does to her god is named “forsaking” (עִזָּב), not “whoring” (זָנָה), and therefore she could be viewed in the role of either a daughter or a wife in relation to God. In 2:23–25, however, she is portrayed as God’s unfaithful wife. Whereas postmodern readers perceive the role of daughter and wife as quite different, for ancient readers the distinction is not as great because in both roles a woman would be utterly dependent on her male partner or father. Rhetorically, the metaphor denotes a hierarchical relationship between the people of Judah and their deity.

#### 5. ANCIENT AND MODERN IMPLICATIONS OF METAPHOR (JER 2:2B, 32; 3:1–5, 19)

There is another text layer that explicitly introduces the marriage metaphor in portraying Judah’s relationship to God, starting with the reference to a time of courtship in 2:2b:

Thus says YHWH:  
I remember the loyalty [חֶסֶד] of your youth,  
the love [אַהֲבָה] of your time of betrothal,  
how you followed me in the wilderness,  
in a land not sown.

My translation intentionally retains the ambiguity of the Hebrew verse that leaves open whether God remembers his own חֶסֶד “covenant loyalty” and אַהֲבָה “love” or the one of the female character.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the verse establishes the idea of a marriage bond and asserts the willingness of the people to follow God in the wilderness.

The next verse with bridal imagery is 2:32, a rhetorical question:

Can a maiden forget her ornaments  
or a bride her attire?  
Yet my people, they have forgotten me  
days without number.

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33. Häusl (*Bilder der Not*, 314) asserts the ambiguity of the verse. The Hebrew noun חֶסֶד “loyalty” denotes commonly the one-sided grace of God, who stipulates the covenant. Michael V. Fox reads an objective genitive here, i.e., YHWH’s loyalty and love is mentioned, and argues that there is no tradition of Israel’s loyalty or love during the desert trek; cf. idem, “Jeremiah 2:2 and the ‘Desert Ideal,’” *CBQ* 35 (1973): 441–50.

The form of the rhetorical question demands a negative answer. No, a bride would not forget her attire. Rhetorically, the people (note the masc. pl. verb) are declared to behave unexpectedly, namely to forget their defining accessories, their intimate relationship to God. Both 2:2b and 2:32 provide a new context for the accusations in 2:14–19, 23–25. Through this embedding, the female character's abandoning of God in search of living water (2:17–19) and her roaming about like a she-camel in the wilderness (2:23–25) appear as acts of adultery.

The passage that uses the marriage metaphor most explicitly is 3:1–5, a disputation introduced by a common legal case.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>1</sup> If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? Would not such a land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? says YHWH.

<sup>2</sup> Look up to the bare heights, and see!  
Where have you not been lain with?  
At the waysides you have been sitting for them  
like a nomad in the wilderness.  
You have polluted the land  
with your whoring and wickedness.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore the showers have been withheld  
and the spring rain has not come.  
Yet you have the forehead of a whore,  
you refuse to be ashamed.

<sup>4</sup> Have you not just now called to me, "My Father,  
you are the friend of my youth";

<sup>5</sup> and "Will he be angry forever,  
will he be indignant to the end?"  
This is how you spoke;  
you did wrong and had your way.

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34. There are distinctive variations in the MT and the Old Greek, which can be interpreted as a deliberate reworking of the passage with regard to the law of remarriage in Deut 24:1–4 in the Hebrew text tradition; see Christl M. Maier, "Ist Versöhnung möglich? Jeremia 3,1–5 als Beispiel innerbiblischer Auslegung," in *"Gott bin ich, kein Mann": Beiträge zur Hermeneutik der biblischen Gottesrede: Festschrift für Helen Schüngel-Straumann zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Ilona Riedel-Spangenberg and Erich Zenger; Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 295–305. For the current inquiry these differences are, however, not essential.

The passage introduces a known legal prohibition of remarriage after divorce (Deut 24:1–4) in order to accuse the personified people of “whoring.” Mary Shields states the rhetorical aim of the passage: “By posing the law as a rhetorical question, the writer, by presuming the audience’s agreement, has enticed the people to indict themselves.”<sup>35</sup> While Deut 24:1 does not mention any reason for the divorce, the characterization of the female character in Jer 3:2 accuses her of repeated acts of adultery, which are implicitly identified with prostitution. Her sitting at the wayside underscores the image of the prostitute waiting for clients. If one takes the “bare heights” as referring to the open-air sanctuaries near the towns, the so-called *במות* (cf. 1 Sam 9:13–19; 1 Kgs 3:2; Jer 7:31), “lovers” may also be other deities that are venerated at these shrines.<sup>36</sup>

Jeremiah 3:1–5 leaves open whether the indicted female addressee is the northern kingdom or Judah. Shields argues that the implied audience of 3:1–5 is preexilic Judah and thus the entity that I assume as the audience for 2:14–19.<sup>37</sup> The following prose passage (3:6–10) supports this interpretation since it explicitly states that God gave Israel a decree of divorce (3:8), which did not, however, prevent Judah from running to other lovers. Thus the adulterous woman described in 3:2 would be Judah. Yet if one takes the legal case as the pivot on which the ensuing disputation hinges, the divorce decree would point to the northern kingdom and declare Israel’s reunion with God as unlawful and unthinkable.

The probable continuation of 3:1–5 may be found in 3:19–20, which expands the idea that the female character appeals to God as her father (cf. 3:4):<sup>38</sup>

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35. Mary E. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute: The Rhetorics of Intertextuality, Metaphor and Gender in Jer 3.1–4.4* (JSOTSup 387; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 38.

36. For the Deuteronomistic polemic against the cult at these shrines see Matthias Gleis, *Die Bamah* (BZAW 251; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 235–44, 247–49.

37. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 49.

38. Jer 3:12b–13 contradicts the rhetoric of 3:1–5 by calling “apostate Israel” to return to YHWH, whose anger will not last forever. See also Bauer, *Gender*, 59. The verses mix forms of second fem. sg. and second masc. pl. and are framed by a prose introduction (vv. 11–12a\*), which partly reiterates the introduction in v. 6, and by a prose addition (v. 13b), which reiterates accusations from other contexts; cf. 2:23b–24, 25, for “distribute her ways for the strangers”; 2:20; 3:6, for “under every green tree”; and 9:12; 22:21, for “not listen to my voice”; cf. the positive formulation in 7:23; 11:4, 7. With regard to contents and framing, 3:12b–13 presupposes the prose section in 3:6–11; the judgment that Israel is less guilty than Judah triggers a call to Israel to



<sup>19</sup> And I myself thought how I would set you [second fem. sg.] among the sons,  
 and give you a pleasant land,  
 the most beautiful heritage of all the nations.  
 And I thought you [Kethib: masc. pl.; Qere: fem. sg.] would call me, “my father,” and would not turn from following me.  
<sup>20</sup> Yet, as a wife faithlessly leaves her companion,  
 so have you [second masc. pl.] dealt faithlessly with me,  
 house of Israel, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 3:19–20 knits several threads together and reveals an identification of the female character in the marriage relationship with either Judah or Israel. In verse 19b the phrase “would call me, ‘my father,’” refers to 3:4, whereas the motif of following YHWH refers to 2:2b. In verse 20 the metaphor of the faithless wife is transformed into a comparison that recalls 3:1–5 and identifies the wife with the house of Israel. The role shift from wife to daughter and from a second feminine singular to a masculine plural address in 3:19b is, in my view, intentional. This shift aims at transforming the divine-human relation from a marriage to a father-children relationship. This shift of roles is necessary since the female character represents the collective, yet this collective, or rather both Israel and Judah, have been destroyed. The sons and daughters, however, can denote both a group of survivors and the generation after the demise. The transition carries the implicit message: Neither the northern kingdom nor Judah as a whole will be reunited with YHWH since their marriage is ultimately broken. But the sons and daughters, that is, the next generations, are allowed to renew their relation to God. Following this shift I would further argue that the passages in Jer 2–3 that address Israel in second masculine plural (2:4–13; 3:14–18, 21–25) represent a postexilic layer within Jer 2–3, which unites the remnants of both the northern and the southern kingdom under the rubric of sons. As such, they can be reunited again under the name “Israel.” There is but one condition: that they repent their trespassing and their longing for other powers and deities (4:1–2).

In sum, I argue that the idea of a broken marriage may have developed in preexilic Judah with reference to the northern kingdom (3:1–5), while Judah was first portrayed as God’s daughter (2:14–19; 3:19) or wife

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return. Jer 3:14–18 is an even later oracle of salvation that envisions the postexilic state of Jerusalem and the return of all dispersed Israelites and Judeans to their homeland.

(2:23–25). After the demise of the Judean monarchy, both capital cities were depicted as adulterous wives of YHWH. In this exilic context, the call to the “sons” to return (3:14–17) would refer to the survivors of the catastrophe. The now extant text narrates the drama of a broken marriage, in which the woman, preexilic Judah (see Shields), is accused of adultery and her children, the postexilic returnees from Babylon, are called to side with the husband (see Diamond and O’Connor).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Reading Jer 2–3 *back and forth* I have tried to combine a redaction-critical approach with a postmodern, feminist perspective. Reading *back and forth* means, on the one hand, exploring the ancient context of the metaphors and their meaning. As it turns out, they are first used in a situation of imperial war and political pressure, in which the depiction of Judah as a wayward daughter and adulterous wife aims at shaming a mostly male audience. After Judah’s demise, the broken marriage metaphor was used to explain God’s turning away from his people.

On the other hand, reading *back and forth* means considering the reactions of postmodern readers seriously and identifying the possible harmful effects of the sexualized female metaphors. Whereas these metaphors can be labeled “shocking, but conventional” with regard to the ancient cultural context, their use appears as “androcentric, misogynist, and thus unacceptable for the depiction of a human-divine relationship” with regard to the current European context. The variation and intensity of the metaphor is, in my view, the product of subsequent redactions, which led to sudden gender shifts and to a confusing Hebrew text. I would argue that a combination of historical-critical and postmodern reading strategies helps to untangle the “gender trouble” in Jer 2–3.

## DREAMS: HAD, RECOUNTED, AND INTERPRETED— POWER PLAYS IN THE JOSEPH STORY?

Heather A. McKay

### INTRODUCTION

People who have dreams may choose to tell them to others or to keep them private. If they choose to tell them, what are their motives? Is “retelling” a dream merely a form of innocent amusement or entertainment? Is retelling a nightmare a way of finding calm? Is the telling of a wish-fulfillment dream no more than a means of sharing with a friend or relative one’s hopes for a wished-for outcome? Or, perhaps less pleasantly, is telling a “dream” a means of giving some flavor of authenticity to a lie one wishes to tell to that other person?

Anyone who remembers their dreams on waking is more or less bound to interpret those dreams for themselves to some extent, at least, and probably fugitively; but if they remember a dream because it holds some significance for them, they may later choose to share that interpretation with a person with whom they have already shared the dream. Perhaps such persons wish others to express a view on the likelihood of their chosen interpretation seeming appropriate or plausible. Better still, their interlocutor/s might agree that such an outcome would be good, that they would be in favor of it, even work toward it in some way that might become open to them. Such a response would gratify the teller and create a further pleasurable experience out of the exchange.

Clearly, however, many questions arise. Is this retelling activity, with or without the accompanying possible interpretation, merely a means of entertaining oneself and one’s listeners? Or is the whole activity some form of power play within a family or among a group of friends? Or is it a way

of lying to one's closest companions? The dreams of Joseph tend to spring to mind as possibly fitting any or all of these scenarios.

The interpretation of the dreamer's dream by another person ought also to be subjected to the same scrutiny. For, as a consequence of telling the dream to the would-be interpreter, the dreamer puts himself/herself somewhat into the power of the interpreter and can therefore be open to manipulation. A simple, humble, or even gullible person could be manipulated quite appallingly by a devious interpreter of those recounted dreams.

This dangerous—to the dreamer—power dynamic of the situation would be reversed, however, if the dreamer in question is a person of great status or power. There, danger could well attend the interpreter. The principle of “kill the messenger” could come into play. Then the interpreter would have to be an extremely skillful diplomat even to risk an unfavorable interpretation—whether given in good faith or not—and a very skilled and crafty manipulator of the egos and wills of others to survive giving such an interpretation. Even more danger would loom, then, if that interpreter were presenting the interpretation in manipulative mode, either seeking safety or advancement for his/her own ends. Again Joseph could spring to mind, this time as an adult, interpreting others' dreams in Egypt. In this paper I will scrutinize Joseph's possible motives and methods against a background of modern discussions of dreams and their interpretation. I should stress, at this point, that the issues under discussion here are not “what really happened” but rather what readers see and hear in their minds' eyes as they read Joseph's story.

#### MODERN UNDERSTANDINGS OF DREAMS AND DREAMING

A discussion of the alleged purposes of dreams is provided by G. William Domhoff,<sup>1</sup> who claims that while no physiological or psychological functions have been positively identified for dreams, human cultures have always found some “meaning” or “purpose” in them.

A typical response to dreams in a variety of cultures has been their use as indicators of the causes of illness, often blamed on evil or angry spirits. More immediately vital uses of dreams have been to speed up the finding and hunting of game, or to foretell the weather or other aspects of

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1. G. William Domhoff, “The ‘Purpose’ of Dreams.” Online: <http://www2.ucsc.edu/dreams/Articles/purpose.html>.

the future. And, in Western society, logged and recounted dreams have been used in psychotherapy throughout the twentieth century, perhaps because many people do not feel as personally responsible for the content of their dreams as they do for their conscious thoughts and therefore feel less reticence in recounting them to a stranger/professional. The ideas of foretelling the weather, or otherwise seeing into the future, are relevant to the interpretations of dreams in Joseph's story, as is the idea that dreams also reveal valuable information about the dreamer.

Approaching the matter from a slightly different tack, the anthropologist Waud H. Kracke has studied cultural aspects of dreaming,<sup>2</sup> suggesting that dreams are dealt with in different cultures according to four stand-points:

- what is generally believed about the *nature* of dreaming
- the familiar ways of *interpreting* particular dreams
- the familiar settings in which dreams are *shared* (or not) and discussed
- the familiar ways in which dreams are *used*, especially in healing actions

In addition, some anthropologists have interpreted dreams psychodynamically, "as expressing the dreamer's inner wishes, fears, and conflicts." So people in many cultures—even some of those in which dreams are seen as existing in some kind of real space—at the same time recognize that dreams happen somehow in the brain or mind. Many think that dreams are continuations or residues of thoughts persons had as they fell asleep, much like Freud's "day residues," that somehow end up enmeshed in dreams. Also, in many cultures attempts have been made to tell the future from dreams and to work out "methods" of reading the dreams in that way, even including regarding them as predicting the opposite of what they seem to promise. It is an unsolved puzzle why such systems are so favored and so prevalent; most probably, dreamers themselves press for explanations that they can accept.

The notions of ideas about the nature of dreaming, that is, whether dreams come from God and whether their interpretation would also come

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2. Waud H. Kracke, "Cultural Aspects of Dreaming." Online: <http://www.dream-research.ca/pdf/culture.pdf>.

from God, are likewise relevant in the dreams in Joseph's story along with the idea of foretelling the future.

### DREAM TELLING

Telling one's dream is apparently a different event from asking for or receiving an interpretation of it. Each society has rules and protocols about how, where, when, and to whom a person may tell his or her dreams, as well as protocols for the setting, the conversational content, the number, gender/s, and relationship/s of the listeners, and all such factors affecting how the teller tells the dream and how the listeners hear it. A woman telling a dream to one close female friend will be in quite a different psychosocial circumstance from a woman telling the same dream to a male she regards as a possible suitor. A man telling his dream to a close male friend, or mate, will be a different type of raconteur from when he tells the same, or a slightly altered version of the same, dream to a slightly merry group of friends during a night out in a bar. And one can easily imagine many other, equally distorting scenarios, though one hesitates even to imagine a dream being recounted as part of evidence in a court of law.

Yet the telling of a dream during the session a person spends with a psychoanalyst working through the narrative and emotions of a dream will be equally as serious. In that situation the particular value of the dream lies in its reflection of the dreamer's feelings about the key events and relationships that are absorbing his or her subconscious mind. The skillful analyst can now access issues that have not surfaced in previous conversations with the client. It is perhaps those aspects of dreams that have allowed interpreters to find some understanding of submerged meanings in dreams.

### DREAM TELLING AND DREAM INTERPRETATION IN THE STORY OF JOSEPH

#### JOSEPH TELLS HIS DREAMS TO HIS BROTHERS

Joseph's childhood dreams can be read as representing the needs of a much younger brother to wreak revenge on his many older brothers—a weaker brother's power play. This is equally true both for the creation of the dream in his private world of sleep and for his mental experiencing of the cheering images and events portrayed therein when he goes over the dream again while awake, or for his (possibly joyfully triumphant) relating of it

to his brothers. After all, his brothers already hated him for being a telltale and his father's darling, singled out by the gift of a long-sleeved mantle; they could hardly speak a kind word to him at any time.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. (Gen 37:3–4)

And since he knew their opinion of him, he could not resist baiting them with his dreams—that is, if he truly had the dreams in the first place.

There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.” His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words. (37:7–8)

Certainly, this dream would represent a wish fulfillment for the, probably deservedly, picked-on Joseph, giving him, as it does, a sense of final triumph over those dominating brothers of his.

His second recounted dream is similar, though even more grandiose.

He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, “Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?” So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (37:9–11)

Seemingly, the sun and the moon represent his parents, presumably Jacob and Rebekah, while the stars represent his brothers. It is noteworthy that he told the second dream also to his father, in spite of being his father's favorite. Presumably, he could not resist crowing over his parents as well as his brothers. One should also note that Benjamin appears to be included in this dream as indicated by reference to eleven stars, while at other parts of Joseph's story he is distinguished from their ten half-brothers.<sup>3</sup>

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3. *Pace* von Rad, who believes the eleven constellations to be a reference to the

Taking a step back from the world of the text and taking a look at what the narrator is doing here suggests to the alert reader that the narration of the dream telling can also be read as a device of the narrator to lay the groundwork for both the brothers' selling of Joseph into slavery in Egypt and for Joseph's rise to fame and fortune there.

Whatever readers' critical understanding of the narrative, they can still imagine a gleeful and even slightly spiteful Joseph telling those dreams to his frowning, snorting, and gesticulating brothers. And they can well nigh hear the brothers' sotto voce comments. Neither of the two dreams required much interpretation, after all. The dreams suggested that Joseph would, at some time in the future, exercise complete dominance over all of his current hearers.

#### JOSEPH'S POSSIBLE MOTIVES FOR TELLING HIS DREAMS

Asking some questions raised by the discussion of dreams above is now appropriate: What were Joseph's motives in telling the dreams? What outcomes did he wish for? Was the retelling a locus of deceit or power play? Or did those dreams merely reflect his inner wishes, fears, and conflicts?

Was Joseph lying about those dreams? I hardly think he would dare to, for the brothers would be sure to punish him for his impudence in telling them—unless, of course, they believed that all dreams came from God, in which case they would bottle their wrath and do nothing about it no matter how much they wished to repay Joseph for voicing such seemingly patent rubbish.

Then again, if Joseph knew that they might think that, he could have been taking a deliberate chance to irritate them or, at least, to abash them somewhat. Such dreams would certainly have reflected his inner wishes, fears, and conflicts. He would dearly have loved to be able to relish getting the better of his brothers. However, if these retellings were deceitful, then they represent a vicious act on Joseph's part, an act of indescribable violence against family solidarity. Lying within the family, according to Irma Kurtz, is a heinous crime, even though lying to outsiders can sometimes be a means of protecting family privacy.<sup>4</sup>

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eleven ancient signs of the zodiac. See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; rev. ed.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 352.

4. Irma Kurtz, "The Lying Game," BBC Radio 4, April 26, 2003.



So readers are left wondering about the young Joseph's character, and about the lengths to which he might go to achieve his own ends. This is a very tantalizing aspect of the ongoing story of Joseph.

#### TWO OF PHARAOH'S STAFF TOLD THEIR DREAMS TO JOSEPH

Later, in the Egyptian prison that Joseph was now involved in running on behalf of the jailer, two men, formerly in Pharaoh's employ but incarcerated for some fault against Pharaoh, told their dreams of the previous night to Joseph: the butler told of his dream of the three vine branches and pressing grapes into Pharaoh's cup; the baker told of carrying three baskets of bread and other bakery goods on his head, out of the topmost of which birds were eating.<sup>5</sup>

Applying our earlier questions, we ask: What were their motives in telling the dreams? What outcomes did they wish for? Was the retelling a locus of deceit or power play? Or did those dreams merely reflect their inner wishes, fears, and conflicts?

The two men had been looking downcast when Joseph came to them in the morning, probably bringing their breakfast, explaining to him that no one knew how to interpret their vivid and detailed dreams. They were both obsessed by them and were patently retelling them accurately. Both the butler and the baker felt the urgent need to have an interpretation, and each hoped for an interpretation that would augur a favorable end to their time of imprisonment. Joseph certainly cast his interpretations, given—as he said—by God, in terms of their inner wishes and fears, accepting what they said as being a true account of their dreams. His interpretation of the butler's dream was favorable to the man, and we note that Joseph asked the butler to remember him once his status in life was restored to his position at Pharaoh's side and perhaps to mention his name and skills too to Pharaoh. On the other hand, the interpretation of the baker's dream indicated a fatal outcome for him that also came true.

#### PHARAOH TOLD HIS DREAMS TO JOSEPH

The narrator provides the story of Pharaoh's dreams as they occurred and follows this account with an explanation of how the butler called to mind

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5. Gen 40.

Joseph's skills, suggesting by this communication that perhaps Joseph's skills might serve Pharaoh well also. Pharaoh took up the suggestion and sent for Joseph. Pharaoh then retold his two dreams to Joseph: the dream of the seven fat cattle being eaten up by the seven miserable-looking cattle that remained ill-favored thereafter; and the dream of the good, rich ears of corn being swallowed up by the adjacent thin ears with a parallel, miserable outcome (Gen 41:1–44). Each of these two tellings of the dreams is followed by Pharaoh's complaint against the inability of his wise men and magicians to make anything of the dreams.

#### THE CONTEXTS OF DREAM INTERPRETATION IN JOSEPH'S STORY

When Joseph told his dreams to his brothers, the context was a private family group, though the family consisted of ten large, and likely angry, men standing listening to him. In the prison we also imagine a fairly private context with the two men speaking softly to Joseph, and each man not really wanting any of the others to hear what he said.

However, when we come to the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, the context is rather more complex. There was the demonstrably public atmosphere of Pharaoh's court; yet within that ambience there were echelons of closeness and privacy such that more and more exalted persons were permitted to come closer to Pharaoh and to converse with him, probably in muted tones, very different from the stentorian voices passing on his orders. So readers may imagine Joseph and Pharaoh conversing together within something of a circle of privacy, although senior advisors and guards would have been observing them closely.

Interestingly, the two dreams of Pharaoh are reminiscent of the two dreams of Joseph, in that both tell a similar story, and thus show a contrast with the two dreams of the butler and baker, who told opposing stories—and received opposing interpretations. So the same questions apply: What were Pharaoh's motives in telling his dreams and what outcome did he hope for? And did those dreams reflect Pharaoh's inner wishes, fears, and conflicts?

Now, readers can assume that Pharaoh told his dreams as accurately as he could because he could not himself understand them and had already told them to his wise men, at least once, in his failed attempt to decipher their meaning/s. It is also plain that he truly did wish to have them interpreted, and one would expect that he hoped for a favorable interpretation.

Hence Joseph was in a very tricky situation. He had to interpret the dreams successfully and try to remain alive—and, if possible, in better circumstances than he had come from. At least, so far, in being prepared for this encounter, he had managed to wash, shave, and put on some fresh clothes before he reached Pharaoh's presence (Gen 41:4).

Yet, before he even heard the dreams, Joseph in true diplomatic mode promises a good interpretation, an interpretation of *shalom*. This seems somewhat rash; or perhaps, rather, he is being politic, since readers know that he—or God, as he puts it—previously gave a favorable dream interpretation only to the butler and not to the baker.

Joseph interpreted the two dreams as having one meaning, a meaning that is intensified by the near repetition of the storyline. They seem to be too much alike to do otherwise. The meaning of them seems straightforward, and one wonders if the wise men could not find that interpretation, or if they were too frightened to utter it, seeing as how both dreams ended on a very gloomy note indeed, with the years of famine blotting out all the benefits of the luxuriant years of plenty.

Here now is the chance for Joseph's brilliance in securing his own future to assert itself. He must find a way to capitalize on the promised rich times of the first seven years and make them *more than* compensate for the succeeding seven poor years. Presumably, therefore, Pharaoh's wise men could not see how to do that and feared for their very lives if they forecast doom.

Joseph interpreted the doubling of the dream as a sign of its certainty of coming true—perhaps secretly hoping for the same outcome from his youthful doubled dreams becoming possible now—and immediately went on to weave a magnificent story of how Pharaoh could be the wisest and most circumspect ruler who would more than survive the famine and, through saving his people from starvation, would earn even more renown. He provided a story of a glorious future that he was almost certain Pharaoh would accept, for it painted a picture that Pharaoh would wish to become the case.

The secret of the successful outcome, according to Joseph, would rest on having a reliable, thorough, even ruthless, man put in charge of the process of saving twenty percent of the food harvested each year throughout the good years and storing it safely under Pharaoh's control for the poor years ahead. As Joseph narrated his plan for a successful and hence glorious future triumph over the forthcoming famine, Pharaoh and all those in his court relaxed: "The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants"

(Gen 41:7). And Joseph must similarly have heaved a deep sigh of relief when he heard of his appointment to the top role in the story he had just created. Why was this story of Joseph so well received? It could have been dismissed as impossible, as fantasy.

### WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

Chris King outlines the key features of a good story.<sup>6</sup> A good story:

- touches people in some way,
- has substance,
- includes conflict and resolution,
- creates vivid images,
- is not about weak-willed characters, and
- is the story that is perfect for the audience.

Does Joseph's dream interpretation have those features? What does he say?

Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine. (Gen 41:33–36)

*Is the story one that touches people in some way?* Yes. The story covers matters of life and death for a great and wealthy nation of whom the hearers are members. It shows everyone how they might avoid the certain doom caused by seven years of unmitigated famine.

*Does the story have substance?* Yes. The story has a wealth of sensible, clear details of how a good outcome will be achieved and the feared disaster be avoided.

*Does the story include conflict and resolution?* Yes. The story shows meticulous human planning and determination could overcome failure and starvation on an enormous scale.

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6. Chris King, "Story-Telling Power." Online: <http://www.creativekeys.net/story-tellingpower/article1004.html>.

*Does the story create vivid images?* Yes. The story creates vivid mind pictures of how the predicted successful outcomes will be achieved.

*Is the story about weak-willed characters?* No. The story has no room for dilatory behavior; the man in charge and all his underlings will be kept in strict and ordered behavior.

*Is the story perfect for the audience?* Yes. The story both cheers the audience that their future survival will be ensured in the face of seven years of famine and allows Pharaoh to foresee a route that will both maintain his magnificence and avoid opprobrium.

### CONCLUSION

Looking back to the questions posed at the beginning of the paper, we no longer need to suspect the Joseph character of lying in his dream telling and dream interpretations, but it is plain that he used his powerful mind to weave convincing stories for the interpretation of the four dreams he encountered as an adult in Egypt.

He adapted the clues in the dreams of the butler and the baker to their job roles and what those effects would mean were they to happen in their working lives. For the butler, finding three branches on a vine and squeezing grape juice into Pharaoh's cup and handing it to him would represent a return to work at Pharaoh's side, and the three days was a likely time scale. On the other hand, to the baker, birds marauding the topmost basket of bread of the three he was carrying on his head to the kitchens would represent a failure in his duties to palace provisioning. Again, the three baskets could well indicate three days and the marauding birds could well figure symbolically as carrion-eating birds of prey. The baker's death was a distinct possibility. Joseph assumed the reference in the dream to the baker's head to indicate hanging. Events proved both outcomes to be as predicted.

Finally, for the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph had to create a story that subverted the doom inscribed in both dreams. He had to find a way to turn to promised disaster into a triumph and create a story that met both Pharaoh's hopes and his own, to the full.

Indeed, it seems that the only people who were lying were Pharaoh's wise men when they claimed that they could not interpret Pharaoh's two dreams.



# “WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET”: THE PASSION OF A LITERARY CHARACTER?

Eep Talstra

## 1. ON PATHOS AND METHOD IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

What do biblical scholars mean when they say that the Old Testament speaks of Yhwh as a God of pathos or passion?<sup>1</sup> What does this imply when God is simultaneously considered a character in the plot of a religious classic, that is, the Bible? In the studies of biblical theology by Walter Brueggemann and Jack Miles,<sup>2</sup> the God of pathos belongs to the writer's religious dictionary. Brueggemann strongly emphasizes the idiom that the Bible is “speech about God.” In his view this means that “Yahweh lives in, with, and under this speech”; and we, its readers, should feel urged to continue to speak that critical language within and against our own modern culture. Thus in his work Brueggemann is able to make rather general statements about God as a literary character, such as God has “passion” or that Israel has to live with the “problematic character of God.”<sup>3</sup>

As a result of this, an interesting contrast exists in Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*. Talking about God's complicated character and his emotional behavior brings us closer to God as readers than any other project of biblical theology, while God nonetheless remains beyond the

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\* This paper was initially read on 24 April 2012 at a conference on Brueggemann's contribution to Old Testament biblical theology, held at the Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj (Kolozsvár), Romania.

1. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 298–302.

2. Ibid.; Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

3. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 298, 311. Old Testament Israel can even speak about God as “unreliable” (359, 367).

world of human knowledge and human history, since God primarily exists in speech about God.

A clear example of the kind of theology Brueggemann is trying to establish can be found in his book about the prophetic word in the book of Jeremiah.<sup>4</sup> Our reading of a biblical text implies reading a religious agenda. God is present in the critical, subversive prophetic language used there, and God will be present with us in our speech if we continue to use the same critical subversive language today. In the first place this means that Brueggemann is very critical of the academic practice of scholarly textual analysis, especially historical-critical exegesis in scholarly commentaries.<sup>5</sup> What can we as readers actually do with it? Second, as in his *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann is fascinated by the strong passion he observes both in the prophet Jeremiah and in God himself.<sup>6</sup> God reacts both with anger and with love for his people. The prophet expresses himself with strong emotions toward God and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Hence the title of the book: the word of God is like “fire in the bones” (Jer 20:9). Brueggemann concludes that we are left with no choice but to follow the prophet in his use of passionate language and become as critical as he was. Bible readers should be quizzical like Jeremiah: “analyze the process around us: what constitutes power?”<sup>7</sup> Basic to all this is the confession that God is the creator, the sovereign God, and independent of any other power.

Brueggemann writes: “Jeremiah ... believes in the moral coherence of the world.”<sup>8</sup> That makes it meaningful to act prophetically and critically, both for Jeremiah and for us as readers. Central to this method of Bible reading is the view that the text should be allowed to function as an agenda for its modern reader: to teach about a passionate God and to use similar subversive biblical language against the powers of our day. This method raises the question of whether the passion of God is just a matter of *speech*. Is the presence of God in our world basically a matter of testimony: the speech of core testimony and of countertestimony to be imitated and con-

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4. Walter Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

5. Ibid., 39: “the disproportion of intense criticism and thin interpretation in these commentaries.”

6. Ibid., 102: pathos.

7. Ibid., 196.

8. Ibid., 192.



tinued by its readership? What about the places where Israel is a religious community of real people living in the real world? It is helpful to note that in part 4 of his *Theology of the Old Testament*, "Embodied Testimony," Brueggemann himself writes that there are clear limits to his courtroom metaphor. Not all that we can say about the God of Israel is a matter of testimony uttered in speech. However, Brueggemann does not make very clear how he evaluates the interaction of a theology of testimonies and a theology of institutions, such as temple, king, and priest.

In this paper I will elaborate on God's "passion" as expressed in some texts from Jewish tradition (2); as a problematic theme in Christian hermeneutical tradition (3); and as found in prophetic texts and related to what Brueggemann calls "ambiguity" in the character of God (4). I will argue that one cannot do biblical theology based on utterances and speech, but one should base it on discourse analysis. That might shed a different light on the "ambiguity" in the character of God.

## 2. PASSION AND SPEAKING ABOUT GOD IN JEWISH TRADITIONS

As speaking about God as a God of passion and pathos has traditionally been stronger in Jewish tradition than in academic Christian theology, Brueggemann has done us a favor by bringing this way of speech to our attention again. The following are some examples from dialogues in the Babylonian Talmud where God is presented as strongly engaged with various domains of human life: God is actively, emotionally engaged in questions raised by topics of creation, commandments, and cult. He is neither hidden in eternity, nor available on demand.

The Babylonian Talmud (Sanh. 38b) tells a story about the creation of humankind by God.<sup>9</sup>

The Lord began by creating two groups of servant angels. To the first group, he asked the question: "Do you agree with our making humans according to our image?" [Gen 1:26]. They asked: "O Lord, Master of the universe, what will be the deeds that humans are going to do?" And He said: "This and that will be the deeds of humans." So they, the angels, answered: "O Lord, Master of the Universe, what is man that you think

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9. *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* (ed. Isidore Epstein; 30 vols.; London: Soncino, 1959). I have summarized the text of the English translation in this and the next passage.

of him and the son of man that you watch over him?" [Ps 8:5]. The story then relays that God destroyed these angels. The same with the second group. Then he created a third group of angels. This third group said: "O Lord, the world belongs to you. Do as it pleases you."

But later, after the flood, they said: "perhaps these first groups of angels were right after all?" Then he said to them: "Even until old age I will be the same and until the graying years I will be the one who bears" [Isa 46:4].

This clearly presents that the difference between God and his angels is in terms of involvement and dedication (i.e., passion).

A comparable story is found in Shabbat 88b–89a. Even the same text from Ps 8 is quoted and again read as a statement by the angels. It describes Moses climbing Mount Sinai to receive the tablets with the commandments from the hand of the Lord. God's angels, however, are strongly opposed to this action.

They ask God why this human should even climb up to them. "What is man that you think of him?" When God informs them that Moses has come to receive the Torah, the angels quote Ps 8:2 "You have established your glory [i.e., the Torah] in the heavens." Then God invites Moses to present arguments against the angels. Moses quotes from the commandments. "You shall have no other gods before me." Are there any other gods with you here in heaven? "Have you images here in heaven?" And so on. Thus Moses convinces the angels that the commandments are needed on earth rather than being kept in heaven. The angels give in, and they quote Ps 8:10: "How glorious is your Name in all the earth!"

The story elaborates on the fact that verse 1b about the glory in the heavens is not repeated here. Once again, whereas the angels seem to be interested in keeping things heavenly, pure, and unattached, God is prepared to be passionately dedicated to his humans and to the earth. Rabbinic theology has found the liberty to speak of God's emotions not as a metaphor for our human emotions but as the very basis of the existence of God's people. The rabbinical intuition about God himself being aware of his own conflict of emotions may help us to concentrate on biblical theology from a broader perspective than just the divine attributes of anger and mercy being the cause of either punishment or grace.

However, if God's passion is just a matter of speech, what about God's presence in his creation (whether it is called history, experience, ontology,

or something else)? To the rabbinic stories that presence was crucial. My claim is that one cannot restrict the God of passion and pathos to mere speech. His actions are beyond passion as a literary feature. His passion also implies his presence in his creation.

As stated above, in the fourth and final section of his book, "Embodied Testimony," Brueggemann accepts that his metaphor of testimonies and courtroom has its limits. The Old Testament is more than language. Apart from the verbal testimonies about Yhwh, the Old Testament also presents much nonverbal testimony concerning God. That is expressed and made visible in cultural forms and artifacts: social structures, religious or political institutions, buildings, and practices. One could claim that Yhwh has his own body language.

However, according to Brueggemann, these cases of embodied testimony are vulnerable; they appear to exist only on a temporary basis. In the closing lines of the section on "Is Yahweh Unreliable?" he remarks, in speaking of the kingship of David: "Yahweh will make provisional alliances in the historical process; thus Yahweh may cohere for a time with historical persons, movements, or power arrangements, but only for a time ... and in the end Yahweh's holiness, glory, and jealousy will not be captured anywhere in creation."<sup>10</sup>

Also among modern representatives of the Jewish tradition, however, one finds a continuation of the broad perspective on speaking about God as in the rabbinic discussions mentioned above. A good example is the work of Benjamin Sommer.<sup>11</sup> He discusses the many aspects of divine presence in statues, sanctuaries, and divine names in ancient Near Eastern religions, including that of Israel. He speaks of "divine fluidity and multiple embodiment" and "the rejection of the fluidity model in ancient Israel" (Deuteronomy).<sup>12</sup> But he does not describe this as a process of religious development from concrete to more abstract speaking of God. Rather he sees both themes present in the Hebrew Bible, in the Priestly and in the Deuteronomic traditions. The divine embodiment is continued in Jewish tradition (in the concept of the Shekinah) but also in Christian faith (in the concept of the Trinity).<sup>13</sup> In contrast, when reading Brueggemann, one

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10. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 372.

11. Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

12. *Ibid.*, e.g., 126, 58–79, respectively.

13. "A religion whose scripture contains the fluidity traditions, whose teachings

has the impression that he strongly favors Deuteronomy and the prophets, and does not see much core testimony in the Priestly traditions.

Nevertheless, for the moment one may say that Brueggemann, when speaking about God's passion or pathos, certainly has an important theme to contribute to biblical theology. It is the classical question of theology: Do we speak of the knowledge of God, or do we speak of the presence of God?

### 3. KNOWLEDGE AND SPEECH

Brueggemann makes very clear that when in biblical theology we dare speak about God, it is crucial to refer in the first place to text and speech.<sup>14</sup> It is important because it helps us to take a stand between historical-critical analysis and the philosophical tradition of theology.

One of the challenges to the discipline of biblical theology lies in the history of Christian theology, especially the history of systematic and philosophical theology. One may even ask whether systematic theology, in dialogue with philosophy and hermeneutics, has ever tried looking back further than the period of the early church and patristic theology. Did the Hebrew Bible as an ancient Semitic and Jewish text really get a chance to become a source for theology?

Illustrating this well is the type of theology found in the exegetical work of Augustine on texts where God speaks and shows his emotions. A good example is Jer 5, where God charges an unknown group to pass through the streets of Jerusalem. "Look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find someone who does justice and seeks truth, so that I may pardon her" (v. 1).

This raises the question: Why is God *asking*? Should he not already know? Is God really searching? Further, in verse 7 God complains: "How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me." Is he really disappointed about the failure of his search for just one doing justice? The same questions apply to the similar text in Gen 18, where Abraham negotiates the fate of Sodom with God. Can our Christian, more philosophical tradition of theology really allow for a *conflict* within the person of God? Can God really question: What options are left; what can we do now?

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emphasize the multiplicity of the *shekhinah* ['indwelling,' 126], and whose thinkers speak of the *sephirot* ['manifestations of God,' 129] does not differ in its theological essentials from a religion that adores the triune God" (ibid., 135).

14. For example, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 19, 47, 65.

In his commentary on these texts in *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum*,<sup>15</sup> Augustine demonstrates how afraid he is of the idea that God would not know and that he really would be asking questions. Would God, in the case of Sodom, and later in the case of Jerusalem, not be aware of the fact that these ten people or even this one man acting justly are not to be found in the city? Augustine writes:

For it was not necessary for God to save also criminal people in order to prevent that he would destroy the just together with them, as he was able to execute capital punishment on the evil people after he had liberated the just from among them. But, as I said, it was only to demonstrate the evil of the entire population that he said: if I only find there ten, I will save the entire city. ... Something similar occurs with Jeremiah, where he says: Go round the streets of Jerusalem and look and search her squares and ascertain: if you find someone doing justice, searching for loyalty, then I will be gracious with their sins. In other words, find just one, and I will save the others, which is meant simply to emphasize and demonstrate that one could not find even a single one there.

These texts contain rhetorical statements, Augustine claims. God knows very well that in Sodom, as well as later in Jerusalem, not a single person acting justly could be found. Search for them, you will not be able to find them. God does not really negotiate. There are no surprises to the Almighty.

Thus one might momentarily think that both Augustine and Brueggemann see the Bible as mere speech. Yet there is a crucial difference. Augustine claims that the words of God asking to search are only speech. God is not really searching, which means that God is different from what the texts tell us about him. Brueggemann claims that, when we read this text of Jeremiah, it is indeed speech, but that means that God indeed *is* what the texts tell us about him.

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15. *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum: Llibri VII* (Corpus Christianorum Series latina, 33:16–17): "Non enim necesse erat deo tam sceleratis hominibus parcere, ne cum illis perderet iustos, cum posset iustis inde liberatis reddere impiis digna supplicia. Sed ut dixi, ad ostendendam malignitatem multitudinis illius dixit: *si decem ibi inuenero, parcam uniuersae ciuitati*. ... Tale aliquid est apud Hieremiam, ubi ait: *circuite uias hierusalem et uidete et quaerite in plateis eius et cognoscite: si inuenietis hominem facientem iustitiam et quaerentem fidem, et propitius ero peccatis eorum*, id est: inuenite uel unum, et parco ceteris, ad exaggerandum et demonstrandum, quod nec unus ibi posset inueniri."

What do we then do when reading the Bible? Assume with Augustine that the real God is hidden behind the texts? Or assume with Brueggemann that these texts demonstrate a plurality of witnesses about God so that one should not attempt to invent any philosophical escape to speak about God in a more abstract way, disconnected from the real texts? In debate with classical traditions of interpretation, Brueggemann certainly has a point.

The next question, however, is whether Yhwh, the God of pathos and passion, is just a literary character. Is it we, as readers, who have the task of making sure that the God of these texts is being critically represented in debate with our culture? Is God present only when we as readers are able to revive his passionate speech in our time? In my view, when reading Brueggemann, this question becomes whether the pathos and passion of God is a kind of program *we* have to execute, or whether his pathos has already been expressed, in accordance with the rabbis' claim(s), in his long history with his people.

#### 4. IS THERE ANY ROOM LEFT BETWEEN "DIVINE WRATH" AND "DIVINE UNRELIABILITY"?

After the examples from Jewish tradition and early Christian hermeneutics regarding the question of how biblical theology can speak about God and his passions, it is now time to return to prophetic texts of the Old Testament. It is helpful to mention the work of Abraham Heschel, who, in his book on the prophets written with the Second World War in mind, was able to speak of "the theology of pathos" and of "the God of pathos."<sup>16</sup> As we have seen, modern scholars like Brueggemann and Miles use the same phraseology, but what does it in their view really refer to? For Heschel, the God of pathos is present in human life, offering his pathos as a healing gift to humans. But what about Brueggemann? What does it mean to him when biblical texts refer to Yhwh reacting with emotions to human sin, suffering, and exile? Is human life in any way changed or even formed by God's emotions as the rabbis claimed? We find texts speaking about God being hurt and disappointed or God being in conflict with himself.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 12: "The Theology of Pathos," 221–31. Heschel dedicated his book "To the martyrs of 1940–45."

17. Examples in this section are from my "Exile and Pain: A Chapter from the Story of God's Emotions," in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th*

The prophet Ezekiel speaks about God being disappointed after his search for intercession and his failing to find an intercessor, as became apparent in the exile (Ezek 13:5 and 22:30). Unlike Moses in Ps 106:23, no one stood in the breach in an attempt to stop Yhwh from destroying his city. God searched, but found no one.

However, in cases where intercession does happen, such as by Moses, a conflict of divine emotions is found: Can I afford to give up on my people? What would the nations say? Do I have to go on with them? (e.g., Deut 32:26; Ezek 20:8, 13, 21; 36:21).

Brueggemann addresses the theme of God in conflict with Israel. Since, in his view, Old Testament theology as a discipline has to describe what Israel witnessed about God, Brueggemann describes the conflicting experiences of liberation and exile, as well as of divine wrath and mercy, as Israel's experience of ambiguity in the character of God.<sup>18</sup> The perspective is Israel's.<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann does not mention the texts about God in inner conflict, but repeatedly describes how the Old Testament presents God as contradictory, even as unreliable.<sup>20</sup> These general statements about the ambiguity in God imply a reversal of traditional interpretations. For example, Walther Zimmerli writes in his interpretation of Ezek 36:21 about the pain of God on account of the damage being done to his name.<sup>21</sup> Zimmerli reads the text as an accusation. He does not describe it as an expression of the dilemma God finds himself in, that is, the struggle between emotions: to proceed or to stop? The divine dilemma is clear enough: if judgment is misunderstood by the nations as God's weakness, the damage being done to the name of God will only increase. So God in the end decides to sanctify the name, and for that reason alone will he save and purify the people (36:22, 36). Whereas classical exegetes read here an accusation (God has a problem with Israel), modern exegetes like Brueggemann read this as an example of the problematic testimony about God: Israel has a problem with God, who punishes and afterward regrets it. God is unreliable.

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*Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa OTWSA/OTSSA, Pretoria August 2007* (ed. Bob Becking and Dirk J. Human; OtSt 50; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 161–80.

18. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 317–32.

19. *Ibid.*, 272.

20. *Ibid.*, 309–11; ch. 10 (359–72).

21. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2* (trans. James D. Martin; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 247, 252.

Yet do we have only these two options? Or is this a contrast more or less created by the courtroom metaphor? In court *one* party is judged. It used to be Israel, and now it has become God. In my view the courtroom metaphor is not a proper representation of what we have: texts. If God does exist in speech, as Brueggemann claims, it is not speech in the format of various testimonies uttered; rather it is speech in the format of texts. Texts are no courtroom; they are more like a theater, where various actors interact.

A biblical theology should analyze Old Testament texts as drama or discourse and not as a collection of utterances that we may use to come to a verdict about just one of the actors, either Israel or God. I want to illustrate this by analyzing how Brueggemann reduces the entire text of 1 Kgs 22 into just one segment of speech about God, that is, the verb פתה in verse 20: "Who will deceive Ahab, so that he will go into battle and fall at Ramoth Gilead?" Does this verse imply, as Brueggemann suggests here, that God uses deception and is unreliable?<sup>22</sup> Or is verse 20 to be read not as a statement about God but rather as part of an ongoing discourse among a number of participants?<sup>23</sup>

In classical literary-critical analysis, exegetes usually concentrate on the question of whether the God presented in this story should belong to an earlier stage of ancient Israelite religion. Ernst Würthwein concludes that the evil spirit in the heavenly court is an instrument of the destruction decided upon by Yhwh.<sup>24</sup> Yhwh makes all the decisions, but the presence of the lying spirit increases the distance between God and evil. John Gray offers a similar explanation.<sup>25</sup> The spirit of falsehood is an extension of the divine personality. This is biblical religion at an early date, where, in Gray's words, a distinction is not yet found between the positive and the permissive will of God.

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22. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 360 ("deception"), 367 ("unreliable").

23. Elements in this section are from my contribution, "The Truth and Nothing but the Truth: Piety, Prophecy and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion in 1 Kings 22," in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort* (ed. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos; VTSup 124; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 355–71.

24. Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige* (2 vols.; ATD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; vol. 1, 2nd ed., 1985; vol. 2, 1984), 1:105–6; 2:255–60.

25. John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (3rd ed.; OTL; London: SCM, 1977), 451–53.



In view of these considerations, Brueggemann's *courtroom metaphor* certainly does more justice to the text as a literary composition. Why reorganize the texts in terms of earlier (i.e., more primitive) and later (i.e., more elaborated) stages of religion? But now the question is one about the text's testimony to God in the final form. Does God indeed work with deception here, and can one thus elaborate this observation into the general statement that Brueggemann has coined for it: Israel has experienced that God is unreliable?

In the narrative of the heavenly council God is told to act with deception. The verb פָּתָה, meaning to act with deception and enticement, has sexual overtones, Brueggemann says, and the usage of the term is thus "grossly negative."<sup>26</sup> With this verb expressing the purpose of the narrative, Brueggemann claims that it wants to "assert Yahweh's decisive hostility toward Ahab."<sup>27</sup> However, can one, in terms of method, really establish such claims on the presence of only one verb? My proposal is that an analysis from a discourse perspective is required. The question it raises is what happens to the reader who follows the plot of the final composition as we have it in the Hebrew Bible. In other words, what is being asked from the reader when confronted with the text as discourse?

From this perspective, one can see that God's word regarding "deceive Ahab" is not an isolated utterance and an example of God's unreliability. Rather it is functional in the discourse and is not at all a verdict of Ahab, who is thus unable to escape his fate. The crucial moment is the "good" prophecy by Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22:15 and the reaction by the king, who does not accept it but rather wants "truth" in the name of the Lord. The initial contrast of "good" and "bad" in the text now changes into the contrast of "truth" and "lie." When Micaiah reports his vision of Israel without a shepherd, the king (v. 18) repeats his own words of verse 8: "Micaiah does not prophesy 'good,' but 'bad.'" This implies that the king understands that the "truth" he just asked for equals "bad."

With this in mind, both the king and the reader of the story will hear the word of the Lord, as presented by the vision of the divine council in verses 19–22. The dialogue in these verses elaborates the opposition of "truth" versus "lie": the "good" message the king has heard so far is the "lie," as he himself knows; the "bad" message he has heard is the truth.

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26. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 360.

27. *Ibid.*, 360–61.

But the dialogue on deceiving Ahab is not a divine execution order; it is instead the report of a prophetic vision. In terms of discourse, it is more appropriate to ask whether anyone has really been misinformed in this story. If the prophet, straight from the council of God, explains to Ahab that he is being deceived, is he still being deceived? No. The text is about choice. The choice is not about God and evil, but about a response to the prophet whom God has charged: "tell them all, reveal what goes on in the heavenly court, tell them the truth about the lies."<sup>28</sup> Ahab, who challenged the prophet to speak, has been fully informed about the nature of the prophecy.

By going into battle the king actually allows the true prophetic word to happen, instead of reading it as knowledge, urging and allowing him to change. Therefore, the story of 1 Kgs 22 does not give any "countertestimony" about God's complicated character. It is important not to isolate the words of Yhwh in the heavenly court from the plot of the story.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Brueggemann's use of the courtroom metaphor in his *Theology of the Old Testament* certainly has offered us a new and stimulating way of doing biblical theology. It is a fruitful experiment to try to find a third way between dependency on philosophy of religion and on the history of religion. The Bible is neither a source book for ancient religion nor a source book with materials to make epistemological claims about what God could or could not be. Rather the Bible is a book with critical and hopeful texts about the position of humans before a passionate God.

The debate on method with Brueggemann should continue on at least two points. The first is the moment when he himself admits that his courtroom metaphor no longer is of assistance, that is, on the points where we have to leave the level of testimony as "speech" and have to enter the area of what he calls *embodied testimony*: the religious communities, the cult, the prophets and priests. There the real question comes back: Is God present just in speech? Theater (discourse and drama) is most likely a

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28. See Robert P. Gordon, "Standing in the Council: When Prophets Encounter God," in *The God of Israel* (ed. Robert P. Gordon; University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 64; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 190–204; Diana Lipton, "By Royal Appointment: God's Influence on Influencing God," in Gordon, *God of Israel*, 73–93.

more effective metaphor than courtroom (speech and truth). The second is the question of whether biblical theology, when merely concentrating on testimony as speech about God, does not itself create the problem of the so-called ambiguity in the character of God. When one studies the composition of full texts as discourses reflecting God's passion and the difficult relationship of God with his people, Brueggemann's section on the countertestimony might become less critical of God and more impressed by God's dilemmas within his people's history.



## DESPERATELY SEEKING YHWH: FINDING GOD IN ESTHER'S "ACROSTICS"

Laurence A. Turner

The enigma of God's absence from the MT of Esther has intrigued readers for centuries. This study will investigate the claims made for the literary phenomenon of acrostics, which allegedly reveal the divine name in the book. Particular attention will be given to popular works of the last century or so, in which such arguments are regularly made and which show no signs of diminishing.

God's absence from Esther is mentioned by the great majority of commentators, regardless of their particular interest in the book. Indeed, a bewildering number of solutions have been suggested over the years. The majority of these fall into two broad camps. First, that God is truly absent from the book but that there are obvious reasons for this. For example, God's absence takes to an extreme the perpetual biblical Qere of substituting Adonai for the Tetragrammaton and is evidence of Esther's extreme piety.<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps what is taken to its logical extreme is actually the biblical tradition of reacting to God's absence. While the Hebrew Bible does so negatively, when divine absence is a catalyst for expressions of lack of confidence in divine concern (e.g., Pss 22:1; 44:23–24; 88:14), in Esther some have seen it more positively as the necessary corollary of divine transcendence.<sup>2</sup> Some have argued that as one reads through the Hebrew Bible, whether in chron-

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1. E.g., Friedrich Wilhelm Schultz, *The Book of Esther: Theologically and Homiletically Expounded* (trans. J. Strong; 1877; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 16; Christoph Horwitz, "Zur Theologie des Buches Esther," *LB* 3 (1998): 98–99.

2. E.g., Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 175–76.

ological<sup>3</sup> or canonical<sup>4</sup> order, God moves increasingly into the background. Thus Esther is merely the most extreme expression of a biblical trend, but is nevertheless still theologically motivated. Others have sought the answer to God's absence in Esther's literary genre—itsself highly contested. To give just one example, Kenneth Craig argues that it is carnivalesque literature. Since this genre questions and subverts social conventions, then the absence of God in Esther is a strategy to promote that aim.<sup>5</sup>

The second major approach to Esther's "godless" text, and the one that has attracted more proponents than the first, is to argue that God is present in it but one needs reading competence to discover him. In brief, and limiting the list to representative literary explanations, some argue that God is as obvious in Esther as he is in those biblical passages that present the personification of the means rather than the ultimate divine cause, such as Judg 5:21 and 2 Sam 18:8. Just as these texts do not mention the Divine, neither does Esther; yet the correspondence of cause and effect points just as unerringly to God here as it does elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Others see the fingerprint of the Divine in the remarkable number of coincidences,<sup>7</sup> the frequent employment of peripety (peripeteia),<sup>8</sup> the subtly crafted allusions to biblical traditions of God's involvement in Israel's history,<sup>9</sup> or understated references to God's involvement in the plot.<sup>10</sup>

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3. E.g., Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

4. Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

5. See Kenneth M. Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnavalesque* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

6. E.g., Petr Chalupa, "Gottesschweigen im hebräischen Esterbuch," *Analecta Cracoviensia* 35 (2003): 135.

7. How coincidences might relate to divine causation is explored by, for example, Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 75–76; Carol M. Bechtel, *Esther* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 13–14.

8. E.g., Stan Goldman, "Narrative and Ethical Ironies in Esther," *JSOT* 47 (1990): 21; Gordon H. Johnston, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Gallows!" in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts* (ed. David M. Howard Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 389–90.

9. E.g., the classic presentations of connections between Esther and Exodus are found in Gillis Gerleman, *Studien zu Esther: Stoff—Struktur—Stil—Sinn* (Biblische Studien 48; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1966); idem, *Esther* (BKAT 21; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973).

10. E.g., there are numerous proponents, especially in older works, of the view

One suggestion with a longer pedigree than most is that the divine name is present in Esther, but is deliberately hidden by means of the literary strategy of acrostics formed by the initial or final characters in consecutive and contiguous words in the text. At least as early as Bachya ben Asher in the thirteenth century, four such examples were found, and these are highlighted in some manuscripts with the appropriate characters enlarged. Each acrostic is unique with regard to the position of the characters and the direction in which they are read:

- 1:20 (initial consonants read left to right) **ה**י**א** ו**כ**ל-ה**נ**ש**י**ם י**ת**נ**ו**  
 5:4 (initial consonants read right to left) י**ב**ו**א** ה**מ**ל**ך** ו**ה**מ**ן** ה**י**ו**ם**  
 5:13 (final consonants read left to right) ז**ה** א**י**נ**נו** ש**ו**ה ל**י**  
 7:7 (final consonants read right to left) ב**י**-כ**ל**ת**ה** א**ל**יו ה**ר**ע**ה**

In addition to these, some have suggested further examples.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the revelation of the divine name, many find further significance in the direction one must read in order to discover the acrostic, and also in the position of the constituent characters, initial or final, in their respective words. In 1:20 and 5:13 one reads left to right, that is, backward, because here God is turning back human wisdom and ambition in order to bring to fruition his eternal purposes. Conversely, in 5:4 and 7:7 one reads right to left, that is, forward, for here God actively rules, underlining “His initiative and direct interposition.”<sup>12</sup> Confirmation of these insights is sought in the fact that 1:20 and 5:13 are uttered by Gentiles (who instigate the crisis which needs to be reversed), and 5:4 and 7:7 by Jews (who are

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that “another place” in Esth 4:14 is a veiled reference to God. For a full discussion see Martin Pröbstle, “Is There a God behind This Text? A Closer Look at Esther 4:14 and 16,” in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan* (ed. Jiří Moskala; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 2000), 147–68. For a recent partial survey of possible motivations for God’s absence from Esther, see Gregory R. Goswell, “Keeping God Out of the Book of Esther,” *EvQ* 82 (2010): 99–110.

11. E.g., Nelson claims Esth 1:17 contains an acrostic of יהוה, but this requires ignoring the negative particle **לֹא** joined by *maqeph* to the final word of the sequence. See Ed Nelson, “Ed-Nelson.com—More than Meets the Eye.” Online: <http://www.ed-nelson.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=45>.

12. E. W. Bullinger, *The Name of Jehovah in the Book of Esther* (2nd ed.; 1891; repr., Trestra, Shetland, U.K.: Open Bible Trust, 1999), 10.

the object of God's intervention throughout Scripture).<sup>13</sup> What is more, in 5:4 the acrostic is formed from the initial characters of the words because "God is *initiating* His action," while in 5:13 it is from their final characters, "for Haman's *end* was approaching."<sup>14</sup>

Overarching all of these revelations, however, is the fundamental issue of the motivation for hiding God's name in acrostics. While there is agreement that there must be significance, there are two schools of thought as to what it actually is. Some appeal to Deut 31:18, "On that day I will surely hide my face on account of all the evil they have done by turning to other gods." The Jews are in exile as a punishment for their sins, that is, negatively, God's face is hidden and, as a consequence, God's name is hidden in the book.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, and positively, just as God is working to save the Jews through Esther, though that is discernible only to the eye of faith, so God's name is hidden in acrostics.<sup>16</sup>

In itself, the claim that there are meaningful acrostics in the text of Esther might not be considered inherently improbable. For example, there are obvious instances of elaborate alphabetic acrostics in poetic texts such as Psalms and Lamentations that still attract scholarly attention.<sup>17</sup> Some partial alphabetic acrostics have been suggested relatively recently,<sup>18</sup> though others once generally accepted are now disputed.<sup>19</sup> Frequently, significant relationships between the alphabetic acrostic form of a text and its content have been suggested. Thus the stable and predictable patterning of the complex acrostic in Ps 119 is often seen as reflecting the nature of

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13. Ibid.

14. Chuck Missler, *Cosmic Codes: Hidden Messages from the Edge of Eternity* (Coeur d'Alene, Idaho: Koinoinia House, 1998), 77–88.

15. E.g., Bullinger, *Name of Jehovah*, 19.

16. E.g., Donald E. Curtis, "Esther—Irony and Providence," n.d., n.p. Online: <http://bible.org/seriespage/esther-8211-irony-and-providence>.

17. E.g., Nancy L. Declaissé-Walford, "Psalm 145: All Flesh Will Bless God's Holy Name," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 55–66.

18. Victor Hurowitz, "An Often Overlooked Alphabetic Acrostic in Proverbs 24:1–22," *RB* 106 (2000): 1–15; idem, "Proverbs 29.22–27: Another Unnoticed Alphabetic Acrostic," *JSOT* 92 (2001): 121–25.

19. E.g., Michael H. Floyd, "The Chimerical Acrostic of Nahum 1:2–10," *JBL* 113 (1994): 421–37. Cf. Thomas Renz, "A Perfectly Broken Acrostic in Nahum 1?" *JHS* 9 (2009): 2–26.



Torah, which is the psalm's main topic.<sup>20</sup> Anthony Ceresko suggests that Ps 34 subtly manipulates its acrostic structure in order to emphasize its wisdom ethos.<sup>21</sup>

All the examples above are of alphabetic acrostics, which follow a (more or less) predetermined trajectory through the sequence of consonants in the Hebrew alphabet. However, the purported acrostics in Esther are of a different kind, spelling out the personal name Yhwh. Once again, in itself, some might argue, this should not be dismissed as a purely whimsical notion, for there have been several scholarly suggestions for personal names hidden in acrostics elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Marco Treves, building on a suggestion by R. H. Pfeiffer, finds proof for the king of Ps 2 being a Hasmonean in the alleged acrostic **לִינִיא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ עֲנֵנוּ** ("Sing ye to Jannaus the First and his wife").<sup>22</sup> Expanding the work of previous scholars, he also identifies the warrior-priest celebrated in Ps 110 as another Hasmonean, on the basis of an acrostic, **שִׁמְעֵן אִים** ("Simon is terrible").<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, Azriel Rosenfeld finds an acrostic in the initial consonants of successive cola in Lam 5, **זְכַרְיָה הַנְּבִיא** ("Zechariah the prophet"), none other than the son of Jehoiada the priest who was assassinated in the temple (2 Chr 24:20–21).<sup>24</sup> There is also a tradition that the name of Moses is concealed acrostically in Ps 92:1.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, while scholarly treatments of Esther frequently refer to its alleged divine acrostics, they are routinely summarily dismissed as fanciful and not worthy of further investigation.<sup>26</sup> Yet F. B. Huey's dictum

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20. E.g., Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 40.

21. Anthony R. Ceresko, "The ABCs of Wisdom in Psalm 34," *VT* 35 (1985): 99–104.

22. Marco Treves, "Two Acrostic Psalms," *VT* 15 (1965): 82–83.

23. *Ibid.*, 86.

24. Azriel Rosenfeld, "Acrostic in *Eicha* Chapter 5?" [in Hebrew], *Sinai* 110 (1992): 96; cited in Elie Assis, "The Alphabetic Acrostic in the Book of Lamentations," *CBQ* 69 (2007): 711 n. 2. For a further highly speculative suggestion of this type see Siegfried Bergler, "Threni V—nur ein alphabetisierendes Lied? Versuch einer Deutung," *VT* 27 (1977): 304–20.

25. Nahum M. Sarna, "Acrostics," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (ed. Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder; 16 vols.; Jerusalem: Keter, 1971–1972), 2:230. However, this proposal requires omitting the third word in the sequence.

26. E.g., Lewis Bayles Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* (ICC; New York: Scribner's, 1908), 8; Carey A. Moore, *Esther: Introduction*,

that “no one today takes these rabbinic devices seriously”<sup>27</sup> is true only for scholarly engagements with Esther. A possible exception to this is Sabua’s note that Carey Moore takes the claims seriously enough to counter them by discovering acrostics for Satan in Esther:<sup>28</sup> the penultimate characters of three successive words in Esth 2:4, **אֲשֶׁר תִּיטֵב בְּעֵינַי**, read right to left; and the initial letters of every other word read left to right in 2:3, **נְעִרָה-בְּתוֹלָה טוֹבָה מְרָאָה אֶל-שׁוֹשָׁן**.<sup>29</sup>

However, scholarly reticence to engage in any detail with the acrostics is in marked contrast to the broader reception history of the book, where popular works have a long tradition of fascination with the acrostics that continues to the present day.<sup>30</sup> Not only are they taken to reveal the hidden God of Esther, but also at the same time, for some, they provide support for a “verbal inspiration” model of Scripture, which reveals divine oversight in the hidden substructure of the text.<sup>31</sup> Read from this perspective,

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*Translation, and Notes* (AB 7B; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 56; Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 339, “Such cryptic codes are not needed to find God in the text”; David G. Firth, *The Message of Esther: God Present but Unseen* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 19, “it is unlikely that these are anything more than accidents of composition.”

27. F. B. Huey Jr., “Esther,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976–1992), 4:785.

28. Rachel B. K. Sabua (“The Hidden Hand of God,” *BRev* 8, no. 1 [1992]: 32, 33 n. 3) cites Moore as arguing this, but despite extensive searching I have been unable to locate it there or elsewhere.

29. Needless to say, neither of these examples provides a convincing counterargument. First, finding Satan in the text could actually be seen as supporting rather than challenging the enterprise. Second, neither example provides comparable acrostics formed by initial or final characters in contiguous words. Third, all examples of “Satan” in the Hebrew Bible are spelled with ש, not שׁ, as in these examples.

30. E.g., J. David Pawson, *Unlocking the Bible* (London: Collins, 2003), 676–79; Ed Ostrom, “Bible Study: The Book of Esther,” n.d., n.p. Online: <http://www.helium.com/items/1887866-bible-study-the-book-of-esther>; M. Bagabaldo, “The Tetragrammaton in Hebrew Acrostics,” 2012, n.p. Online: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGbmNaNV0sQ&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGbmNaNV0sQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

31. E.g., Missler, *Cosmic Codes*, 77–88. “We possess 66 books, penned by 40 authors over thousands of years, yet the more we investigate, the more we discover that the books of the Bible are actually elements of a highly integrated message system in which every detail, every number, every name, even the elemental structures within the text itself, are clearly the result of intricate and skillful ‘engineering.’” Cf. Bullinger, *Name of Jehovah*, 23, who asserts that in these acrostics “we have something far beyond a mere coincidence: we have design.”

the specific significance of the acrostics for Esther is that “it is impossible to believe that this has occurred without intention. Probably it is not found again in all the Hebrew Bible. Four times in the eleven pages of Esther, and never again in the 630 pages of the Hebrew Bible!”<sup>32</sup> This sums up the division of opinion between the two parties. Popular approaches to the divine name acrostics frequently claim that they are unique to Esther, or at least, occur very rarely elsewhere.<sup>33</sup> This is seen as a necessary condition for their peculiar revelatory value within the text of Esther.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, such claims for uniqueness are dismissed by opponents on the assumption that acrostics of יהוה are merely accidental and would occur randomly elsewhere. Strangely, neither party appears to have expended much effort in establishing their presuppositions about the occurrence, or nonoccurrence, of such acrostics in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. It is this lack to which I now turn my attention.

It is commonly held that “acrostics, especially those that spell out God’s name, are very rare. Jewish copyists carefully guarded against the accidental acrostic that might spell out this divine name.”<sup>35</sup> However, the evidence points in the opposite direction. Each of the acrostic configurations of the divine name alleged for Esther occurs frequently throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>36</sup>

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32. James Elder Cumming, *The Book of Esther: Its Spiritual Teaching* (Devotional Commentary; London: Religious Tract Society, 1907), 13.

33. E.g., Curtis, “Esther—Irony and Providence”: “to my knowledge, no other such acrostics exist in the Old Testament”; Katharine C. Bushnell, “The Vashti-Esther Story—Part Two,” *God’s Word to Women*. Online: [http://godswordtowomen.org/vashti\\_esther\\_4-6.htm](http://godswordtowomen.org/vashti_esther_4-6.htm), “Nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible does it appear with one exception, which is in Psalm 96:11.”

34. Of course, one could argue that such conditions are not logically absolutely necessary. Acrostics in Esther might reveal God’s hidden presence, and if found elsewhere have a different function. However, I have not encountered any proponents who concede this possibility.

35. Ronny H. Graham, “Esther, Book of (Forerunner Commentary): Bible Tools,” *Bible Tools*. Online: <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/1493/Esther-Book-of.htm>.

36. These examples and all other statistics were generated using Michael S. Bushell, Michael D. Tan, and Glenn L. Weaver, *BibleWorks* (BibleWorks, LLC, 1992–2008).

1. Initial consonants read left to right: thirty-three examples, including Esth 1:20.<sup>37</sup> For example, Josh 11:16, **הָעֲרֵבָה וְאֶת־הָרַר יִשְׂרָאֵל** (“the Arabah and the hill country of Israel”).
2. Initial consonants read right to left: twenty-four examples, including Esth 5:4.<sup>38</sup> For example, 1 Chr 8:39, **יְעוּשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי וְאֵלִיפֶלֶט הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** (“Jeush the second, and Eliphelet the third”).
3. Final consonants read left to right: twenty-five examples, including Esth 5:13.<sup>39</sup> For example, Gen 24:58, **לְרֵבֶקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ, אֵלֶיהָ הֲתֵלְכִי** (“to Rebekah and they said to her, ‘Will you go?’”)
4. Final consonants read right to left: thirty-eight examples, including Esth 7:7.<sup>40</sup> For example, 1 Chr 23:17, **וּבְנֵי רִחְבִּיָּה, רַבּוּ לְמַעַלְהָ** (“but the sons of Rehabiah were very numerous”).

For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that the consonants of **אלהים** also occur occasionally in consecutive contiguous words, though not in Esther: for example, **מִקְדָּשׁ יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים לְהֵבִיא אֶת־אֲרוֹן** (1 Chr 22:19), which for good measure contains characters from both **יהוה** and **אלהים**.<sup>41</sup> Claims have also been made for significant acrostics of **אלוה** in Esther.<sup>42</sup> The relevant texts are **הַתֵּד וַיִּגַּד לְאַסְתֵּר אֵת** (4:9); **הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר** (6:1), and **הִגִּיעוּ וַיְבַהֲלוּ לְהֵבִיא אֵת** (6:14). Numerous other

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37. Gen 11:9; Exod 4:16; Lev 8:15; 9:9; 21:22; Num 1:51; 5:18; 19:12; Deut 10:7; 20:8; Josh 2:15; 11:16; 18:28; 24:18; Ruth 1:21; 2 Sam 18:4; 1 Kgs 18:3; 2 Kgs 7:2; 1 Chr 27:30; 2 Chr 23:6; Esth 1:20; Pss 18:8; 96:11; Eccl 3:17; Isa 30:26; 35:2; 45:20; Jer 31:7; 33:20; Ezek 46:1; Dan 12:1; Zech 1:5; 8:19.

38. Gen 19:25; Exod 4:14; Num 13:32; Deut 11:2; 2 Sam 18:4; 1 Kgs 7:12; 8:42; 18:37; 2 Kgs 10:1; 1 Chr 5:12; 8:39; 16:31; 18:8; 22:18; 23:11, 19; 26:4; 2 Chr 20:34; 26:11; 27:3; Esth 5:4; Ps 96:11; Isa 45:18; Ezek 46:1.

39. Gen 24:58; 49:31; Exod 4:3; 16:7; 25:23; 37:10; Lev 8:29; Num 13:30; 24:13; Josh 19:47; 24:27; Judg 14:2; 1 Sam 20:21; 2 Sam 15:14; 1 Chr 21:17; Ezra 8:19; Esth 5:13; Ps 106:1; Isa 16:3; Jer 48:2; 49:19; 50:15, 29; Lam 3:33; Ezek 1:27.

40. Gen 12:15; 19:13; 38:7; 43:10; Exod 3:13; 16:22; Num 5:12; Deut 24:5; 30:12; 31:29; Josh 10:18; Judg 16:16; 19:24; 20:18, 41; 2 Sam 18:3; 1 Kgs 13:26; 16:7; 1 Chr 23:17; Esth 7:7; Pss 57:7; 73:15; 107:24; 115:11; Isa 16:3; 33:22; Jer 9:11, 17; 15:19; 49:19; 51:31; Ezek 23:8; 30:2; 31:15; Hos 11:10; Joel 2:7, 17; Zech 9:17.

41. See also Lam 2:13; Zech 4:13 (initial consonants read left to right); Josh 11:20; 2 Chr 30:24; Isa 41:13 (initial consonants read left to right); Isa 61:8 (the sole example of final consonants read right to left). There are no examples of final consonants read right to left.

42. For example, James D. Price, “Acrostics in Esther.” Online: <http://lists.ibiblio.org/pipermail/b-hebrew/1999-August/003939.html>.

examples are scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>43</sup> Esther 7:5 also delivers the consonants of אהיה, central to God's self-revelation in Exod 3.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, there is a partial overlap of contiguous final characters that produces this divine title when read right to left ואי-זה הוא, or vice versa, זה ואי-זה הוא.

Other hidden divine titles have been claimed for Esther through features related to acrostics, such as "equidistant letter sequences," in which the position of characters in an individual word is not significant but rather their consistent distribution across several words. For example, "El Shad-dai" is revealed in 4:2b–3a, where every seventh character spells out the title: אל-שער המלך בלבוש שק ובכל-מדינה ומדינה.<sup>45</sup> Yet others have suggested a modern midrash, centering on diverse spellings of יהודים (Jews), as a more playful and homiletical ploy for discovering God in the text.<sup>46</sup>

Thus my investigation of Esther's acrostics has revealed the following. Despite confident assertions to the contrary, similarly derived acrostics

43. Not including those in Esther, there are 102 examples: initial consonants read left to right (60) and right to left (27); final consonants read left to right (4) and right to left (11).

44. Apparently first suggested by Bullinger, *Name of Jehovah*, 21–22.

45. Missler, *Cosmic Codes*, 77–88. Missler also argues for "Meshiach/Messiah" in Esth 1:3, counting every eighth consonant from the *mem*, right to left (בשנת שלוש); (למלכו עשה משתה לכל-שריו ועבדיו חיל); "Yeshua/Jesus" in 4:17, also counting every eighth consonant but left to right (ויעבר מרדכי ויעש ככל אשר-צותה עליו אסתר). His pièce de résistance, however, is the discovery in 3:11–12a of the sentiment, "Haman and Satan stink," ריח (derived by reading every sixth consonant (right to left): ויאמר המלך להמן הכסף נתון לך והעם לעשות בו כטוב בעיניך ויקראו ספרי המלך בחדש. The resulting clause could, of course, be rendered rather differently, and grammatically more likely, as "Haman and Satan are a soothing odor" (cf. Gen 8:21). The same methodology is taken to even further extremes by Grant R. Jeffrey, *The Signature of God: Astonishing Biblical Discoveries* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1998), 202–29, who finds Adolf Hitler and Anwar Sadat in other passages.

46. In Esther the word for "Jews" is spelled in two ways; on thirty-two occasions with one י before the final ם (יהודים), and on six occasions with two (יהודיים). The consonant י (*yod*) means "hand," and a double *yod* (יִי) is a frequent abbreviation for the Tetragrammaton. Read midrashically, therefore, the variant spelling יהודיים points to the hidden hand of God in Esther. See Nili S. Fox, "In the Spirit of Purim: The Hidden Hand of God," *JBQ* 18 (1989): 184; Sabua, "Hidden Hand." However, while two contiguous *yods* are fully written in the variant יהודיים, the vocalization in the apparatus of BHS, with *dagesh forte* doubling the first of these two *yods*, means that in effect we have three contiguous *yods*, not two. However, one might wonder at the potential three consecutive *yods* could have for a Christian Trinitarian reading!

of the divine name and titles are not unique to Esther. Indeed, they are commonplace. For example, in applying the same principles to the main exhibit of the divine name, one finds approximately 116 instances of יהוה beyond Esther, or on average one example every seven to eight chapters of the Hebrew Bible. Nor can one argue that such phenomena occur with significantly greater frequency in Esther than anywhere else. While it is true that its four acrostics of יהוה in ten chapters occur more frequently than on average, Joel, for example, has two instances in its three chapters. If the total number of examples in a book is seen as significant, then 1 and 2 Chronicles have a grand total of fifteen. What is more, the divine name is explicitly present in some verses in which such acrostics occur.<sup>47</sup> In other examples, the divine name itself contributes one consonant to the acrostic, as in 1 Kgs 7:12, בית־יהוה הפנימית ולאֵלם הבית,<sup>48</sup> and in a few cases two consonants, as in Gen 19:13, פני יהוה וישלחנו יהוה.<sup>49</sup> There are instances where יהוה and אלהים each contributes a consonant, as in 1 Chr 21:17, מה עשו יהוה אלהי.<sup>50</sup> Beyond Esther, therefore, the occurrence of the acrostic יהוה appears to have no bearing whatsoever on revealing the hidden God of the text, since in many cases God is already explicitly present, and if absent there would be no acrostic. Such acrostics in Esther, therefore, can hardly be taken to reveal the hidden God when they clearly do not do so elsewhere.

If one surveys all of the examples of such acrostics throughout the Hebrew Bible, hardly any seem to be strategically located in contexts of theological importance that might explain their use as indicators of significance, or revelations of the hidden Deity. For example, Song of Songs harbors no acrostics of יהוה, even though its text is arguably as godless as Esther's.<sup>51</sup> Rather, in Esther and everywhere else, they appear to occur randomly. For example, there are no acrostics of יהוה in Job or Proverbs, only eight in Psalms, yet fifteen in 1 and 2 Chronicles. This is not to say, how-

47. E.g., Gen 11:9; Deut 11:2; 1 Sam 20:21; Ps 107:24.

48. Further examples include Exod 16:7; Ruth 1:21; 1 Kgs 16:7.

49. See also Gen 38:7; 1 Kgs 13:26; Pss 106:1; 115:11; Isa 33:22.

50. See also 1 Kgs 18:37; 2 Kgs 7:2, in which the prefixed definite article contributes ה. In addition, several verses contain יהוה and אלהים independently of the acrostic (e.g., 1 Chr 22:18; Isa 45:18).

51. This depends on how one interprets שלהבתיה in Song 8:6, the sole possible reference to יהוה in the book. Opinion is divided between "flame of the LORD" (e.g., ESV), and "a raging flame" (e.g., NRSV).

ever, that with some ingenuity there are no examples that could be pressed into theological service. Perhaps the prime example of this is Exod 3:13. Moses, in conversation with God, indicates that he is at a loss to know in whose name he will speak to the Israelites, should they ask him. God's response is **אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה**, traditionally rendered as "I am who I am" (Exod 3:14), supplemented by the information, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" In such a situation, where Moses and the Israelites are ignorant of the divine name, and God himself responds enigmatically, how ironic it is for the reader attuned to the possibilities of acrostics to observe that the answer to Moses' searching interrogation is found within the very question he asks: "and they say *to me*, 'What is *his name*?' What [לִי מִה-שְׁמוֹ מִה] shall I say to them?" (i.e., right to left: the second, fourth, seventh, and ninth letters). Moses speaks with greater insight than he realizes, providing, acrostically, the very name of which he is ignorant. On the whole, however, the connections between the acrostics of **יְהוָה** and the contexts in which they occur provide infrequent bases for theological reflection.

Finally, occurrences of the divine name or titles in acrostics throughout the Hebrew Bible provide no support for the notions that the direction of reading (right to left or vice versa), or position of characters (initial or final), have significance. For example, the claim that initial characters read right to left in Esth 5:4 show God initiating an action because he actively rules<sup>52</sup> is moot given that the verse is Esther's invitation to the king and Haman to attend a feast. In itself, it is no more significant than many other links in the chain of peripety that lead to the plot's resolution. Examples of the same configuration, such as 1 Chr 8:39, "Jeush the second, and Eliphelet the third" (see above), which provide mere details in a complex genealogy, underline neither the initiative nor the rulership of God. Such lack of correlation is true across the board.

They seek God here. They seek God there. But in Esther's acrostics they seek in vain.

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52. E.g., Bullinger, *Name of Jehovah*, 10; Missler, *Cosmic Codes*, 77–88.





PART 2  
IDEOLOGICAL-CRITICAL READINGS



THE BIBLE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF  
2012, 2008, AND 2004, AND THE  
COLLAPSE OF AMERICAN SECULARISM

Jacques Berlinerblau

So it is very surprising that no one seems to be very interested in the public of Bible buyers and Bible readers. I can find no studies at all of what people in this country think of the Bible, how they understand it, what they think of its truth or otherwise, if and how they use it.<sup>1</sup>

Biblical scholars who study the way the Scriptures are used in American politics are confronted with a unique dilemma—one that the great scholar from across the pond in whose honor this essay is presented would certainly find droll. For the truth of the matter is that our vast erudition, specialized training, and broad linguistic competencies often fail to illuminate the subject matter that we explore. In a strange way, knowing as much as we do about the Bible is often a distinct intellectual handicap. To put it in colloquial terms, *our knowledge is no good here!*

This is because of the yawning abyss between what we study and what we know. There is a huge difference between the Bible of the public square on the one hand and the Bible of university religious studies departments, seminaries, and divinity schools on the other. For all intents and purposes, they are *completely different Bibles*. Public and professorial users approach their Scriptures with vastly incompatible lenses, assumptions, and hoped-for outcomes.

Let me explain the disconnect in as pithy a manner as possible, going so far as to sloganize my insight. When a professional biblicist reads a

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1. David J. A. Clines, “The Bible and the Public,” in *The Bible and the Modern World* (rev. ed.; The Bible and the Modern World; Biblical Seminar 51; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 55.

verse, she sees a question. When a politician reads a verse, she sees an answer. For nonscholars, the Good Book is a fairly unproblematic document. It has a known and stable history. It has a clear message. It has an undeniable truth. In addition, it has shovel-ready policy implications.<sup>2</sup>

These assumptions rarely carry the day among professional biblicists, and this accounts for the whopping incongruity between these two interpretive cultures. When we in The Guild are *good*, we traffic in complex and deep understandings of the Holy Scriptures. We master long-lost ancient languages, cognate to the original Hebrew and Greek. We control the often two-millennia-plus history of scriptural interpretation. We deploy sophisticated theoretical models culled from other academic disciplines. We do all of this in an earnest and honorable quest to make sense of the witnesses' beguiling and cryptic words.<sup>3</sup> (I charitably forgo a discussion of what happens when we are *bad*.)

I have nothing but praise for the skill and dedication of my exegetical colleagues. But to paraphrase Kurt Vonnegut, bringing this academic arsenal to the study of American politics is like attacking a hot fudge sundae in a suit of armor. Quite simply, the manner in which political figures and their constituents use the Scriptures is singularly unamenable to analysis by the aforementioned scholarly precision tools.

For example, of what use is hard-fought mastery of Aramaic in making sense of a phenomenon like former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee? In 2008 he averred, "I believe it's a lot easier to change the Constitution than it would be to change the word of the living God, and that's what we need to do is to amend the Constitution so it's in God's standards rather than try to change God's standards."<sup>4</sup> Where does Aramaic come into that?

How does one's expertise in narratology help us make sense of Pastor Rick Warren's subdiscursive grunt to a perplexed Barack Obama at the

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2. I explored these insights in *Thumpin' It: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today's Presidential Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

3. I discuss the professional drama of the biblical scholar *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 70–84.

4. Adam Aigner-Treworgy, "Huck, the Constitution, and 'God's Standards.'" Online: [http://firstread.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2008/01/15/4431338-huck-the-constitution-and-gods-standards?lite](http://firstread.nbcnews.com/_news/2008/01/15/4431338-huck-the-constitution-and-gods-standards?lite).

Saddleback Civil Forum on the Presidency that same year: “At what point does a baby get human rights, in your view?”<sup>5</sup>

How could we make sense of John Edwards back in 2008—when he was apparently not right with God—invoking Matt 25:45 as his “favorite Bible verse”?<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Matt 25 has become something like the Official Blue Scripture. A full-blown Democratic religious consulting company goes by the name of the Matthew 25 Network.<sup>7</sup>

President Obama used that same verse declaiming, “It’s also about the biblical call to care for the least of these—for the poor; for those at the margins of our society. To answer the responsibility we’re given in Proverbs to ‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.’”<sup>8</sup> At the 2012 Democratic National Convention, senatorial candidate Elizabeth Warren interpreted that Scripture in accord with what I have called the Democrats’ “Theology of Togetherness”: “The passage teaches about God in each of us, that we are bound to each other and called to act. Not to sit, not to wait, but to act—all of us together.”<sup>9</sup>

A professional biblicist would have been hard pressed to parse Rick Santorum’s Hanukkah greeting card in December 2011. That seasonal affirmation, some noted with bewilderment, contained a verse from John 8:12: “I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the

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5. Lynn Sweet, “Transcript of Obama, McCain at Saddleback Civil Forum with Pastor Rich Warren.” Online: [http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2008/08/transcript\\_of\\_obama\\_mccain\\_at.html](http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2008/08/transcript_of_obama_mccain_at.html).

6. See Katharine Q. Seelye, “Edwards Charged with Election Finance Fraud,” *New York Times*, June 3, 2011. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/04/us/politics/04edwards.html>. Also H. Jeff Zeleny, “The Democrats Quote Scripture.” Online: <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/the-democrats-quote-scripture/>.

7. Michael Luo, “New PAC Seeks to Court Christians for Obama.” Online: <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/06/10/new-pac-seeks-to-court-christians-for-obama/>.

8. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by the President at the National Prayer Breakfast.” Online: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/02/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast>.

9. Politico, “Elizabeth Warren DNC Speech.” Online: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0912/80802.html>. Jacques Berlinerblau, “Democrats’ Theology of Togetherness.” Online: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/democrats-theology-of-togetherness/2012/09/06/1877df16-f7e0-11e1-8398-0327ab83ab91\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/democrats-theology-of-togetherness/2012/09/06/1877df16-f7e0-11e1-8398-0327ab83ab91_blog.html).

darkness, but will have the light of life.”<sup>10</sup> Was this a Hanukkah card for Jews or for Messianic Jews?

During the 2012 GOP presidential primaries, we heard Herman Cain compare his call to run with the call Moses received from God.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, think of Texas governor Rick Perry’s own scripturally sourced justification for his candidacy. Invoking Isa 6:8, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Perry exclaimed, “Here I am. Send me.”<sup>12</sup> Would a scholar of Deutero-Isaiah be more helpful in illuminating such instances than a psychologist specializing in delusional narcissism?

Stateside, we are familiar with the expression “attack ad.” This is a form of publicity in which one candidate enfilades another. The most recent presidential election inaugurated a new tradition: attack Scriptures. Here is ordained Methodist minister and former Democratic governor of Ohio Ted Strickland:

Mitt Romney has so little economic patriotism that even his money needs a passport. It summers on the beaches of the Cayman Islands and winters on the slopes of the Swiss Alps. In Matthew, chapter 6, verse 21, the scriptures teach us that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. My friends, any man who aspires to be our president should keep both his treasure and his heart in the United States of America. And it’s well past time for Mitt Romney to come clean with the American people.<sup>13</sup>

Is any specialized training in anthropological gift theory required to unpuzzle conservative Republican Congressman Paul Ryan’s recent refusal to accept a Bible that was offered to him? He might have refused it because he is a devotee of Ayn Rand. More likely, he spurned the offering because the liberal advocacy group Catholics United was forcing it upon him. Too,

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10. David Weigel, “Happy Hanukkah from Rick Santorum.” Online: [http://www.slate.com/blogs/weigel/2012/02/08/happy\\_hanukkah\\_from\\_rick\\_santorum.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/weigel/2012/02/08/happy_hanukkah_from_rick_santorum.html).

11. Alana Horowitz, “Herman Cain: ‘I Felt Like Moses.’” Online: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/09/herman-cain-moses\\_n\\_1002744.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/09/herman-cain-moses_n_1002744.html).

12. Christy Hoppe, “Perry Touts Values, Staying Power in FINAL IOWA PUSH,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 2, 2012. Online: <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/perry-watch/headlines/20120102-perry-touts-values-staying-power-in-final-iowa-push.ece>.

13. Politico, “Ted Strickland DNC Speech.” Online: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0912/80699.html>.

they had helpfully annotated the Bible with passages stressing Catholic social teachings on the poor.<sup>14</sup>

Our knowledge of the Bible's complex history might have alerted us to some strange goings-on back in a 2008 Republican debate. An audience questioner via video feed dangled a King James Version (KJV) of the Bible directly in front of the camera and stated:

I am Joseph. I am from Dallas, Texas, and how you answer this question will tell us everything we need to know about you. Do you believe every word of this book [he places the cover that reads "Holy Bible" in front of the camera]? And I mean specifically, this book that I am holding in my hand [turning the spine of the text to the camera indicating that it is the KJV]. Do you believe this book?<sup>15</sup>

Many Americans were not only baffled but also creeped out by Joseph from Dallas. He was probably posing what is referred to stateside as a "gotcha" question. Mormons like Mitt Romney, to whom the prompt was likely addressed, revere the KJV as their standard translation. However, there is also the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), in which "hundreds of changes and additions" to the KJV were made by the religion's founder.<sup>16</sup> Was Joseph goading Romney to comment on the canonical difference between Mormon Scriptures and evangelical Scriptures? We may never know. True, one had to know something about the Latter-Day Saints' canon to surmise Joseph's motivations, but one need not have spent seven years in graduate school to acquire that wisdom.

My point is this: Much of the training that we possess as scholars of the Bible and religion is regrettably tangential to the manner in which the text is cited in American politics. Actually, the text is not only cited, but *physically brandished*—as it was by Catholics United, as it was by Joseph from Dallas. Martin Marty, in a memorable contribution, spoke of "America's iconic book." He meant that for many in this country the

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14. Sarah Posner, "Paul Ryan's Bible, Jim Wallis', or None of the Above?" Online: <http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/sarahposner/4708/>.

15. Jacques Berlinerblau, "Is Mike Huckabee a Catholic?" Online: [http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2007/11/at\\_wednesday\\_nights\\_republican.html](http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2007/11/at_wednesday_nights_republican.html); idem, "Postscript to the Republican Debate." Online: [http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2007/12/postscript\\_to\\_the\\_republican\\_d.html](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2007/12/postscript_to_the_republican_d.html).

16. David Bitton and Thomas G. Alexander, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism* (3rd ed.; Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2008), 18.

Bible elicited visceral—as opposed to intellectual—adoration and was revered as a holy object.<sup>17</sup> We scholars scrutinize its words. We do not really think much about the physicality of the text, the simple albeit massively freighted significance it has for its readers.

It emerges from this that, to understand our subject matter, we cannot bring it to us. Rather, we must confront it on terms more conducive to the way American politicians and voters construe the text. Such was the argument I made in *Thumpin' It: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today's Presidential Politics* in 2008. My comments above about methodology interface with a second concern I have about the plight of American secularism.<sup>18</sup> Namely, what does all of this Scripture bombing tell us about the plight of church-state relations in the United States? Would not an American political observer circa 1965 be flummoxed by the Scripture-heavy political rhetoric of America's current leadership class?

Prior to going further, I need to lay out one default ground rule for us to bear in mind when we hear politicians cite Scripture: Whether they are Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, Jew or Gentile, we must *never* make the mistake of assuming that their invocation is *not* motivated by political expediency. To assume that politicians cite the Bible spontaneously, hearts overflowing with God's love, is to make a catastrophic category error. It is to confuse a pastor with a politician, a seminarian with a stumper, a devotee with a demagogue.<sup>19</sup>

With that said, permit me to elucidate four key issues that need to be taken into consideration when we study today's faith and values politicking. Most of these, as we shall see, are not necessarily illuminated by the methods and theories that those of us in The Guild devote our lives to mastering.

#### RHETORIC OR POLICY?

Is Scripture used by American politicians merely rhetorically, or does it drive actual policy decisions? This crucial distinction, I regret to say, is

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17. Martin Marty, "America's Iconic Book," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book: Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Addresses, 1980* (ed. Gene Tucker and Douglas Knight; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 1–23.

18. Advanced in my most recent study, *How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

19. See Mark A. Noll, "The Politicians' Bible," *Christianity Today* 36, no. 12 (1992): 16–17.



often lost upon many journalists and even academics. It is one thing for a politician to quote chapter and verse; it is entirely another for him or her to predicate domestic and foreign policy on that line from the Good Book. This is tantamount to the difference between theory and practice.

In *Thumpin' It*, I came to a very clear conclusion—and bear in mind that the monograph went to bed in July of 2007 during George W. Bush's second term. At that time, those on the left exulted in tarring Bush as a loony fundamentalist, who took his marching orders from the Scofield Reference Bible. Think of a work like Kevin Phillips's *American Theocracy*.<sup>20</sup> The author had convinced himself of a one-to-one correlation between Bush's public scriptural effusions and his Middle Eastern national security program. Phillips spoke of "White House implementation of domestic and international policy agendas that seem to be driven by religious motivations and biblical worldviews."<sup>21</sup>

Now let there be no doubt, our forty-third president was a very religious man. This is a truism made prominent in his biography, *A Charge to Keep*.<sup>22</sup> That being said, I was hard pressed to find any "smoking gun" or direct link between the president's well-known admiration for a "biblical worldview" and the policies he espoused.<sup>23</sup>

For instance, I found no warrant for the oft-made claim that Bush's Middle Eastern foreign policy was predicated on premillennial dispensationalist schemes.<sup>24</sup> Such schemes, according to many reports, allegedly were dear to the hearts of evangelicals. But, as the scholar Timothy Weber has pointed out, only a small minority of evangelicals has actually subscribed to these views.<sup>25</sup> Speaking to former Bush officials, some of whom

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20. Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York: Viking, 2006). Also see Richard Shweder, "George W. Bush and the Missionary Position," *Daedalus* 133, no. 3 (2004): 26–36.

21. Phillips, *American Theocracy*, viii.

22. George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House* (New York: Morrow, 2001).

23. Jeffrey Siker, "President Bush, Biblical Faith, and the Politics of Religion." Online: <http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=151>. Dana Stevens, "Oh God." Online: <http://www.slate.com/id/2099698/>. "Bush on God," *St. Petersburg Times*, January 16, 2005.

24. Berlinerblau, *Thumpin' It*, 60–74.

25. Timothy P. Weber, "How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend," *Christianity Today* 42, no. 11 (1998): 49.

were Jewish neoconservatives, corroborated my view that this was an inaccurate surmise.

I did, however, see a clear connection between Bush's pro-life rhetoric and one famous executive decision he made. As is well known, in 2006 George W. Bush vetoed H.R. 810, The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, also known as the Castle-DeGette Bill. It was Bush's first veto in six years of holding office, and it resulted in a freeze on federal funding for research on newly developed stem cell lines.<sup>26</sup>

I, as well as others, am of the opinion that the move was a sop to the evangelical base and even something of an apology. After all, the executive branch did nothing to move the needle on repealing *Roe v. Wade* (the controversial 1973 decision legalizing abortion). That was undoubtedly something the "values voters" who put Bush into office in 2004 had hoped for.<sup>27</sup> By disallowing *federally* funded stem cell research, the president would seem to have been making amends. Here we can get a faint glimpse of a policy that rides on the wings of a religious impulse, though I will have more to say about this momentarily.

As for Obama, here as well there seems to be a disconnect between his biblical oratory and his policies.<sup>28</sup> For instance, he may make a lot of noise about the "least of these," he may refer over and over again to Cain's demurral in Gen 4:9 (strangely, Cain there insinuates that he is *not* his brother's keeper), yet his critics on the left feel that he has not lived up to the high standards interpreters assume these verses call us to obey.<sup>29</sup> Has he punished the Wall Street 1 percent who pulverized the economy? Was

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26. Berlinerblau, *Thumpin' It*, 46–47. H.R. 810, 109th Cong. (2005).

27. John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Values Campaign? The Christian Right and the 2004 Elections* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

28. "Faith in America: Interviews with President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney," *Cathedral Age* (Midsummer 2012): 21–25. Online: [http://support.nationalcathedral.org/wnc/interview/?\\_\\_utma=149257513.853236170.1345603163.1345603163.1345603163.1&\\_\\_utmb=149257513.1.10.1345603163&\\_\\_utmc=149257513&\\_\\_utmz=149257513.1345603163.1.1.utmcsr=huffingtonpost.com|utmccn=\(referral\)| utmcmd=referral|utmctt=/2012/08/21/obama-and-romney-answer-q\\_n\\_1818290.html&\\_\\_utmv=-&\\_\\_utm=145642292](http://support.nationalcathedral.org/wnc/interview/?__utma=149257513.853236170.1345603163.1345603163.1345603163.1&__utmb=149257513.1.10.1345603163&__utmc=149257513&__utmz=149257513.1345603163.1.1.utmcsr=huffingtonpost.com|utmccn=(referral)| utmcmd=referral|utmctt=/2012/08/21/obama-and-romney-answer-q_n_1818290.html&__utmv=-&__utm=145642292).

29. Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union." Online: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0308/9100.html>. "National Prayer Breakfast: President Obama's Speech Transcript." Online: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/national-prayer-breakfast-president-obamas-speech-transcript/2012/02/02/gIQAx7jWkQ\\_story\\_1.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/national-prayer-breakfast-president-obamas-speech-transcript/2012/02/02/gIQAx7jWkQ_story_1.html).

he willing in the epic 2011 deficit battle to go to the wall against Congress and safeguard many government programs that protect the poor?<sup>30</sup> Did he, until the ghastly stimulus of the Newtown school massacre, ever take on the gun lobby whose activism was not indirectly correlated to disproportional murder rates in inner-city neighborhoods?<sup>31</sup> The scholar Cornel West dubbed Obama a “black mascot of Wall Street oligarchs and a black puppet of corporate plutocrats.”<sup>32</sup> In West’s view, not only has the president not lived up to Scripture’s exigencies; he has also forsaken the prophetic vision.

I am reminded of the Texas-ism “all hat, no cattle.” *In the main*, Bible-thumpin’ politicians are all rhetoric, no policy. There are, on the fringes, a few exceptions to this rule. And I concede that these exceptions have grown more normative in the gap since 2008, especially on the state level. Still, biblical scholars who study American politics are advised to assume as a default position that “biblical worldview” does not majorly or directly influence the federal government’s domestic and foreign policy formation.

#### BIBLICAL INFLUENCE OR RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE?

Enfolded within this distinction between rhetoric and policy is yet another subdistinction, and a confusing one at that: the difference between leaning on the Bible and leaning on the *interpretive tradition* spawned by the Bible. Here I *do* think scholars can be of some use. Indeed, I have often argued that the role of biblicists in public discourse is to clarify for the public complex matters such as this one.<sup>33</sup>

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30. Mark Landler and Michael D. Shear, “Obama’s Debt Plan Sets Stage for Long Battle over Spending,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2011. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/14/us/politics/14obama.html>. Jonathan Chait, “What the Left Doesn’t Understand about Obama,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2011, MM9. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/magazine/what-the-left-doesnt-understand-about-obama.html>.

31. James Barron, “Nation Reels After Gunman Massacres 20 Children at School in Connecticut,” *New York Times*, December 15, 2012. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/15/nyregion/shooting-reported-at-connecticut-elementary-school.html?ref=nyregion>.

32. Glen Johnson, “West: Obama a ‘Black Mascot’ and a ‘Black Puppet.’” Online: [http://www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2011/05/west\\_obama\\_a\\_bl.html](http://www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2011/05/west_obama_a_bl.html).

33. Jacques Berlinerblau, “What’s Wrong with the Society for Biblical Literature?”

Many are the believers who thoughtlessly assume that their faith is based on the Bible. Many are the scholars who seek to disabuse them of that misconception. Jews, for example, tend to overestimate how much of their halakic worldview comes from the Tanak. They tend to underestimate the degree to which the Pharisaic Judaism they adhere to is a product of the rabbinic corpus colloquially known as the Talmud.<sup>34</sup> In the opinion of many scholars, Judaism is *rabbinic* to the core, not biblical. In the opinion of many lay Jews, the distinction is nonexistent.

In Catholicism as well, the argument could be made that Catholics live more by the teachings of the church fathers and the interpretations of Holy Mother Church than they do by the Old and New Testaments. It was the Jesuit scholar Daniel Harrington who recalled a quip from his mother circa 1950: “We’re Catholics. We don’t read the Bible.”<sup>35</sup>

Which brings us to evangelicalism, unique among the faiths mentioned because of its absolute insistence that it scrupulously lives in accord with the biblical worldview. As Roger Olson notes, “Evangelicals revere the Bible as God’s uniquely inspired and authoritative book; for them it is the supreme source and norm for Christian *faith* and practice.”<sup>36</sup>

What must be stressed is that *professional biblicists*, not lay believers, tend to draw the distinctions just noted. Religious folks typically fail to grasp the difference between their primary Scriptures and the millennia of hermeneutical interpretation that—in my opinion, at least—often drowns out the originals.<sup>37</sup> This means that the thoughtful analyst must discern if a political initiative rests on a biblical or a postbiblical foundation. As an aside, I would note that the study of the significance of hermeneutics has often been assumed to be a “postmodern thing.” Indeed, postmodern biblicists have done much to bring the importance of scrutinizing this factor to our attention.<sup>38</sup> However, the examination of the interpretive history

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*Chronicle Review* (November 10, 2006): B13–15. Online: <http://chronicle.com/article/Whats-Wrong-With-the-Socie/12369/>.

34. Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 87–100.

35. Daniel Harrington, *How Do Catholics Read the Bible?* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1989), xi.

36. Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook for Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 154.

37. Berlinerblau, *Secular Bible*, 57–69.

38. Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David J. A. Clines,

of the Bible is of such importance that one wonders whether all biblical scholars—postmodern or not—should be trained in understanding how the Bible's meanings are in flux across sociological time and space.

David Clines, in his 1995 essay, "Why Is There a Song of Songs and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?" was spot on when he wrote, "The question of the effect of our texts has rarely been raised in our scholarly tradition. This is perhaps the worst consequence of the historical-critical method (which was all very necessary in its own day and remains valid, please don't misunderstand me), since in its quest for origins it screened out the present, and, with that, the ethics of interpretation."<sup>39</sup> Biblical hermeneutics, or what I once called "sociohermeneutics," is a field of study that needs many more practitioners and far greater institutional resources placed at its disposal.<sup>40</sup>

But back to the problem at hand. Let us take the case of homosexuality, which is extremely instructive in terms of the problematic we are exploring. The place of gay people within the church has been among the most divisive issues in the recent history of American Christendom.<sup>41</sup> Those who argue that homosexuals are not "affirmed in Christ" have what they believe to be very precise scriptural injunctions to this effect. There is, for example, Lev 18:22, translated by the NKJV as follows: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." Romans 1:27 rails against men "leaving the natural use of the woman" as a form of "sexual immorality" (1:29).

In an earlier book, I pointed out that these verses are chock-full of linguistic ambiguities.<sup>42</sup> I personally, and professionally, would not translate or interpret either of these verses as an unambiguous repudiation of same-sex eroticism. What I will concede is that the *translations* referenced above do seem to offer believers fairly definite biblical condemnations of

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*What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOT-Sup 94; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); George Aichele et al. (Bible and Culture Collective), *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

39. David J. A. Clines, "Why Is There a Song of Songs and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?" in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Gender, Culture, Theory 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 107.

40. Berlinerblau, *Secular Bible*, 81.

41. P. Deryn Guest, "Battling for the Bible: Academy, Church, and the Gay Agenda," *Theology and Sexuality* 15 (2001): 66–93.

42. Berlinerblau, *Secular Bible*, 101–15.

homosexuality. I repeat, I think those translations are misleading. I can see, however, how the verse clearly informs the policy initiatives of conservative Christians and the pressure groups that represent their interests. In other words, I understand the link between the Bible and the believer's reading of the Bible.

On other issues, it is harder to see this causal connection. Let us think of an issue that surfaced in the 2012 election cycle. I refer to the so-called personhood amendments. Pro-life advocates on the far right have placed these on ballots in Mississippi, Colorado, Louisiana, and Virginia, among other places.<sup>43</sup> In essence, this type of legislation tries to endow a zygote with full-blown human status protected by the Constitution. We need not detain ourselves with a discussion of how these amendments have fared across the nation. For our purposes, we should realize that it is exceedingly difficult to draw a clear connection between this type of activism and *anything* in the Scriptures. In that the biblical authors could not have possibly known what a zygote was, in that the ancients were operating with the scantiest and most primitive medical knowledge about reproductive biology, to what degree can we say that the Scriptures have *any* viewpoint on the issue of human life at the cellular level? As John Rogerson pointed out, "The biblical writers knew nothing about fertilization."<sup>44</sup>

One final example: For years, those on the Christian Right have been making theologically tinged antigovernment arguments. Paul Ryan, in his vice-presidential announcement speech, sloganized the sentiment as follows: "Our rights come from nature and God, not government."<sup>45</sup> All well and good, but this would seem to *directly contradict actual biblical verses well known to Christians*. For what, if any, meaning does "rendering unto Caesar" have if not to acknowledge that a Christian, at the very least,

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43. Kate Sheppard, "Personhood Amendments: Coming to a Ballot Near You?" Online: <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2011/11/personhood-amendments-state-map>.

44. John Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 88. Also see Andreas Lindemann, "'Do Not Let a Woman Destroy the Unborn Babe in Her Belly': Abortion and Ancient Judaism and Christianity," *Studia theologica* 49 (1995): 253–71.

45. Kenneth W. Smith Jr., "Full Text of Paul Ryan's V.P. Announcement Speech." Online: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/post/paul-ryans-announcement-speech-we-wont-duck-the-tough-issues/2012/08/11/f5ed0548-e3b2-11e1-ae7f-d2a13e249eb2\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/post/paul-ryans-announcement-speech-we-wont-duck-the-tough-issues/2012/08/11/f5ed0548-e3b2-11e1-ae7f-d2a13e249eb2_blog.html).

respects government?<sup>46</sup> What is Rom 13:1 talking about when it advises, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities”? And what about 1 Pet 2:13–14 and 1 Tim 2:1?

So-called Teavangelicals might believe that drowning the federal government in a bathtub is a Christ-sanctified idea, but there is significant evidence to the contrary.<sup>47</sup> Paul, after all, makes unambiguous reference to *delivering* taxes to whom they are due (Rom 13:7). How this squares with the antitax, antigovernment effusions of Tea Party enthusiasts, many of whom are conservative Christians, defies rational explanation.<sup>48</sup>

What I am saying, then, is that politicians and politically engaged citizens often assume that they are merely obeying the mandates of the Scriptures. In some cases, it is more precise to say they are obeying the mandates of a particular interpretation of the Scriptures. And in other cases, there is a whopping disparity between what the Scriptures seem to say and how the faithful construe their political advocacy.

#### TECHNICAL USAGE

So far we have explored a series of hopefully helpful analytical dichotomies. The first was rhetoric versus policy, the second postbiblical versus biblical influence. Our third area of interest focuses on only one prong of another well-known binary: content versus form. Here I urge analysts to look less at the messaging involved in Scripture citation and more at the technical way the message is conveyed. The danger of focusing on content alone is that exegetes tend to assume levels of subtlety and interpretive sophistication that are simply nonexistent among politicians and their constituencies. Often biblicists forget how one-dimensional Bible reading

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46. A variety of interesting articles on this verse are found in Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), e.g., Gerhard Schneider, “The Political Charge against Jesus (Luke 23:2),” 403–14; H. St. J. Hart, “The Coin of ‘Render unto Caesar...’ (A Note on Some Aspects of Mark 12:13–17; Matt. 22:15–22; Luke 20:20–26),” 241–48; and F. F. Bruce, “Render to Caesar,” 249–63.

47. David Brody, *The Teavangelicals: The Inside Story of How the Evangelicals and the Tea Party Are Taking Back America* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

48. Public Religion Research Institute, “Fact Sheet: ‘Teavangelicals’: Alignment and Tensions between the Tea Party and White Evangelical Protestants.” Online: <http://publicreligion.org/research/2011/11/fact-sheet-alignment-of-evangelical-and-tea-party-values/>.

can be. After all, most readers of the Scriptures do not seek to revel in the glorious multivalence of its many possible interpretations. On the contrary, they engage the text to find *the* message, *the* truth, and so forth.

My investigation of biblical citations in public oratory in 2004 and 2008 yielded a fairly consistent conclusion. Scriptural allusions were almost always the essence of brevity. That is to say, the overwhelming majority of Bible talk by politicians goes by in a flash. Politicians do not linger. They do not exegete. They do not need footnotes. I called this technique “the cite and run.” Its motto: “*Make the damn reference and get on with it!*”<sup>49</sup>

A few examples: Newt Gingrich, speaking at Judson University in March 2012, used Prov 29:18 to justify his candidacy, stating, “I believe what we need desperately in America today is captured in a simple Bible phrase: ‘Without vision the people perish.’”<sup>50</sup> And scene! Mitt Romney, at the memorial for the victims of the Aurora, Colorado, shooting, cited the New Testament (Rom 12:15), “And we can mourn with those who mourn in Colorado.”<sup>51</sup>

At the Republican National Convention, Marco Rubio of Florida invoked Luke 12:48—“We’re special because we’ve always understood the scriptural admonition, that for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required”—and left it at that. Notice that in all cases the reference is unadorned, as if its meaning were clear, uncontested, and most importantly, perfectly in sync with the politician’s worldview.

Indeed, sometimes the citation is not even explicitly articulated. Instead, it is smuggled into the oratory as a sort of high-pitch dog whistle audible only to certain constituencies. George W. Bush, I once noted, was the unparalleled master of sneaking snippets of Scripture into his speeches. In doing so, he executed a near perfect wink-and-nod to the evangelical base, while secularists remained oblivious to the signal that he had just relayed.

For instance, at the end of his 2001 State of the Union address, Bush slipped in this praise for his fellow citizens: “We can make Americans

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49. Berlinerblau, *Thumpin’ It*, 44.

50. Alana Semuels, “Newt Gingrich Courts Churchgoers in South Carolina.” See <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jan/15/news/la-pn-newt-gingrich-courts-churchgoers-in-south-carolina-20120115>.

51. Rom 12:15. See Eric Marrapodi and Halimah Abdullah, “Romney Strikes Rare Notes of Faith in Aurora Speech.” Online: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/20/politics/romney-religion-speech/index.html>.



proud of their government. Together we can share in the credit of making our country more prosperous and generous and just, and earn from our conscience and from our fellow citizens the highest possible praise: Well done, good and faithful servants.” How many Americans noticed that he had snuck in a little Scripture from Matt 25:21?<sup>52</sup> I am fairly certain that Mitt Romney meant to do just this when at the Republican National Convention he alluded to Amos 3:3 by declaring: “Tonight I am asking you to join me to *walk together* to a better future.”<sup>53</sup>

However, in 2012, we did see some notable and relevant innovations. In a more secular age, one used to hurry through or even conceal one’s faith-based pandering. That was the logic animating the examples I just gave. But America is changing. Public expressions of religion are becoming more explicit, bolder, and lengthier. In a recent study, I have referred to this explosion of faith in the public square as being part of the “revival” of American religion.<sup>54</sup> The revivalists seem hell-bent on saturating American discourse with sectarian religious imagery and creedal statements.

Most intriguing in this regard is Rick Perry’s August 6, 2011, oration at an event he called “The Response.” For those who have forgotten the details, Perry, freshly announced as a candidate for the GOP nomination, held court in front of thirty thousand prayerful people at Reliant Stadium in Houston. Writing in *The Washington Post*, I made this observation about the proceedings: “What Governor Perry did Saturday is unusual in the history of presidential campaigns, at least recent ones. He engaged in extended citation of passages from Joel, Isaiah and Ephesians. He would reel off immense chunks of Scripture—without any interpretation whatsoever, as if the verses were self-explanatory.”<sup>55</sup>

In other words, Governor Perry delivered a sermon. Any other politician in any other decade of the twentieth century would have used the occasion to articulate his policy prescriptions to the American people. Perry reversed that logic in accordance with the antiseccular sentiment of

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52. C-SPAN, “Address of the President to the Joint Session of Congress.” Online: <http://legacy.c-span.org/Transcripts/SOTU-2001-0227.aspx>.

53. “Transcript: Mitt Romney’s Acceptance Speech.” Online: <http://www.npr.org/2012/08/30/160357612/transcript-mitt-romneys-acceptance-speech>.

54. Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular*.

55. Jacques Berlinerblau, “Piety Is the Policy at Rick Perry’s Prayer Rally.” Online: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/georgetown-on-faith/post/piety-is-the-policy-at-rick-perrys-prayer-rally/2011/08/08/gIQAtpz52I\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/georgetown-on-faith/post/piety-is-the-policy-at-rick-perrys-prayer-rally/2011/08/08/gIQAtpz52I_blog.html).

the age: the piety *was* the policy. Those who observed the twenty Republican debates throughout 2011 and 2012 rarely lost sight of how important it was for the candidates to stress their religious bona fides in as explicit a manner as possible.<sup>56</sup>

My sense is, then, that the old cite-and-run techniques of 2008 may increasingly yield, at least among Republicans, to the longer-form effusions of Perry. On the Republican side of the aisle, anyhow, where traditionalist Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons have become a mainstay of the base, it makes perfect sense that Party oratory would amplify previously muted strains of religious politicking. Whether the governor of Texas was an innovator or an outlier in this regard remains to be seen.

#### EFFECTIVE USAGE

One last category to be mindful of concerns the actual effectiveness of using Scripture in political rhetoric. Did the cited verse have the desired outcome of swaying an audience, pulverizing an opponent, unloosening checkbooks at fundraisers, or garnering votes?

It is a tricky question, because a campaign's success or failure does not only hinge on a candidate's Scripture references. The United States, after all, has not regressed to the point where voters only care about the religious character of their elected officials. Indeed, data from the 2012 election suggests that the so-called nones, or religiously unaffiliated, voted against the conservative-Christian-dominated agenda of the GOP with especial aplomb. That is, 70 percent of a constituency that is reckoned to be one-fifth of the American people voted for Barack Obama.<sup>57</sup> In any case, it is important to recall that elections are never won by Scripture alone. Countless other policies, ads, political positions, and backroom compromises seal a politician's electoral fate. Thus it is hard to discern metrics for gauging effective and ineffective biblical citation.

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56. Jacques Berlinerblau, "Romney Takes Care of Business at Liberty University." Online: <https://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/romney-takes-care-of-business-at-liberty-university/46823>.

57. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation" (October 9, 2012), 25. Online: [http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious\\_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf).

Put in the most reductive terms possible, politicians who effectively cite Scripture *win* their respective contests. The case study here would have to be George W. Bush's 2004 victory over John Kerry.<sup>58</sup> The storyline there concerns a flailing incumbent, mired in an unpopular war, presiding over a sluggish economy, yet somehow still carrying the day because of the ballot of the so-called values voters.

There does seem warrant for the claim that Bush's use of scriptural messaging was helpful. It is undeniable that what the journalist Dan Gilgoff termed "the Jesus machine" played a huge role in bringing out the vote for Bush, especially in Ohio.<sup>59</sup> Some scholars have pointed out that Bush prevailed since he was able to woo a small percentage of African American conservatives to the red side of the ledger in that state.<sup>60</sup> One statistic that bears repeating is that Karl Rove's national operation had thousands of faith-based ground troops. Kerry's team, apparently, had one dedicated operative in charge of religious outreach.<sup>61</sup>

Broadly speaking, faith and values politicking is at its very best when employed for purposes of what I call "base whip-up." In other words, there are large, organized voting blocs—particularly on the Christian right—who are receptive to skillful biblical citation. I refer to evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants, traditionalist Catholics, and Mormons.

These religious conservatives expect to hear their candidates invoke the Bible, talk about their personal faith, and engage in the requisite culture war provocations on issues such as abortion and gay rights. A skilled politician—and let's be clear, this is usually going to be a Republican—knows just how to reach out to these constituencies using the Good Book. Perhaps no politician embodied these virtues more than former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum. His 2012 run for the presidency was punctuated on an almost daily basis by assaults on secularists, laments about the

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58. James Guth et al., "Religious Influences in the 2004 Presidential Election," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36 (2006): 223–42; Robert Denton Jr., "Religion and the 2004 Presidential Campaign," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (2005): 11–31.

59. Dan Gilgoff, *The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical America Are Winning the Culture War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007).

60. Bob Wineburg, *Faith-Based Inefficiency: The Follies of Bush's Initiatives* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2007), 88.

61. Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine*, 242–67. Also see Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular*, 120–36.

absence of prayer in American society, denunciations of “phony theology,” and scathing reflections on gay lifestyles.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, sometimes one plays the Bible and religion cards too loudly or too insultingly. The case of interest here is that of Todd “Legitimate Rape” Akin. Representative Akin was the Republican nominee for Senate in Missouri, who in an interview mentioned, “If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.”<sup>63</sup> The ensuing uproar handed the election to his Democratic opponent, Claire McCaskill.<sup>64</sup> He was joined on this “rape slate” by another Republican, Richard Mourdock, who a few weeks later argued that “even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that it is something that God intended to happen.”<sup>65</sup> The views of both of these men on abortion, medicine, and science were clearly informed by what they believed to be in the Bible.<sup>66</sup> And it is equally clear that their invocation of so-called biblical principles doomed their campaigns.

What the failed bids of these candidates demonstrate is that the use of biblical and religious themes in political oratory is not so much a double-edged sword as a double-edged nuke! Things can go hellaciously wrong

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62. Jacques Berlinerblau, “Under Fire,” *New Humanist* 127, no. 3 (2012): 39–41. Online as “The Death of American Secularism”: <http://newhumanist.org.uk/2788/the-death-of-american-secularism>. Rosalind S. Helderman, “Rick Santorum’s ‘Phony Theology’ Criticism of Obama Follows a Familiar Theme.” Online: [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-02-22/politics/35442340\\_1\\_phony-theology-hogan-gidley-rick-santorum](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-02-22/politics/35442340_1_phony-theology-hogan-gidley-rick-santorum). Shushannah Walshe, “Rick Santorum Has Tense Exchange on Gay Rights and Health Care in Iowa.” Online: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/12/rick-santorum-has-tense-exchange-on-gay-rights-and-health-care-in-iowa/>.

63. William Saletan, “Todd Akin’s Rape Fiasco.” Online: [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/frame\\_game/2012/08/todd\\_akin\\_s\\_legitimate\\_rape\\_gaffe\\_shows\\_how\\_abortion\\_can\\_be\\_a\\_crime\\_issue.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/frame_game/2012/08/todd_akin_s_legitimate_rape_gaffe_shows_how_abortion_can_be_a_crime_issue.html).

64. Diana Reese, “Claire McCaskill Legitimately Shuts Down Todd Akin in Missouri Senate Race,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2012. Online: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2012/11/07/claire-mccaskill-legitimately-shuts-down-todd-akin-in-missouri-senate-race/>.

65. Kim Geiger, “Joe Donnelly Triumphs over Richard Mourdock in Indiana Senate Race,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2012. Online: <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/06/news/la-pn-indiana-senate-result-20121106>.

66. On Akin’s background see Eliza Wood, “Todd Akin, the Bible, and Rape.” Online: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eliza-wood/todd-akin-the-bible-and-r\\_b\\_1819333.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eliza-wood/todd-akin-the-bible-and-r_b_1819333.html).

for a politician, terribly fast when they fecklessly invoke religion. Think of presidential candidate John McCain's two pastors, Rod Parsley and John Hagee, and the uproar they created in 2008.<sup>67</sup> Think of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Obama's ill-advised jab at conservative religious Americans who "cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them."<sup>68</sup> What I mean to say is that faith and values politicking is an extraordinarily complicated business and, unless politicians have the skill of a George W. Bush or a Bill Clinton in invoking religious themes, they run the risk of sinking their own campaigns.

#### CONCLUSION: THE COLLAPSE OF AMERICAN SECULARISM

With this survey rendered, it is important to step back and contextualize what we have just discussed in the context of broader patterns in recent American history.

In the second half of the twentieth century the Bible never surfaced in political rhetoric as much as it has now. Was it invoked as frequently by Eisenhower and Stevenson in 1952 and 1956? Kennedy and Nixon in 1960? Goldwater and Johnson in 1964? Nixon and Humphrey in 1968? Or Nixon and McGovern in 1972? The question for secular people, believers and nonbelievers alike, is this: What does it mean when the Scriptures have been cited more frequently by presidential aspirants in these past four years alone than they have been across five decades of American history? Whatever happened to the old secular status quo, where God was publicly acknowledged and graciously venerated, albeit in restrained and vague terms?

When did this change occur, and why? That is the question I address at length in *Thumpin' It*. The answer is quite complex, but let me, in closing, identify two interrelated factors that explain in large part the phenomenon we have been tracking here.

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67. "McCain Rejects Endorsements from Hagee, Parsley." Online: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/05/22/mccain-rejects-hagee-endo\\_n\\_103143.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/05/22/mccain-rejects-hagee-endo_n_103143.html).

68. Jeff Zeleny and Adam Nagourney, "An Angry Obama Renounces Ties to His Ex-Pastor," *The New York Times* (30 April 2008), p. A1. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/30/us/politics/30obama.html>. Katharine Q. Seelye and Jeff Zeleny, "On the Defensive, Obama Calls His Words Ill-Chosen," *The New York Times* (13 April 2008). Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/13/us/politics/13campaign.html>.

One reason for the increasing salience of the Bible in American public life is the nearly half-century rise of the Christian right. Awoken from its slumber by the anything-goes 1960s, conservative Christians refound their political footing in the 1970s. At first, it was Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter who roused the sleeping giant that was evangelical America.<sup>69</sup> When conservative Christian leaders like Jerry Falwell lost faith in him, his followers pivoted to the candidacy of Ronald Reagan in 1980.<sup>70</sup> And with that began the dismantling of the old New Deal coalition of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It is often forgotten that evangelicals were generally *Democratic* voters prior to the Reagan revolution of 1980.

We should never underestimate what Reverend Falwell accomplished. He executed, in the words of one commentator, the “biggest voter realignment” in the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup> He also perfectly identified the enemy, the “them,” to a pious, God-fearing “us.” As Albert Menendez observed, Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority “made every effort to portray Reagan as a defender of traditional Judeo-Christian values, while the Democrats were depicted as agents of ‘secular humanism,’ the sinister cabal supposedly ruining America.”<sup>72</sup> The dividend of Falwell’s activism is this: the Religious Right is a mainstay of the GOP and, in some estimations, its true base. If the base wants the Bible, the base gets the Bible—and this in large part explains our Scripture-saturated politics of the last decade or so.

That story is well known. Less well known is the complete unraveling of the secular status quo that took place in the second half of the twentieth century. American secularism has fallen upon hard times. As I have noted elsewhere, “Conservative religious leaders rampage against it, demagogues denounce it on the campaign trail, all three branches of government give it the cold shoulder, and among the general public it suffers from a distressing lack of popular appeal.”<sup>73</sup>

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69. Andrew Flint and Joy Porter, “Jimmy Carter: The Re-Emergence of Faith-Based Politics and the Abortion Rights Issue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (2005): 28–47.

70. For a revealing glimpse of Falwell’s political worldview, see Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

71. Jeffrey Bell, “What Falwell Wrought: Just the Biggest Realignment in Modern History,” *The Weekly Standard* 12 (2007): 13–14.

72. Albert Menendez, *Evangelicals at the Ballot Box* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1996), 145.

73. Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular*, xv.

In 1960 a presidential candidate such as Senator John F. Kennedy could deliver a speech in which he boasted that he “believe[d] in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.”<sup>74</sup> This was also an America in which the United States Supreme Court increasingly pushed religion out of public schools and public spaces.<sup>75</sup> As both the cause and effect of these developments, minorities—be they religious, ethnic, or sexual—were finding a voice in challenging the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant status quo.

Yet, in the intervening decades, all of that changed. In the judicial branch, the accomplishments of what is known as separationism have been undermined steadily at least since Justice William Rehnquist’s dissent in the 1985 *Wallace v. Jaffree* case. No fewer than four justices on today’s court would seem to concur with Rehnquist’s demurral that the wall of separation “is a metaphor based on bad history,” and “should be frankly and explicitly abandoned.”<sup>76</sup> For some contemporary court watchers it is not a question of if the wall collapses, but when.

The legislative chamber, for its part, is teeming with conservative evangelicals who speak openly about America being a “Christian nation” and who seem hell-bent on dismantling the wall brick by brick.<sup>77</sup> As for the executive branch, a *Democratic* president has presided over the supersizing of George W. Bush’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. President Barack Obama recently called for national days of prayer on 9/7–9/9 (in advance of the commemoration of 9/11).<sup>78</sup> Although comparatively restrained, Obama invokes Christ in his rhetoric in ways that would have made John F. Kennedy and mid-century separationists despair.<sup>79</sup>

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74. “Transcript: JFK’s Speech on His Religion.” Online: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600>.

75. Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular*, 32.

76. *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985), 107.

77. Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular*, 137–52.

78. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, “Presidential Proclamation—National Days of Prayer and Remembrance, 2012.” Online: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/07/presidential-proclamation-national-days-prayer-and-remembrance-2012>.

79. Jacques Berlinerblau, “Obama at the National Prayer Breakfast (2011).” Online: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/obama-at-the-national-prayer-breakfast-raging-christ-fest-secular-wake/31816>; idem, “Obama at the National Prayer Breakfast (2012).” Online: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/tag/national-prayer-breakfast>.

The point is that the Bible thumpin' we examined above is a metric of secularism's malaise. Either it rethinks itself, retools, reevaluates, or the long-form sermonizing of Governor Rick Perry becomes the norm, at least in Republican circles. Finally, either biblical scholarship ventures forth from the cloistered sanctity of specialization or its obsolescence in these matters of public concern will continue to be the norm. That was a lesson we could glean from the scholarship of a brilliant biblicist, David Clines, who is as much a specialist as he is a generalist, capable of using his expertise to make sense of the world in which he lives.



## THREE QUESTIONS ON ECONOMICS FOR G. E. M. DE STE. CROIX

Roland Boer

The Marxist classicist, Geoffrey Ernest Maurice de Ste. Croix, belongs to the venerable if less-populated tradition of Marxist economic minimalism in regard to the ancient world, a tradition that includes Karl Polanyi and Moses Finley.<sup>1</sup> Ste. Croix's major contribution is to have mounted a sustained and largely persuasive argument for the importance of class in the economies of ancient Greece and Rome, an argument that has profound relevance for biblical analysis.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I provide a brief account of Ste. Croix's central argument before exploring three questions concerning

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1. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson, eds., *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957); George Dalton, ed., *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1968); Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (rev. ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); see also Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1974); idem, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974); idem, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), 2–18; Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Precapitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy* (London: Verso, 1997); Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neil Wood, *Class, Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

2. Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981); see also idem, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth, 1972); idem, *Athenian Democratic Origins and Other Essays* (ed. David Harvey and Robert Parker; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); idem, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

his account: one concerns trade, which is profoundly useful, and the other two property and mode of production, where Ste. Croix is found wanting.<sup>3</sup>

### CLASS

Ste. Croix's chosen entry point is class, which he defines as "the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation."<sup>4</sup> His search for the motor of history is conventionally Marxist: we need to identify the process by which surplus is produced and from that point determine who benefits and who is exploited. Ste. Croix focuses on slaves, for they were put to work without any recompense and would thereby generate surplus well beyond their purchase price and cost of upkeep. Yet Ste. Croix is fully aware that slaves numbered less than peasants—relatively "free" landholders who cultivated small plots. So he argues that the ruling classes (what he calls the "propertied classes") above all lived on the surplus produced by slaves. The reason: the possessors of the largest tracts of land were precisely the ruling classes and the preferred way of working land was through slave labor. Often they themselves did not supervise the slaves but preferred to appoint overseers. The produce of these estates enabled the ruling classes to live in wealth, undertake roles of governance, pursue literature and the arts—all tasks that were possible only on the backs of the slaves who worked the estates. The slaves directly supported the existence of an often brutal ruling class, who in turn had the time and resources to produce the thought and literature of the classical world.

There is, however, a second modification in Ste. Croix's position, a modification that becomes necessary in light of the stretch of time covered by his "Greek world" (sixth century B.C.E. to seventh century C.E.). In the latter phase of that world the development of indentured labor, or *coloni*, increased dramatically. Ste. Croix has no hesitation in calling them serfs, for they were legally and economically bound to the ruling or propertied class. The *coloni* are widely regarded as forerunners to the serfs of the Middle Ages, but Ste. Croix's argument for their emergence (initially in Africa) is very persuasive. As the sources for slaves dried up—mostly

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3. I offer this study in honor of David Clines, who shares with me an Australian origin. I would like to think that such common ground has enabled him (and me to some extent) to think at times outside the frame. Ste. Croix provides another avenue of doing so.

4. Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 43.

conquest—and the cost of slaves skyrocketed, since owners were forced to breed them, new sources of producing surplus were required. Gradually the free peasants were forced by the propertied class into indentured roles in order to take up the slack. For these reasons, Ste. Croix opts for “unfree labour” as a term to cover both slaves and *coloni*/serfs, even though the Romans themselves, unable to escape the worldview and terminology of slavery, viewed the *coloni* as slaves in all but the technical sense.

Ste. Croix’s class analysis provides the most persuasive explanation I have read of the crumbling of the Roman Empire. Given the increasingly brutal exploitation of unfree labor in order to support an expensive and burdensome state apparatus—the final straw being the creation of a whole new bureaucracy in the form of the Christian church after Constantine’s conversion—many of those laborers had little affection for that state and actually welcomed the invaders. Ste. Croix digs up an impressive range of evidence of continual desertions, the indifference of laborers, and actual assistance to invaders—reflected in the increasingly harsh penalties for doing so. Perhaps it is best expressed in the fable of the donkey, which stands his ground when his master tells him to hurry into the city because the barbarians are coming. Eventually the master asks, “Why will you not come?” The donkey replies, “Will they put two packs or one pack on my back?” The master says, “One, I suspect.” “Well then,” says the donkey, “you put two packs on my back and they will put one on my back; I am not coming with you.”

Most of the debate over Ste. Croix’s proposal has turned on the question of slavery. As Paul Blackledge points out,<sup>5</sup> it is an innovative defense of the slave economy in which slavery is the archetypal form of unfree labor. It also offers a direct answer to the objections of Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst to slavery as a distinct mode of production; it works far better than Moses Finley’s emphasis on “status” rather than class; and it goes well beyond Karl Kautsky’s argument that slavery developed out of debt bondage in both ancient Greece and ancient Israel.<sup>6</sup> Ste. Croix’s reconstruction has been challenged, although the most pertinent points concern, first, whether the transition from slavery to serfdom is really part of the same

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5. Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 105.

6. Hindess and Hirst, *Precapitalist Modes of Production*, 109–77; Finley, *Ancient Economy*; Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity* (trans. Henry F. Mins; 1953; repr., London: Socialist Resistance, 2007) (German original 1908).

economic system; and, second, the matter of agency. I will deal with the first question below in my discussion of mode of production; suffice to indicate here that Ste. Croix's avoidance of any discussion of mode of production leads him to fail to see that the shift in formations of class—from slave to serf—is part of a larger shift in modes of production.

In regard to subjective matters of class, Perry Anderson has argued that Ste. Croix downplays the subjective, conscious element of class consciousness and emphasizes what is really the contradiction between forces and relations of production.<sup>7</sup> In response, Anderson argues for the weakening of Rome's ideological hold over slaves as they developed a distinct sense of identity and thereby offered resistance to the ruling classes. Obviously, any analysis of class and class conflict should include both factors—the objective tensions between forces and relations of production as well as the subjective elements of class consciousness.

#### TRADE

Three substantial questions arise with this otherwise very usable account. The first concerns trade, or rather the lack thereof. Ste. Croix continues an economic minimalist tradition of opposing the persistent tendency to see trade as the driving force of both the Greek world and the ancient Near East.<sup>8</sup> The assertion of the primacy of trade takes various forms, such as the argument that a city-state like Athens rose to prominence through sea-borne trade; or that trade was the primary reason for the conflict between Athens, Corinth, and Sparta; or that the mechanisms of expansion and contraction of empires in the ancient Near East were determined by trade; or indeed that there was a full-blown international market economy in the ancient Near East, replete with systems of production, circulation, and consumption.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Anderson, *Zone of Engagement*, 17–18.

8. Others opposing this tendency include Finley, *Ancient Economy*; Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies*; J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001).

9. For example, Rafi Greenberg, *Early Urbanizations in the Levant: A Regional Narrative* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002), 13; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the*

In response, Ste. Croix makes a simple point concerning transport. By land, the transport of goods was prohibitively expensive.<sup>10</sup> For example, in the period of the Roman emperor Diocletian (284–305 C.E.), it was cheaper to move the same quantity of wheat by ship from one end of the Mediterranean to another, from Syria to Spain, than it was to transport it 120 kilometers (or 75 miles) overland.<sup>11</sup> Was water-borne trade then the preferred method? It may have been cheaper per unit to transport goods in such a way, yet the cost of constructing ships was astronomical. Even if one had ships, Ste. Croix is skeptical that the Greeks or Romans actually used sea-borne trade as a prime generator of surplus.

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*History of Early Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 24–29, 118–19; Caroline Grigson, “Plough and Pasture in the Early Economy of the Southern Levant,” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. Thoms E. Levy; New York: Facts on File, 1995), 245–68; Arlene Rosen, “The Social Responses to Environmental Change in Early Bronze Age Canaan,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 14 (1995): 26–44; Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, “Commodities and Cuisine: Animals in the Early Bronze Age of Northern Palestine,” in *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas L. Esse* (ed. Samuel R. Wolff; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001), 251–82; Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, “An Archaeozoological Perspective on the Cultural Use of Mammals in the Levant,” in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Billie Jean Collins; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 457–91; Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987); idem, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Christopher M. Monroe, “Money and Trade,” in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East* (ed. Daniel C. Snell; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 155–68; Douglas L. Esse, *Subsistence, Trade, and Social Change in Early Bronze Age Palestine* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991), 103–4; Laetitia Graslin, “Les théories économiques du commerce internationale et leur usage pour l’étude des échanges à longue distance à l’époque néo-babylonienne,” in *Approaching the Babylonian Economy: Proceedings of the START Project Symposium Held in Vienna, 1–3 July 2004* (ed. Heather D. Baker and Michael Jursa; AOAT 30; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005), 121–36; Muhammad A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626–331 BC)* (trans. Victoria A. Powell; DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 60–63; Hayah Katz, *A Land of Grain and Wine ... A Land of Olive Oil and Honey: The Economy of the Kingdom of Judah* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2008).

10. The following observations are drawn from a paper originally given in 1959 called “How Far Was Trade a Cause of Early Colonisation?” in *Athenian Democratic Origins*, 349–70. Due to its continuing relevance, it reads as though it were written yesterday.

11. Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 11–12.

He distinguishes among three types of trade: imports, exports, and commercial exchange. Obviously, they are related, but he makes the distinction to point out that the primary concern of Greek city-states was the first, imports. The driving force was neither commercial exchange for profit, nor was it to think in terms of balance of trade, seeking to export more than one might import. Rather, the overriding concern was import: city-states were interested only in what they could acquire, not in what they could send out. Is there a shortage of grain? Let us get hold of some. I hear that so-and-so has brought in some expensive dye from Tyre and Sidon; let me see if I can get some too. And so on. The question then arises as to how one paid for such imports. Mostly the means of payment was fortuitous. Athens had its silver mines, and could rely in part on tribute from colonies, but if it became necessary to export products, then that was seen as a necessary evil for the sake of ensuring the desired imports. The absence of a sense of profit (generated by the third type of trade) is reflected in that Athens in the fourth century B.C.E. exacted the same duty (2 percent) on exports as imports. What then of individual merchants? Surely, they were interested in profits in order to make a living. Ste. Croix points out that merchants were always despised and peripheral figures in the eyes of the ruling classes. They were not organized and exercised no influence on politics. Merchants were useful for ensuring imports, but city-states did not think of them as “their own,” and they did not form a “mercantile class.”

Even imports were regarded as a necessary evil, for city-states were ideally self-sufficient. The reason for such an ideal lay with land, the major concern of rulers. Ste. Croix deftly picks up a standard assumption in studies of the ancient world and brings it to a logical conclusion.<sup>12</sup> It is widely agreed that Greek colonization was primarily due to population pressures and not for the purpose of trade on favorable shipping routes. For example, if one were to consider a settlement on the Propontis or Black Sea coast for the purpose of trade, one would choose the place where the currents naturally lead, namely the northwestern coast where Istanbul now stands (originally Byzantium). However, the first settlement by Megarian Greeks in 651 B.C.E. was at Chalcedon, on the other side, where it is extremely

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12. For a relatively recent and comprehensive study of population growth and colonization, with a wealth of relevant references, see Walter Scheidel, “The Greek Demographic Expansion: Models and Comparisons,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 (2003): 120–40.

difficult to land a boat. The reason is that Chalcedon had far more arable land. Only seventeen years later did they settle Byzantium as well. If a town did become involved in trade, it was secondary, coming from the bottom up rather than any primary intention to engage in trade. The persistence of land-based wealth is shown by the occasional example even from Roman times: if someone happened to make some money from a perilous expedition in search of precious things, or perhaps from tribute as a provincial governor, he would not “invest” in another venture; he would use it to acquire land, the only secure form of wealth.

To Ste. Croix's points, I would add the following: there was an absence of any mechanism for productive loans, that is, to use capital to create more capital. Instead, one borrowed for nonproductive purposes.<sup>13</sup> The best one could do with money is either buy land or bury it so that it would be there in case of need. Indeed, for trade to function as a generator of surplus, it requires cheap transport, complex logistics, and a system of political and legal structures, enforced by agreement among strong states. The old warning must be repeated once more: the imposition of categories developed in the analysis of capitalism to the ancient world is deeply anachronistic.<sup>14</sup>

#### PROPERTY

On the matter of property, however, Ste. Croix manifests a gap. He prefers to use the term *propertied classes* rather than *ruling classes*. In great detail,

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13. See Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 21, 141–44, 96–98.

14. This imposition is the unfortunate agenda of many of the essays in the series of volumes published from the International Scholars Conference on Ancient Near Eastern Economies: Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine, eds., *Privatization in the Ancient Near East and Classical World* (Peabody Museum Bulletin 5; Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1996); Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine, eds., *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East* (Peabody Museum Bulletin 7; Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1999); Michael Hudson and Marc van de Mieroop, eds., *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East* (International Scholars Conference on Ancient Near Eastern Economies 3; Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2002); Michael Hudson and Cornelia Wunsch, eds., *Creating Economic Order: Record-Keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East* (International Scholars Conference on Ancient Near Eastern Economies 4; Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2004).

he shows how property qualifications were always the criteria for admittance to the ruling classes, and that it was property in land that was valued most highly. But he does not examine what *property* itself might mean. This is odd, especially in a Marxist study. Let me explain.

The way we understand private property ultimately derives from the ancient world, but in an unexpected fashion. It was invented by the Roman jurors of the second century B.C.E., subsequently lost in the Middle Ages, only to be recovered in the “Papal Revolution” begun under Pope Gregory VII (ca. 1015–1085), from which it became a central element of capitalism.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, private property was a unique invention of Roman civil law.<sup>16</sup> And that innovation was the concept of “absolute property,” or what is known as *dominium ex jure Quiritium*—the right of absolute ownership of a thing by any Roman citizen.<sup>17</sup> The crucial distinction is between “possession” and “property”: the former refers to the relatively uncertain control of goods, while the latter entails full legal title to those goods. “Property” thus refers to the unqualified and absolute legal title to a thing (*res*). Unlike mere possession, property is not subject to any qualification or external constraint. Only in this sense can one speak of private property. And if one has absolute rights to a piece of property one also has the right to dispose of it.<sup>18</sup>

How did this crucial development come about? It was the product of specialized jurists who focused on civil law (*ius civile*), who were neither practicing lawyers nor state functionaries, but legal theorists. Their spe-

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15. Nicholas V. Gianaris, *Modern Capitalism: Privatization, Employee Ownership, and Industrial Democracy* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1996), 20; China Miéville, *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law* (London: Pluto, 2006), 195.

16. H. F. Jolowicz, *Historical Introduction to the Study of Roman Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 142–43, 426; Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, 65–67; Andrew Linklater, *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1432; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 31; David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), 199–205.

17. *Quirites* is the common name used for Roman citizens after the Romans and Sabines were united (*Romani* was reserved for warriors and rulers). Thus quiritary ownership applies to citizens.

18. The Roman jurors defined absolute ownership as the right to dispose perfectly of a material thing in so far as it not forbidden by law (*ius perfecte disponendi de re corporali nisi lege prohibeatur*).



cific interests were disputes over property, the questions of contract and exchange between Roman citizens—in short, transactions such as sale, purchase, hire, lease, inheritance, and property in marriage. This theoretical work was the outcome of the extensive development of the slave economy under the Romans. With such a large number of slaves, along with the myriad economic transactions that came with Roman expansion, Roman civil law came to define a slave as a “thing” (*res*) that a citizen may own as his absolute and inalienable property. Once this breakthrough was made, it came to be applied to any movable or immovable item. This history means that one—Ste. Croix included—must be extremely careful when speaking of private property in times before this invention and in places not influenced by it. Neither the Greeks, nor Persians, nor Babylonians, nor Sumerians knew what private property was.

#### MODE OF PRODUCTION

The absence of an adequate consideration of private property may be regarded as a sin of omission; not so the question of mode of production. Ste. Croix finds discussions of mode of production tiring and unproductive, too close to a form of Marxist scholasticism. But is not some engagement with the debates called for, especially with the texts of Marx and Engels? Instead, Ste. Croix dismisses feudalism as a descriptor of his “Greek World” since it lacks precision (it is more of a social relation than an economic system), rules out any Asiatic mode of production for the ancient Near East (on this matter he suggests that Perry Anderson has said the last word<sup>19</sup>), and even on the matter of slavery he writes, “I think it would not be technically correct to call the Greek (and Roman) world ‘a slave economy’; but I should not raise any strong objection if anyone else wished to use that expression.”<sup>20</sup>

However, Ste. Croix does not dispense with these modes of production in order to produce a new term; he avoids such discussion altogether. One reason must lie in the stretch of time he covers: the earlier centuries of his Greek world have slavery as the prime form in which surplus was extracted, but then the later period sees the rise of serfs (or *coloni*). If he had engaged with questions of mode of production, he would have faced

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19. Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 544; Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 462–549.

20. Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 133.

the reality that the shift from slaves to serfs was the sign of a fundamental shift in economic systems. It is not sufficient to argue that slave and serf are different forms of unfree labor, for there are many forms of unfree labor that fit the category.<sup>21</sup>

A further problem involves his assumption that the “Greek world” extended well into the ancient Near East under Alexander the Great’s conquests (333–323 B.C.E.). Here too he opts for serfdom as the defining class structure of exploitation.<sup>22</sup> The effect of this argument is strange, for it draws the ancient Near East into Ste. Croix’s later Greek world. If we follow this line of argument, then the serf was the prime form of exploitation in the millennia of ancient Near Eastern economics (at least from ca. 3000 B.C.E.) as well as the later stages of the Roman Empire via the *colonus*. What we end up with is a vast porridge called serfdom into which quite distinct economic systems from different historical periods all seem to fit.

In other words, the absence of this level of discussion in Ste. Croix’s text leaves a large hole. He operates mostly at an intermediate level, somewhere between the nitty gritty of everyday life (although he discusses matters of food and transport from time to time) and the sweeping abstract level of modes of production. Ste. Croix opts for the middle zone, that of class. The downside of his decision is that he assumes it is the correct (and thereby only) way to develop a Marxist reading of the Greek world.<sup>23</sup> The upside is that on the specific issue of class Ste. Croix offers one of the best studies of the ancient world, and an extraordinarily fruitful way of using Marxism for such a study.

### CONCLUSION

In sum, Ste. Croix provides some extraordinary insights, but also some false paths and holes. I have said enough about those paths, so I would like to conclude with an observation concerning his usefulness for reconstructing the economics of biblical societies. In particular, there is the need for a sustained analysis on the matter of class in biblical societies—with

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21. Chris Wickham has argued that the later phase cannot really be described as a “slave economy.” See Wickham, *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London: British School at Rome, 1994), 9–20.

22. Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 155–58.

23. I also suspect it also has much to do with his British context, where class is barely concealed and so obviously part of everyday life.

the detailed attention to sources characteristic of Ste. Croix. The only comparable text is the monumental but flawed work of Norman Gottwald,<sup>24</sup> which remains restricted to the Hebrew Bible. A reconstruction like that of Ste. Croix needs not only to build on his work but also to explore both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

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24. Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of Liberated Israel 1250–1050 BCE* (1979; repr. with new preface; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).



## READING AS A CANAANITE: PARADOXES IN JOSHUA

Mark G. Brett

Professor David Clines has authored a number of provocative works in which he has argued, in various ways, for the rights of readers over against authors. In this essay I will engage with only two versions of the argument and make some observations on the relationships between them. In one version, which might be termed *Ideologiekritik*, he suggests that it is incumbent on critical readers to block the flow of ideology from biblical texts to scholarly commentary.<sup>1</sup> If this first version of the argument can be understood as a restriction on hermeneutical trade, then ironically, the second version sounds decidedly laissez faire: biblical interpretation can be aligned with readers' interests much like bespoke tailoring cuts its cloth to the contours of the customer's needs.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the first version, which perhaps displays a surfeit of moral imperatives, this second version has been charged with a deficit of moral seriousness<sup>3</sup> as if it entailed the view that readers can make a text say anything they might choose. The latter claim I take to be a misleading generalization about the umbrella category of postmodernism. Among other things, I will argue that when the better arguments for "readerly" interpretation are held together in

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1. David J. A. Clines, "Metacommentating Amos," in *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Heather A. McKay and David J. A. Clines; JSOTSup 162; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 142–60; repr. in idem, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 76–93.

2. David J. A. Clines, "Possibilities and Priorities of Biblical Interpretation in an International Perspective," *BibInt* 1 (1993): 67–87; repr. in idem, *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 292, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1:46–67.

3. Cf. James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 102, 132–34, 164, 168.

tension, they foster more comprehensive, and in this sense more critical, forms of conversation.

For many historians, it is self-evident that biblical texts should only be cut and styled to fit the original readers in the ancient world. This is where the hermeneutical tailoring makes most professional sense, on this view, reconstructing ancient clients via historical modeling and hypothesis. A history of the biblical text's later influence in various ideological settings is also a possible scholarly interest, as the relevant historical evidence allows, but that would be a separable enterprise. My own approach to hermeneutical pluralism would agree that there are a number of logically separable tasks at issue here, and that they should be pursued in relative isolation from one another. But I also agree with Professor Clines that there are many kinds of interpretive interests, including critiques of ideology, that raise questions about the legitimacy of alternative paradigms of interpretation. In other words, the critical scrutiny of competing interpretive paradigms is itself a proper interpretive interest for *Ideologiekritik*, even if we can only ever achieve a piecemeal and transitory identification of blind spots in critical thinking.<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, the critical examination of competing paradigms is an enterprise that is notoriously fraught with dangers, and genuine debates are often short-circuited.

For example, one of the leading antagonists of postmodernism in our field, William Dever, has repeatedly drawn attention to Keith Windschuttle's *Killing of History*, which is taken to be a devastating critique of postmodern nihilism.<sup>5</sup> The invocation of this book is ironic in the extreme, since Windschuttle's obfuscation of key issues in Aboriginal history may be taken as a paradigmatic case of ideological struggles in the discipline of history.<sup>6</sup> Our recent "history wars" in Australia should be sufficient indi-

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4. See the classic account of Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (trans. Edmund Jephcott; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) (original German ed. 1944; rev. German ed. 1947).

5. William Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 24; idem, *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 28, referring to Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

6. Keith Windschuttle, *Van Dieman's Land 1803–1847* (vol. 1 of *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*; Sydney: Macleay, 2002); Robert Manne, ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black, 2003); Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

cation that *claims* to objectivity are not themselves evidence of objectivity. There are still, nevertheless, better and worse ways to debate evidence, and critical rigor continues to have influence in some quarters. We need not greet the advent of *Ideologiekritik* with dismay, even when the unfortunate conflation of ideology and fiction in biblical studies has yielded such confusion. We do not need an elaborate definition of ideology in order to see that texts may be politically shaped, even if they are quite accurate in their referential claims about the past—"if true, so much the better for the ideological effect."<sup>7</sup> What is at issue in the present discussion is not just the asserted content of biblical texts, but the way in which this content is related to particular social interests. Conservative defenses of the historical accuracy of biblical materials have not really grasped the breath of the problems at issue here. If there is a measure of historicity, some key questions remain; for example, which voices are excluded or marginalized from the Joshua narratives, and why?

I have deliberately allowed a contemporary set of debates to shape my interpretive interests in this essay, without burying the concept of authorial discourse. Notably, in a significant study of the influence of the Bible in Australian history, Ann Curthoys has shown how an exodus-conquest typology "works against substantial acknowledgement and understanding of the colonial past." Indeed, "white Australians ... construct for themselves a past which allocates the land as won through suffering, and therefore theirs."<sup>8</sup> In reaching this conclusion, Curthoys was influenced in part by a landmark essay by Edward Said in which he investigates the exclusion of Canaanites from the biblical world of moral concern. Said's metacommentary attempted to block the flow of biblical ideology into Michael Walzer's theories concerning exodus-inspired political movements.<sup>9</sup> My own

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7. Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology* (ed. Slavoj Žižek; London: Verso, 1994), 7–8; cf. Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 304–22.

8. Ann Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Mythology," *Journal of Australian Studies* (1999): 1–18.

9. Edward Said, "Michael Walzer's Exodus and Revolution: A Canaanite Reading," in *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (ed. Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens; New York: Verso, 1988), 161–78; cf. the review of subsequent literature in Nur Maselha, "Reading the Bible with the Eyes of the Canaanites: Neo-Zionism, Political Theology and the Land Traditions of the Bible," *Holy Land Studies* 8 (2009): 55–108. Contrast Gary Anderson, "What about the

research suggests that the exodus-conquest typology was less significant in the Australian national imagination than what has come to be called “the doctrine of discovery”—a complex legal history that was much more dependent on colonial interpretation of Genesis, and of Isa 40–66, than of Joshua.<sup>10</sup> Excavating the ideological background that has influenced Australian self-understandings in no way concedes that scholarly debate is now lost forever in the postmodern mists. On the contrary, an increased self-awareness on the part of readers could also lead to more comprehensive and more critical debates around the very political issues that appear so intractable.

#### SURVIVING THE BAN

To begin with, we will pursue a relatively narrow set of questions about how the Joshua narratives might have been read in the eighth, seventh, and fifth centuries B.C.E. To venture into earlier periods would be hazardous, due to the sheer complexity of the historical and literary problems that we would need to address, not least in the field of archaeology. In contrast with the arrival of the Philistines in the twelfth century, the formation of Israel as a people was not characterized by the imposition of a new culture; archaeologists agree that Israelites were in some sense indigenous, even if YHWH religion originated outside the historical borders of Israel and Judah. As is well known, the Merenptah stela first supplies the name “Israel” at the end of the thirteenth century, which is the only extrabiblical record of “Israel” before the ninth century, when it again appears in Assyrian records and in the Mesha inscription. What kind of Israelite identity would have persisted through these centuries is a controversial issue, but for our present purposes the more important questions are what kinds of

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Canaanites?” in *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham* (ed. Michael Bergmann, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea; Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 269–82.

10. Mark G. Brett, “Feeling for Country: Reading the Old Testament in the Australian Context,” *Pacifica* 23 (2010): 137–56; Robert J. Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Lindsay G. Robertson, *Conquest by Law: How the Discovery of America Dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of Their Lands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).



Canaanite culture would have endured, and how was the “fissure” between Israelite and Canaanite identity effected?<sup>11</sup>

In an astute analysis of the archaeological debates, Daniel Fleming has recently suggested that the arguments for Canaanite ethnicity in Iron I (down to mid-tenth century B.C.E.) are at least as strong as those for an Israelite ethnicity. More surprisingly, perhaps, he has raised doubts about the very idea of ethnicity in relation to this period.<sup>12</sup> While it is likely that some of Israel’s neighbors called themselves Canaanite as a self-description, the social complexities on the ground are largely inaccessible to archaeological description (the Philistine evidence is much clearer), and we cannot rely on imperial Egyptian texts to decide the matter of self-description.<sup>13</sup> The notion of ethnicity is declared problematic by Fleming when no self-descriptions are available and when recent anthropological theory has questioned the idea of ethnic groupings as bounded, culturally homogeneous, and territorially based.<sup>14</sup> While it is no doubt the case that the postmodern emphasis in recent anthropological theory has been explicitly critical of earlier models of ethnicity, the newer versions of social poetics differ more in degree than in kind.<sup>15</sup> Cultural permeability or hybridity have long been features of ethnic theories, without any presumption that ethnic boundaries require a homogeneous culture within territorial boundaries; the latter is characteristically an aspiration of ethnic nationalism rather than of ethnic “networks” or “associations” as Thomas

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11. See Dever, *Lives of Ordinary People*, 129, for the idea of “post-Canaanite polities.” On ethnic “fissure”—reducing the size of shared ancestry—see Thomas H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (3rd ed.; London: Pluto, 2010), 68–69.

12. Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 283–89, extrapolating in particular from Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman, “A Border Case: Beth-Shemesh and the Rise of Ancient Israel,” in *Israel in Transition: From Late Bronze II to Iron IIA (c. 1250–850 B.C.E.)*, vol. 1: *The Archaeology* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 21–31, who analyze the evidence in terms of ethnicity.

13. By way of analogy, indigenous Australians possess hundreds of traditional names for their local polities, a number of regional terms, as well as the generic Latin *aboriginal*, which arose as a result of colonial contact.

14. Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 252–54.

15. This is evident, for example, from a comparison of Michael Herzfeld’s work, *Anthropology: Theoretical Practice in Culture and Society* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), with Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*.

Eriksen defines them.<sup>16</sup> In the end, Fleming adopts the terminology of “association” and “collaborative politics,” which begs the question of how he would distinguish his proposals from Eriksen’s taxonomy.

Fleming is more persuasive when he turns to the analysis of biblical texts. And he certainly finds more to say about the complexity of conquest narratives than William Dever, whose apparently evenhanded archaeological approach leads him to conclude that the Hebrew Bible, “written by elitists (and propagandists), is an ideal portrait, not of what most people actually believed and practiced, but of what they should have believed and practiced—and would have, had these theologians, these nationalist orthodox parties, been in charge.”<sup>17</sup> Dever suggests that the biblical texts have silenced not just the voices of the “post-Canaanites” of the Iron Age but of all the lower classes of the Levant—more than three quarters of the population.<sup>18</sup> He takes archaeological imagination to be ethically superior to the historiography of the biblical writers from Jerusalem who were, for example, “simply oblivious” to the inhabitants of Lachish, barely forty miles distant, who suffered terribly at the hands of the Assyrians at the end of the eighth century. “Not only is this horrifyingly callous, but it disqualifies these writers as anything like reliable historians.”<sup>19</sup>

Fleming takes the view that the writers who produced the conquest narratives should at least be divided into two quite different groups. Joshua 8:3–29, for example, is likely to have been conceived in northern tradition, and only subsequently drawn into the Judean conquest narratives, after the fall of the northern kingdom. He suggests that parallels with Moabite and Sabaean texts imply the existence of an earlier “indigenous tradition for claiming right to a new land,” which should be distinguished from the Assyrian genre of vassal treaties, imposed on conquered peoples and reflected in Deuteronomy. On this point he follows Lauren Monroe’s argu-

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16. Eriksen (*Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 41–45) discusses degrees of incorporation, distinguishing ethnic communities that share a territory and the highest degree of incorporation, from ethnic “associations,” “networks,” and “categories.” See further Mark G. Brett, “Israel’s Indigenous Origins: Cultural Hybridity and the Formation of Israelite Ethnicity,” *BibInt* 11 (2003): 400–412.

17. Dever, *Lives of Ordinary People*, 287.

18. Dever does, however, appear to contradict himself on the silence of the lower classes when he describes the popular denunciations of wealth and centralized power on the basis of biblical evidence drawn from 1 Sam 8:10–18 and the book of Amos; cf. *ibid.*, 141 and 244.

19. *Ibid.*, 367.

ment that the **הרם** in Josh 8 reflects early state formations in the region, for which such comprehensive ritual slaughter binds a people simultaneously to the land and to the divinity who provides it, excluding all the prior inhabitants from economic relations.<sup>20</sup> The early **הרם** was in this sense not simply a strategy for warfare; its ritual performance also served to secure a covenant relationship with the deity and consequent flourishing in the land. In effect, it rendered a town “an empty vessel in which the conquering population and its god set up residence.”<sup>21</sup>

In this earlier northern tradition, Joshua maintains his central position in conducting a local YHWH war against Ai, a town that is located in other narrative contexts within Benjaminite territory. Since Josh 8 shares a number of significant features with the account of war against Benjamin in Judg 20–21, it may be possible to discern in this Benjaminite intertextuality, according to Fleming’s hypothesis, evidence of intra-indigenous conflict among the northern groups: “By this scenario, Ai would have no larger identity or association; it is never called Canaanite or the like.”<sup>22</sup> In spite of the image of comprehensive destruction in Judg 20:48, and of **הרם** in Judg 21:11, there are survivors who intermarry with another northern tribe. In short, if the earlier **הרם** traditions are at home in the northern tribal associations of the eighth century (as is the encounter with Canaanite kings in Judg 5<sup>23</sup>), then their audiences would have been readily able to distinguish this Joshua from the one who was to arrive in the seventh century as the agent of Mosaic laws of conquest, implemented across all the territories of Israel and Judah.

While the recent work of Monroe and Fleming provides no more than plausible hypotheses for traditions that sit behind the biblical texts as we have them, there are also some significant indications on the surface of the narratives that point to the complexity of compositional history. To begin with, there seem to be tensions between the authority of Joshua and the authority of Moses, and while narrative analysis might illuminate these

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20. Lauren A. S. Monroe, “Israelite, Moabite and Sabaeen War-*hêrem* Traditions and the Forging of National Identity: Reconsidering the Sabaeen Text RES 3945 in Light of Biblical and Moabite Evidence,” *VT* 57 (2007): 318–41.

21. *Ibid.*, 326.

22. Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 140–41, drawing on Sara J. Milstein, “Expanding Ancient Narratives: Revision through Introduction in Biblical and Mesopotamian Literature” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2010).

23. Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 287–88.

tensions in some respects, the conflict of voices in the text can hardly be accounted for in purely narratological terms.<sup>24</sup> The chain of command in Josh 8:8, for example, descends directly from YHWH to Joshua without looping through Mosaic law (contrast 8:30–35, discussed below), and this has been considered one among the several reasons to separate the older Ai story from its surrounding narrative.

A comparison between Josh 8:8 and the rules of engagement in Josh 11 is instructive. In 11:6 Joshua is commanded directly by YHWH only to hamstring horses and burn chariots, and by the end of chapter all the humans are slaughtered and animals are excluded from the ban while confidently claiming that everything was done according the command of Moses (11:11–15).<sup>25</sup> Joshua 11:6 might well reflect an older narrator's point of view that sees Joshua as acting without a mediating legal tradition; but even when Mosaic authority is brought into view, this chapter does not yet see the sacrifice of animals as inevitably part of the ban. The wording of Deut 20:16—that Israel should destroy “all that breathed”—is taken up in Josh 11:11, 14 (cf. 10:40) without any hint that this included animals as well. The same observation may be made about the Sihon and Og narratives in Deuteronomy, where the animals are spared (2:35; 3:7).

The inclusion of animals in the ban should probably be seen as a distinct conception that belongs to another layer of tradition in the book of Joshua. At one level of the tradition, for example, in 11:11–15, an “omniscient” narrator could claim faithful implementation of the Mosaic law by assuming that “all that breathed” implied only the death of humans. This is clearly not the case in Josh 6–7.

Joshua 7:24–25 describes the destruction of Achan's family and livestock in terms that reiterate the ban on Jericho in Josh 6, where the Israelites destroyed “all in the city, men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and donkeys” (6:21).<sup>26</sup> The consequences of Achan's sin can be read, moreover, as an application of Deut 13:7–15, which does not hesitate to

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24. The most impressive attempt is found in the work of L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

25. Walter Brueggemann emphasizes the different voices of authority in his theological discussion of Josh 11 in *Divine Presence and Violence: Contextualizing the Book of Joshua* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2009). Cf. the critique from Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Reading Joshua,” in Bergmann et al., *Divine Evil*, 236–56.

26. Frank Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 52–71.

speak of חרם in verse 15. The cairn of stones raised over Achan in 7:25–26 not only aligns with the stoning required in Deut 13:10, but suggests a link to the fate of Canaanite kings in Josh 8:29 and 10:27. Taken together, Josh 6–7 and Deut 13 seem to reflect a single understanding of the ban. Yet we are also forced to conclude that this point of view is different from the tradition that interprets the ban in Deut 20:16 to include only humans.

Many scholars agree that the law in Deut 13:7–15 is sufficiently similar to the loyalty requirements in Assyrian vassal treaties, and more specifically in Esarhaddon's treaties, to warrant the dating of this text to the seventh century. Having now provided the reasons why Josh 6–7 are closely related to this Deuteronomistic law, we would be justified in dating the Jericho and Achan narratives within the same historical horizon, as distinct from an earlier and narrower interpretation of "all that breathed." It seems that in the seventh century, the Deuteronomistic writers have simultaneously imitated and resisted the Assyrian treaty genre, exhibiting the kind of mimetic rivalry that produces the need for "scapegoats" like Achan. YHWH has taken the place of the suzerain, but the exclusive demands for loyalty nevertheless agree with the Assyrian models, as does the death penalty for disloyalty to the suzerain, and more generally, the curses that arise from breaches of the treaty/covenant.<sup>27</sup>

This is not to say that the entire discourse of Deuteronomistic חרם was invented in the seventh century in resistance to the dominant empire of the day, but rather that the older legal traditions concerning war and the older חרם traditions from the region (as reflected in Josh 8:3–29) were reshaped at this time. One element in this transformation, as we have seen, was the expanded national role given to Joshua, now configured as a servant of the Mosaic laws of conquest. Another element, apparently, was the application of the requirements in Deut 13:15 to the Achan story in Josh 7, which envisages the same version of the ban that we find in the Jericho narrative in Josh 6:21.

Michael Stone has detected another a pre-Deuteronomistic layer of editing in Josh 11:1–5, which begins by first referring to an assembling of

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27. See the overview of earlier studies in Mark G. Brett, *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire* (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2008), 79–93, revising the argument in "Genocide in Deuteronomy: Postcolonial Variations on Mimetic Desire," in *Seeing Signals, Reading Signs: The Art of Exegesis: Studies in Honour of Antony F. Campbell, SJ, for His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Mark A. O'Brien and Howard N. Wallace; JSOTSup 415; London: Continuum, 2004), 76–90.

specific kings—Jabin of Hazor, King Jobab of Madon, the king of Shimron, and the king of Achshaph—before turning to a more typical list of indigenous ethnicities: the kings of “the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah” (11:3). The initial focus on kings, instead of ethnicities, is then given a distinctive interpretation in Josh 11:18–20a: “Joshua made war for many days with all these kings, for it was YHWH’s doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel in battle.” Stone suggests that this reasoning is quite irrelevant to the Deuteronomistic conquest law, and implies instead an increasing opposition to YHWH’s sovereignty on the part of these particular kings. On this view, 11:1–5 is part of a pre-Deuteronomistic editorial pattern, along with 5:1; 9:1–2; 10:1–5, that frames Joshua’s battles as “defensive wars” against the indigenous kings, rather than the general populace. This model of the conquest as directed against indigenous sovereignty is then further evidenced in chapter 12, which presents nothing more than a catalogue of vanquished kings.<sup>28</sup>

While there may be reason to think that this social differentiation was part of the forging of Israel’s identity within the cultural hybridity of the Early Iron Age, many of the attempts to distinguish between Deuteronomistic and pre-Deuteronomistic versions of Joshua narratives would seem to be engaged in a fruitless enterprise, unless there are clear indicators such as a distinctive notion of the ban. The narratives of Josh 2–7 and 9, which go to extraordinary lengths to explain why the descendants of Rahab and the Gibeonites sans kings survive among the Israelites, are peppered with Deuteronomistic language and categories. The Gibeonite ruse, for example, depends on the logic of Deut 20:10–18, which prohibits treaties with indigenous people. The Gibeonite speech in Josh 9:5 even seems to appropriate a line from Israel’s own story in Deut 29:5, with the claim that “clothes are falling apart and sandals falling to pieces.”<sup>29</sup> The relatively complex narratives in Josh 6 and 9 serve to explain why the conquest of Canaan was incomplete, and can be readily contrasted with the formulaic

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28. Lawson G. Stone, “Ethical and Apologetic Tendencies in the Redaction of the Book of Joshua,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 25–35; cf. L. Daniel Hawk, “Conquest Reconfigured: Recasting Warfare in the Redaction of Joshua,” in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (ed. Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritche Ames; SBLSymS 42; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 145–60.

29. Hawk, “Conquest Reconfigured,” 157.

list of successes in 11:10–23, where we find the ban duly conducted under the authority of Mosaic law. If there were indeed pre-Deuteronomistic attempts to accommodate indigenous people, as opposed to their kings, then it is strikingly evident that these attempts have been blessed by a Deuteronomist.

There is, of course, a long scholarly tradition that finds the admission of an incomplete conquest to be the work of a second Deuteronomist (often styled Dtr 2) from the exilic period, who was forced to have second thoughts about the excessively rhetorical claims in Josh 11:23 and 21:43–45 that Joshua had taken “all the land.” But even by the end of the eighth century, with the refugee population dramatically swelling in Jerusalem under the weight of Assyrian aggression, there may well have been occasion for second thoughts. The need for two Deuteronomistic voices can, however, be aligned with the evidence that the phrase “all that breathed” has one meaning in Josh 11:11, 14, and quite another meaning in Josh 6–7. One might venture the hypothesis that Josh 2–7 was edited by the “deutero-Deuteronomist,” who in the Jericho and Achan narratives takes the most comprehensive view of the ban, yet who nevertheless takes pains to account for the “וְהַנִּשְׁמָרִים who remain,” as they are described in 23:4. Of course, “all the land” and “all that breathed” may be rhetorical expressions, hyperbole, and intentionally so. But it is nevertheless impossible to homogenize all the voices in Joshua—as if perhaps the same historian bent on claiming “all the land” could immediately turn, in the next breath, to a list of lands not taken.<sup>30</sup> This kind of tension is much better explained by the hypothesis of a later editor struggling to fit new perspectives into inherited tradition. For example, any history of alternative cultic centers apart from the “one place” designated for YHWH’s name<sup>31</sup> would have constituted a problem that needed to be addressed—as in Josh 22:26–27, which states that what appears to be an altar was not actually an altar.

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30. Contra Wolterstorff, “Reading Joshua,” 252–54, who seems to suggest that a single historian might compose both hagiographies and more down-to-earth narratives (as if, in terms of his analogy, a sporting team might follow up the hyperbolic exclamation “We slaughtered them!” with a losing score). It stretches credulity to imagine that this single historian would work with two different notions of the ban, both attributed to Mosaic law.

31. See William Morrow, “‘To Set the Name’ in the Deuteronomic Centralization Formula: A Case of Cultural Hybridity,” *JSS* 55 (2010): 365–83.

On the other hand, Josh 8:30–35 (MT) presents an entirely new set of puzzling details that probably imply an audience later than even the deutero-Deuteronomist's readers. The separable status of this unit is made clear already in the ancient versions, where it is placed after Josh 5:2 in 4QJosh, and after 9:2 in the LXX. The MT and the LXX nevertheless agree that this episode, which includes the construction of an altar on Mount Ebal, should precede the Gibeonite narrative, a narrative of native survival. Although the narrator in 8:30–35 repeatedly defers to Mosaic law, there is no hint that this northern altar might be as problematic as the one in Josh 22. Rather than simply assuming that this belongs to a Deuteronomistic redaction, as is commonly the case,<sup>32</sup> the reference to “immigrant and native” (גֵּר and אֲזֵרָח) in Josh 8:33 stands out as a glaring anachronism that demands further reflection. To which category would the Gibeonites or Rahabites belong?

The term גֵּר has a large number of uses in the prior legal traditions of the Covenant Code and Deuteronomy, with a common underlying assumption that “strangers” or “immigrants” are people who have been displaced from their country of origin for reasons such as famine or war. Yet the language of אֲזֵרָח has no place at all in the earlier legal tradition. Based on the distribution of its usage, it is evident that we are dealing here with a linguistic innovation of the Holiness school that seeks to establish the equity of immigrants and natives. Notwithstanding some variations in legal terminology, the view that there should be “one law” for natives and immigrants is almost identically expressed in Lev 24:22, Exod 12:49, and Num 15:15–16, 29. Gordon McConville puts the issue quite well, if slightly paradoxically: “the concept of אֲזֵרָח exists in the interests of elucidating the nature of Israel, precisely by pointing to the alien's integration.”<sup>33</sup>

In another study, I have outlined the reasons why the collective defense of the “native and immigrant” can be best understood as a critical response to the exclusivist interpretation of Deuteronomic law in the core materials

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32. Noted by Monroe, “Forging of National Identity,” 336, who nevertheless suggests that an altar on Mount Ebal would have been a quite likely feature of pre-Deuteronomistic tradition in the north, based on parallels with Moabite and Sabaeen texts.

33. Gordon McConville, “Fellow Citizens’: Israel and Humanity in Leviticus,” in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham* (ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller; LHBOTS 461; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 24. For the uses of אֲזֵרָח in Priestly traditions, see also Exod 12:19, 48; Lev 16:29; 17:15; 18:26; 19:33–34; 24:16; Num 9:14; 33:15.



of Ezra–Nehemiah.<sup>34</sup> It is not possible simply to transfer this same conclusion to the puzzling addition in Josh 8:30–35.<sup>35</sup> But whatever the historical explanation might be for having natives and immigrants shoulder to shoulder on Mount Ebal (half of them facing Mount Gerizim), listening to the recitation of Mosaic law, we can be reasonably sure that the “natives” of Josh 8:30–35 are seen by the narrator here as Yahwists. These Yahwists are bound in some sense to גרים, even if these immigrants are only to be “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” as the Gibeonites in 9:23 and 27 are described—apparently a fitting fate for those who masquerade as travelers from “distant” nations (cf. Deut 20:11 and 29:11).

That prescriptions for an altar and ceremony on Mount Ebal are incorporated within Deut 27:4–8 is suggestive. Christophe Nihan has persuasively argued that the audience of Josh 8:30–35 is to be located at a time during the Persian period, when northern tradition was being lent a renewed significance, not least by the temple at Gerizim.<sup>36</sup> In contrast with the narrowly Judean orientation of the late-seventh-century Deuteronomistic writings, Josh 8:30–35 can be understood together with Deut 27:4–8 and Josh 24 as a group of texts that lay claim to pan-Israelite origins and to a new national ideal that may overcome the division between the Judean and Samaritan peoples.

This is an attractive proposal, regardless of whether we accept the associated hypothesis of a Hexateuch that stretches its narrative arc from Gen 12 to Josh 24.<sup>37</sup> In the story world, Abram might be forgiven for

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34. Mark G. Brett, “Natives and Immigrants in the Social Imagination of the Holiness School,” in *Imagining the Other and Constructing Israelite Identity in the Early Second Temple Period* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana V. Edelman; London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

35. Rainer Albertz argues that the post-Priestly addition within 8:30–35 is found only in the specific phrase כָּנַר בְּאֶזְרָח. See Albertz, “The Canonical Alignment of the Book of Joshua,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 292–93. However, an addition to Joshua that “stands in contradiction to its original annihilation theology” (293) can hardly be reduced to a canonical “alignment.”

36. With a comprehensive review of the previous text-critical literature, see Christophe Nihan, “The Torah between Samaria and Judah: Shechem and Gerizim in Deuteronomy and Joshua,” in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 187–223.

37. See, e.g., Thomas Römer and Marc Brettler, “Deuteronomy 34 and the Case

building his altar at Shechem beside an oak tree (Gen 12:6–7, contra Deut 16:21), but Joshua has no such license when he writes his own “law of God” beside the Shechemite oak in Josh 24:25–27. The Mosaic imperative to avoid sacred trees is apparently set aside in laying claim to the Abram story. Joshua displays a full knowledge of the Genesis, Exodus, and conquest traditions in 24:1–14, apparently without the need to refer to the law of Moses (in contrast to Josh 8:30–35). Importantly, the choice offered to the people in Josh 24:15–22 makes it possible for non-Judeans to choose YHWH, and in this sense an exclusivist demand to worship YHWH still has an inclusive dimension. If there was a Hexateuch at some stage in the unfolding of Israelite tradition, with the promise of land in Genesis and the taking of land in Joshua *framing* the Moses story from Exodus to Deuteronomy, then this land would include Samaria. Even if Joshua’s “book of the torah of God” (24:26) was subsequently overtaken by a “book of the torah of Moses” (8:31), a Samaritan interest was peculiarly preserved within the acknowledgment of a Pentateuch in Josh 8:30–35.

#### CONSEQUENCES

Some versions of *Ideologiekritik* seem to presuppose that ideologies adhere to biblical texts, almost regardless of the social contexts within which these texts are conceived or reinterpreted. There is little allowance, on this essentialist model, for the fact that living traditions are ongoing *debates* about the norms and content of that tradition. As Jacob L. Wright has suggested, “The construction and contestation of memories is well attested in contexts where cultural-political expressions are not monopolized by a single power and where groups can readily challenge each other on issues posed by populations within their societies and on their borders.”<sup>38</sup> In this brief

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for a Persian Hexateuch,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 401–19; Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid, eds., *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). Albrecht argues that the post-Priestly additions to Joshua presume the authority of a Pentateuch, which rose to prominence at the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E., after the combined Judean and Samaritan communities had decided against a Hexateuch. See Albrecht, “Canonical Alignment,” 290, 300.

38. Quoted from Jacob L. Wright’s forthcoming book *A People in Arms: War Commemoration, Nation-Building, and the Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, by kind permission of the author. For the distinctive perspectives on Canaanites in Priestly and Holiness traditions, see, e.g., Jakob Wöhrle, *Fremdlinge im eigenen Land: Zur Ent-*

study of Joshua, I have tried to demonstrate the ironies at work in a single biblical book, which seems to exhibit at least three ancient versions of what we might today call nationalism. I am not convinced that any of these three versions of nationalism amounts to settler colonialism, although the earliest **הרם** traditions perhaps present a very localized permutation—so localized that the warring parties probably spoke dialects of the very same language.<sup>39</sup> The traditions of Joshua seem to be almost exclusively concerned with local disputes about sovereignty, and in this respect, the biblical hermeneutics of the nineteenth-century Maori leader Te Kooti were not distant from Deuteronomistic logic: he saw himself as empowered by Mosaic authority to drive out the imperial British, configuring Maori sovereignty as Israelite.<sup>40</sup>

The local kind of conflict reflected in the **הרם** tradition is very different from the much later colonial imaginaries. Notably, the global assertion of Christendom's jurisdiction in the papal decree *Inter Caetera* of 1493 established a global meridian running between the Arctic and Antarctic poles. The pope was apparently not involved in the details of the Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal, which a year later moved the meridian slightly to the west, but this was a political nuance that made little difference to the underlying theological assumption of the day, namely, that the church mediated the divine sovereignty of the Creator over the entire earth, and therefore Catholic monarchs could be regarded as divine viceroys wherever new worlds were “discovered.”

Protestant colonial initiatives were different again, on principle opposed to papal jurisdiction. Especially within Protestantism we find the virulent versions of nationalism based on biblical typologies, with extrem-

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*stehung und Intention der priesterlichen Passagen der Vätergeschichte* (FRLANT 246; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 215–22; Baruch J. Schwartz, “Reexamining the Fate of the ‘Canaanites’ in the Torah Traditions,” in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfield Jubilee Volume* (ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 151–70; Mark G. Brett, “Permutations of Sovereignty in the Priestly Tradition,” *VT* 63 (2013): 382–92.

39. On the distinctive features of settler colonialism, see especially James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

40. See Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs: A Life of the Nineteenth-Century Maori Leader Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 70–72, 115, 210, 219, 287, 502.

ist preachers configuring themselves as part of a new Israel pitted against new Canaanites.<sup>41</sup> But it is arguably the notion of “waste” land, open to the imposition of settler sovereignties, that did more historic damage as Protestant colonial competition unfolded—initially fueled with a religious rhetoric of providence, but soon secularized into a form of symbolic violence.<sup>42</sup> For us Australians, this symbolic violence is, as Pierre Bordieu puts it, “something you absorb like air, something you don’t feel pressured by; it is everywhere and nowhere.”<sup>43</sup> Our secular national imagination seems so much more civilized than the biblical **חרם**, but appearances can be deceiving.

As for our “readerly” question about settler sovereignties, provoked by Edward Said and Ann Curthoys, the outcomes are mixed. When Joshua pointed his javelin toward Ai, we can hardly claim that, millennia later, biblical *Wirkungsgeschichte* bore it halfway round the world to Sydney Cove. When the “doctrine of discovery” finally reached New South Wales, it was after a long and tortuous relay race, run by Christian princes and secular lawyers, each with their own interests at heart. But that is another and more complex story, which needs to be told by historians of colonization.

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41. Among many other works see Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

42. See the historical overview provided by Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 117–84.

43. Pierre Bordieu, “Doxa and Common Life: An Interview,” in Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 270.

# OCCUPY CENTRAL: SCRIBAL RESISTANCE IN DANIEL, THE LONG ROAD TO UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE\*

Philip P. Chia

## INTRODUCTION

Sixteen years down the road, in the battle for democracy since Hong Kong's return to China, church leaders in Hong Kong clashed publicly in 2013, arguing "for" and "against" the "Occupy Central (2014)" Movement,<sup>1</sup> a civil disobedience or a civil nonviolent resistance action, first initiated in

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\* It is my honor to dedicate this essay to Professor David J. A. Clines, who has taught me much in "commonsense" biblical interpretation over the years.

1. Under the heading, "Church Divided over Occupy Plan," *South China Morning Post*, April 20, 2013, Tony Cheung reported: "Local religious leaders have clashed over the Occupy Central movement in the battle for democracy, with one calling on Hong-kongers to join in even as another argued against it." "Occupy Central" is a movement that called for at least ten thousand Hong Kong citizens who would sign and covenant to carry out the plan to paralyze the Central District in Hong Kong by July 2014, unless there is a "true" and "genuine" universal suffrage delivered by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government as promised by the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) of the People's Republic of China, as an attempt to force an electoral reform for the election of its next chief executive in 2017. The Occupy Central plan has a four-step process: (1) July 2013: oath-taking days—solemn ceremonies for participants to declare their commitment to the plan; (2) early 2014: a deliberation day—ten thousand participants divide into groups to discuss and vote on ideas for political reform; (3) April/May 2014: citizens' authorization—a citywide civil referendum, or a by-election triggered by the resignation of a lawmaker; (4) July 2014: occupy Central—ten thousand participants block the roads in the Central District to pressure Beijing for democracy. Benny Tai explained that time and public participation are necessary if the plan is to be effective because the people of Hong Kong needed the *educational process* to understand the plan in order to participate in the campaign.

January 2013 by a law academic at the University of Hong Kong, Benny Tai Yiu-ting,<sup>2</sup> a professed Christian, who launched the campaign with an intention to paralyze the financial and administration district of Hong Kong, the Central District, in order to force the (central) government (of China) to fulfill its promise to implement “genuine” universal suffrage in the election of Hong Kong’s next chief executive in 2017.<sup>3</sup> The clash among church leaders was partly due to their differences in political ideology and partly due to differences in interpreting biblical teaching on nonviolence resistance, of which the book of Daniel was one of the often cited texts both “for” and “against” civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance social action. No doubt, theological affirmation, contextual interpretation, and right social action are inextricably intertwined.

Has an ancient biblical document anything to do with any contemporary social context? Is there any possibility to formulate a biblical faith informed by social action? Has the biblical book of Daniel anything to do with the current context of Hong Kong? Have the apocalyptic texts in the book of Daniel anything to do with civil nonviolent resistance action? Or to put the issue more broadly, what has the ancient biblical document and the discipline of biblical studies to do with contemporary public sociopolitical engagement? Prompted by these engaging questions, I probe in this essay into the relation between biblical texts and contemporary contexts, biblical studies and public engagement, engaging public issues of the day with biblical texts. I explore and elaborate on biblical studies and public engagement,

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2. Benny is joined by two others to form the three Occupy Central *maskilim* (“educated elites” or “wise teachers”) core organizers; they are a Baptist minister, Reverend Chu Yiu-Ming, and sociology professor Chan Kin-man, director for the Centre of Civil Society Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Benny has taught constitutional law for more than twenty years; he recently published an article, “Public Theology, Justice and Law: A Preliminary Note,” *CGST [China Graduate School of Theology] Journal* 54 (2013): 73–95, citing various biblical passages to support his motto of “achieving justice via the rule of law.”

3. The current HKSAR chief executive was elected by 689 votes among 1,200 legitimate eligible elite voters in 2012. In response to the Occupy Central Movement, the chairman of the Law Committee under the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, Mr. Qiao Xiaoyang, stated that the chief executive would be elected by universal suffrage in 2017 but that the candidates must love China and love Hong Kong, and must not confront Beijing. Such conditions functioning as screening mechanisms for Beijing to endorse eligible chief executive candidates is considered “non-genuine” and not “true” universal suffrage.

with the book of Daniel—its bilingual characteristic and scribal resistance on the one hand, and civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance, and the Occupy Central campaign in Hong Kong on the other hand—as a case of contextual and ideological reading, engaging the biblical text with the current situation of Hong Kong and the greater China region.

#### BIBLICAL STUDIES AND SOCIOPOLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

In his recent book *Political Engagement as Biblical Mandate*, Paul D. Hanson attempts to answer the question, “what light does the Bible shed on life in our nation and world today?” and states that “religiously informed thought has played and can continue to play a constructive role in the public forum over domestic and international issues that are weighted with moral content.”<sup>4</sup> However, he laments that

many people of faith live in a world that is confined to their particular congregation, denomination, or locality. Charity is directed to the immediate neighbor and the spiritual family is coterminous with one’s own parish, whereas references to Darfur, Somalia, and Pakistan register with the hollow sound of far away places. Such are the fruits of a spirituality that has become increasingly individualistic, of an ecclesiology excluding any concept of the individual congregation being part of a worldwide network, of salvation construed as a gift of eternal life given exclusively to those adopting a particular set of beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

He has clearly changed his approach to biblical studies:<sup>6</sup> he formerly characterized Jewish apocalyptic as apolitical and held that visions are detached from reality.<sup>7</sup> Such change was due to his recent experience with some reality, as he testifies,

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4. Paul D. Hanson, *Political Engagement as Biblical Mandate* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2010), viii, vii.

5. *Ibid.*, 1.

6. He explains: “In terms of my personal scholarship, it can be viewed as a ‘trial balloon’ sent out into the open skies of the public square in hope for constructive criticism and lively debate” (*ibid.*, viii).

7. Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). His views did not change in the revised edition, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979). Note the strong contrast with Richard Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); and Anthea E. Portier-Young,

Three times in the last several years, my own “innocent” eyes have been opened thanks to invitations to lecture in South Africa, the Philippines, and India. In each case, what modest scholarly contribution I could offer was repaid many times over by lessons taught by courageous women and men who in their struggles for justice and acts of compassion have demonstrated to the world the profound relevancy of the Bible for contemporary political policy and action.<sup>8</sup>

Living within the global reality of Asia as a biblical scholar, the everyday challenge to me has been the public relevance of the ancient biblical documents to my sociopolitical economic context. I have argued previously for a “public turn” in biblical studies, so as to engage contemporary reality with the relevancy of the biblical text.<sup>9</sup> In light of the current volatile context of Hong Kong, I have chosen to engage with the apocalyptic text of Daniel in the light of recent Daniel studies, focusing on the book’s “rewriting” nature, its bilingual characteristic, its scribal resistance, and its relevancy to the contemporary context of Hong Kong.

#### DANIEL AS A WRITING CONSTRUCTED UPON OTHER WRITINGS

The book of Daniel consists of six heroic court stories (Dan 1–6) and four “historical apocalypse” visions (Dan 7–12). In chapters 1–6 the author(s) reconstructed the text with a representation of legendary stories of various traditions engaging the figure of Daniel as the superhero, and claiming superiority in all wisdom and various professional skills for the Hebrew lads within a foreign court. In chapters 7–12, however, Daniel speaks in the first person (though introduced by a third person narrator), employing

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*Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

8. *Political Engagement*, 2.

9. I have elsewhere proposed a “public turn” in biblical interpretation: “Biblical Studies and Public Relevance: Hermeneutical and Pedagogical Consideration in Light of the Ethos of the Greater China Region (GCR),” in *Transforming Graduate Biblical Education: Ethos and Discipline* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Kent Harold Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 93–107; “After Crossing: The Relevance of Public Culture to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Essays in Honour of Professor Archie Lee* (ed. L. K. Lo; Hong Kong: Chung Chi Divinity School, 2010), 212–24; “Biblical Studies in a Rising Asia: An Asian Perspective on the Future of the Biblical Past,” in *The Future of the Biblical Past* (ed. Roland Boer and Fernando Segovia; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 81–95.



rich apocalyptic imagination in the four visions of “historical apocalypse” to counter the hegemony of empire discourse.<sup>10</sup>

On the “rewrite and reuse” hermeneutical nature of the book of Daniel, Paul Ricoeur comments, “the book as a whole presents itself as a writing constructed upon other writings. On the one hand, the *midrash* of Daniel A [i.e., chs. 1–6] develops and expands upon texts well known to the original reader. On the other hand, as regards the apocalypse properly speaking, it, too, assumes that the reader knows the prophetic writings which it ‘reuses’ ... and which ... it replaces by a transhistoric speculation based upon contemporary events.”<sup>11</sup> He further elaborates: “We are invited to imagine a writer of the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes hidden behind a fictional author. The paradox is that the real author is never more than presumed obliquely across the fictional author of a real text.”<sup>12</sup> Then, “The [real] author proceeds to a fictional transference of his heroes into another time in order to express the spirit of resistance to the present persecution, that of Antiochus Epiphanes. In so doing, the author constitutes the past as the model for his own time.”<sup>13</sup>

On the scribal resistance technique of “reuse of the reuse” and “writing constructed upon other writings” in Daniel, it is not surprising that such are common tactics of scribal resistance throughout the ages. It also occurs in modern-day Hong Kong and mainland China, where the reuse of ancient legendary tales was intentional and a means of political counterdiscourse, even to the extent of mockery of the governing power.<sup>14</sup> One recent example would be the Chinese feature film, *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (2013), whereby the “apocalyptic” story draws heavily from one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature, *Journey to the West*, written in the sixteenth century during the Ming Dynasty, widely known as *The Monkey King* in the English-speaking world. The “reuse” and “rewrite” of this classic text in the feature film achieved a wide promulgation of the theme of “good” (Buddha/human kindness) and

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10. See Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 9–23, 223–79; Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*.

11. Paul Ricoeur, “Foreword,” in André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (trans. David Pellauer; London: SPCK, 1979), xvii.

12. *Ibid.*, xviii.

13. *Ibid.*, xxi–xxii.

14. The Chinese feature movie *Let the Bullets Fly* (2010) is an example of how a blacklisted topic can find its way into cinema as suitable for viewing.

“evil” (demons/oppressors), reflecting the current volatile social contexts in Hong Kong and China. Without such a “rewriting” or “reusing” strategy, any social idea could easily be deemed as offending to the authoritarian government and suffer censorship. This “rewriting” tactic is widely popular also among netizens, who termed it “re-creation” or “derivative work.” The inspiration from Daniel’s “reuse” and “re-creation” tactic as scribal resistance would triumph over conventional authoritarian censorship of all kinds, especially under the hegemonic power of the Seleucid Empire, with an intention to promote hope in resistance.

#### BILINGUAL TEXT AS TECHNIQUE OF SCRIBAL RESISTANCE

One of the other unique characteristics of the book of Daniel is its employment of bilingual text, switching between Hebrew and Aramaic: 1:1–2:3a in Hebrew; 2:3b–7:28 in Aramaic; and 8:1–12:13 in Hebrew.

Aramaic was a world language of commerce and diplomacy in the ancient Near East. “Hebrew is tremendously significant for its biblical association, but Aramaic was of even a greater significance as a cultural medium in the ancient Near East.”<sup>15</sup> As the Aramaic language covered a huge territory of the ancient world and had a wide spectrum of dialects, Zdravko Stefanovic asserts, “Aramaic was not definitely tied to any single national or ethnic group.”<sup>16</sup> The employment of bilingual texts and reuse of tales of fictional heroes are examples of the scribal resistance skills of Daniel’s *maskilim*, “educated elites,” with a political strategy. Thus “[t]he fictional setting of that book in the Babylonian and Persian periods allows Aramaic to function within Daniel as a language of empire that gestures to the people’s complex colonial history and identity.”<sup>17</sup> The switching between Hebrew and Aramaic<sup>18</sup> signifies a certain ethnic-reli-

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15. Raymond A. Bowman, “Arameans, Aramaic, and the Bible,” *JNES* 7 (1948): 65–66.

16. Zdravko Stefanovic, *The Aramaic of Daniel in the Light of Old Aramaic* (JSOT-Sup 129; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 11.

17. Anatheia E. Portier-Young, “Languages of Identity and Obligation: Daniel as Bilingual Book,” *VT* 60 (2010): 107 n. 45.

18. See John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 2–3. He also points out, “The Qumran fragments attest the same combination of Hebrew and Aramaic as the MT. The shift from Hebrew to Aramaic at 2:4b is attested in 1QDan<sup>a</sup>. The shift from Aramaic to Hebrew is attested in 4QDan<sup>a</sup> and 4QDan<sup>b</sup>. The Hebrew prayer in Daniel 9 is attested in the fragmentary

gious-political strategic rendering for the purpose of the text as it was composed and edited.

Anathea Portier-Young, drawing from developments in the field of sociolinguistics on bilingualism and language choice, rightly argues about “the effects that the *sequence* of language choices is meant to create for Daniel’s *audience*. This sequence itself constructs an alternate world, creates a new identity, and makes new claims upon Daniel’s reader.” She continues in a footnote: “I believe the author(s)/redactor(s) of Daniel *intended* these effects, i.e., they result from a deliberate rhetorical strategy that aims to create a new discursive world for the reader through which a set of claims about reality, identity, and right action are counterposed to imperial claims to absolute power.”<sup>19</sup> To act as counterdiscourse resistance to the Seleucid Empire of Antiochus, “the second century BCE author(s) of the book of Daniel deliberately began their discourse in Hebrew, switched to Aramaic, and concluded in Hebrew in order to project a particular construction of the world, invite the reader to adopt a particular identity and position within that world, and establish a set of rights and obligations counter to those of the Seleucid empire.”<sup>20</sup>

Portier-Young further argues forcefully and convincingly for this bilingual strategy of Daniel, as she summarizes succinctly:

Sociolinguistic theory illuminates the way multilingual speakers and writers alternate between languages to create and signal a new context. The writers of Daniel begin the book in Hebrew, evoking the history and traditions of Israel, the particularity of Judean identity, and the rights and obligations of covenant with the Lord. The shift to Aramaic in Daniel 2:3b highlights another social context and contract, a world of royal patronage that carries its own rights and obligations and makes competing claims on the identity and allegiance of Judeans. Yet with his edict and program of terror Antiochus IV would forfeit all claims to authority. With this situation in view, the vision of judgment in Daniel 7 heralds a decisive shift, using a language of empire to refute its claims and announce its end. The writers return to Hebrew in chapters 8–12, crafting from the language of Israel’s Torah an apocalyptic language that frames identity solely within the covenant relationship between God and

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4QDan<sup>c</sup>, but the text of chap. 3 in 1QDan<sup>a</sup> did not contain the prayers that are found in the versions (this is also true of 4QDan<sup>d</sup>).”

19. Portier-Young, “Languages of Identity and Obligation,” 103–4 and n. 27.

20. Ibid., 107.

God's people. They invite those who have collaborated with the empire to perceive its true form and reject the false world it projected. They call the audience to find their place instead within the world of the visions, forsaking a stance of collaboration with the Seleucid empire in order to adopt a posture of resistance rooted in covenant and shaped by their new apocalyptic vision.<sup>21</sup>

This conception also finds support in Jin Hee Han's analysis: "The book of Daniel proceeds to conceptualize a linguistic system in order to shed light on a full array of characteristics of an instrument that would help to drive a wedge between the world it describes and the world it deconstructs. Apocalyptic language, thus born and raised, is ready to produce a radically revised perspective on reality."<sup>22</sup>

In which way has the use of bilingual text as strategic scribal resistance in Daniel inspired and informed the current context in Hong Kong and China? Hongkongers have enjoyed relative freedom of speech more than their neighbors in mainland China, and there has been a certain degree of tolerance practiced by the Hong Kong legal authorities, at least for the moment. Some are still daily and publicly speaking openly and challenging the authority of Communist China in the Legislative Council meetings in Hong Kong, though the days of such freedom may be numbered, due to the increasing domination by the pro-Beijing legislative councilors. Thus counterdiscourse is being voiced from various indigenous groups, in different dialects, protesting the limitation of freedom and challenging the authority for democratic governance.

In response to social unrest, media policing and censorship have been intensified by the authorities. Due to certain words, phrases, and terms being blacklisted by the authorities, new linguistic tactics have appeared in the wider public and among netizens. One of the most common terms of communist ideology is "harmonious society," being the key ideological concept of the previous administration under Hu Jintao, the former general secretary of the Communist Party of China. With the play on words working on similar phonetic sound, any silencing or oppressing "works" by the authority are termed being "river crab," which carries the same phonetic sound as "harmony" but with a meaning similar to being

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21. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 228.

22. Jin Hee Han, *Daniel's Spiel: Apocalyptic Literacy in the Book of Daniel* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008), 98.

“neutralized” or “compromised.” Perhaps also due to the difference in spoken language between Hong Kong and mainland China (Hong Kong uses Cantonese and the mainland uses Mandarin or Putonghua), many issues, events, or policies have been “re-created” linguistically in recent years as counterpolitical language and discourse resistance.

In everyday life, frustration and anger from oppressions of all kinds have given rise to a demand for “cursing” and “vulgar” languages, especially those addressing the ruling power and official authority. Immediate censorship has been applied to all public media in an attempt to curb such widespread promulgation of linguistic profanation. Such social volatility has given rise to many “derivative works,” among them the “re-creation” of China’s so-called Ten Great Mythical Animals, which is only to be understood as strongly profane or coarse language, all played into the phonetic equivalent of some foreign words. They are more than just “net” language. They are the linguistic expression of frustration in everyday life and a common form of resistance.

The frustration is also tempered with cross-cultural exchange in everyday life between Hong Kong and mainland China, as seen in cross-border trading, where Hongkongers feel threatened by the buying power and unique “characters” of the shoppers, as in many other parts of the world. The feature film *Vulgaria* (2012), a low-cost production that ranked second in the 2012 Hong Kong movie industry, says it all. A key figure in the film is an animal “donkey,” which shares a phonetic sound with the word “slave” in Chinese (both Cantonese and Putonghua). Sarcastically, the “donkey” is the sex partner of a thug leader who is a film investor in the movie, dramatically demanding the producer to have sex with his donkey “lover.” The movie portrays the “enslavement” of decent professions or common people in everyday life who meet with capitalistic, inhuman, thuglike, uncivilized power. It so happened that the first Critic’s Prize winner (Feb. 25, 2013), organized by the Hong Kong Art Development Council, was won by a Beijing writer, whose award-winning essay strongly criticizes this *Vulgaria* movie. This award immediately sparked a “net war” between the Hong Kong locals and pro-Beijing voices. The volatility in Hong Kong society demonstrated the presence of a mixed cultural and capitalistic hegemony that seeks political domination, which in return, confronted by a strong protectionist “localism,” demonstrates that a clear case of resistance to cultural and linguistic hegemony is at play.

## NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE IN DANIEL

There is little doubt in modern reading that Daniel is a book of resistance. "Read 'in the shadows of empire,' Daniel becomes a revolutionary book of resistance, albeit nonviolent resistance," comments Daniel L. Smith-Christopher.<sup>23</sup> Danna Nolan Fewell suggests, "The book of Daniel may be the Bible's foremost book of resistance against political domination."<sup>24</sup> And Portier-Young states forcefully, "No book of the Hebrew Bible so plainly engages and opposes the project of empire as Daniel."<sup>25</sup> Richard Horsley, however, makes a broader assertion, "Our examination of the contents and principal concerns of the Second Temple Judean texts customarily classified as 'apocalyptic' indicates that they are all responses to imperial rule." Further, he argues that "no Second Temple Judean text classified as 'apocalyptic' has survived that does *not* focus on imperial rule and the opposition to it, thus, suggest that their composition is closely related to the experience of that rule."<sup>26</sup>

Given the resistance nature of Daniel, under the persecution of Antiochus, written by *maskilim*,<sup>27</sup> a group of educated elite, such scribal action could rightly be understood as scribal resistance of nonviolent action. However, what can wise scribes do in face of the tyranny of the Seleucid Empire, except write? When compared to armed soldiers, scribes are normally physically weak persons, "they could not even kill a chicken," as

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23. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "The Book of Daniel," *NIB* 7:32–33.

24. Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 117. Cf. idem, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).

25. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 223.

26. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 3, 193.

27. There is a general consensus that *maskilim*, wise teachers, wise instructors, educated elites, are the author(s) of Daniel. For example, Philip Davies ("The Scribal School of Daniel," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* [ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint; 2 vols.; VTSup 83.1–2; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 1:255–57) is convinced that these *maskilim* "were a class of educated elite, who belonged to the class of professional scribes employed in the administration of political affairs." Cf. also Han, *Daniel's Spiel*, 75–80; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*; C. L. Seow, *Daniel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003). Ricoeur, however, thought that it was the *hāsīdīm* ("Hassidim or Asideans") who could be a more aggressive active resistance force, whereas the *maskilim* are more nonactive, involved in passive resistance movement ("Foreword," xvii–xxvi).

the Chinese saying goes; that “scribal revolt won’t make it to action given its ten-year span.” D. S. Russell, however, believes it otherwise, as his title indicates: *Daniel: An Active Volcano*.<sup>28</sup> He exclaims that “Daniel is indeed ‘molten lava,’ devastating in its judgment of evil and destructive of tyranny and oppression.”<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur, on the other hand, concurs with Lacocque, who considers the author(s) of Daniel passive resisters: “The attitude recommended by Daniel is in no way armed struggle, but expectation (12.12), patience even unto death if necessary: God reserves the resurrection for martyrs. ... The author awaits the destruction of the oppressor solely by a miracle; the tyrant will perish and the kingdom of the saints will be established, without the intervention of any human hand (2.44–5; 8.25).”<sup>30</sup>

In the analysis of resistance in four apocalypse writings, Portier-Young asserts that there are both active resistance as in armed “revolt” and passive resistance as in martyrdom, nonviolent or civil resistance, all presented in apocalyptic texts.<sup>31</sup> It is difficult, however, to define “resistance” due to the shifting nature of the concept. Thus it is a danger to try and derive “absolute and unchanging definitions.”<sup>32</sup>

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28. David S. Russell (*Daniel: An Active Volcano* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989], 10) has a touching comment on the need for contextual interpretation of Daniel: “it will not suffice to interpret the Old Testament in general, or the Book of Daniel in particular, simply after the manner of, say, the early Church which was of necessity conditioned by its own culture and history and reflected contemporary exegetical traditions, or after the manner of, say, the Reformers who, against their particular historical and religious background, were wont to see in the Old Testament an all-important quarry from which to dig the pure gold of Christian doctrine. It is not to judge either the early Church or the Reformers to say that every age, including our own, must seek to rediscover biblical truth for itself and try to see the meaning of that revelation in terms of the contemporary scene. ‘Until the text of the Bible has been shown to be relevant and potent in the immediate social and personal consensus of contemporary life, it has not become the word of God, however faithful the textual exegesis.’”

29. Ibid., 7.

30. Ricoeur, “Foreword,” xxiv; Lacocque, *Book of Daniel*, 11, quoting Adolphe Lods, *Histoire de la littérature hébraïque et juive* (Paris: Payot, 1950), 846.

31. Cf. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, xiv, 10–11, 219.

32. Daniel Miller, Michael Rowlands, and Christopher Tilley, “Introduction,” in *Domination and Resistance* (ed. Daniel Miller, Michael Rowlands, and Chris Tilley; London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3. Cf. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 10–11.

Rather than suggesting a definition that will be universally valid, Portier-Young provides three useful points to conceptualize the understanding of resistance:

1. Domination, its strategies, and the hegemony that reinforces it provide the conditions for and objects of resistance. 2. Acts of resistance proceed from the intention to limit, oppose, reject, or transform hegemonic institutions (and cosmologies...) as well as systems, strategies, and acts of domination. 3. Resistance is effective action. It limits power and influences outcomes, where power is understood as an agent's ability to carry out his or her will.<sup>33</sup>

She further argues:

Indeed, articulating and promulgating counterdiscourse are primary forms of resistance to hegemony. The teaching function of Daniel's *maškilim*, or "wise teachers," ... presents a key example of resistant counterdiscourse. ... In each case articulating and promulgating resistant discourse accompanies other forms of resistance, including embodied practices such as fasting (Daniel), prayer (Daniel, Book of Dreams), fighting (Book of Dreams), or the acceptance of martyrdom (Daniel). Like the counterdiscourses they accompany, these embodied practices testify to the radical relocation of power from earth to heaven and from empire, king, and army to God, angels, one like a human being, and God's people (e.g., the people of the holy ones of the most high in Daniel).<sup>34</sup>

There are various forms of scribal counterdiscourse resistance demonstrated in apocalyptic texts. "One form of counterdiscourse answers myth with myth, ... as in the Book of the Watchers, the Book of Dreams, or Daniel 7. ... another form turns to history as a means of revealing the contingency of present realities, as in the historical reviews of Daniel. ... Even the syntax of Daniel's apocalyptic visions destabilizes the very logic and coherence of a social reality some believed to be structured and governed by the empire."<sup>35</sup>

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33. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 11.

34. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

35. *Ibid.*, 13. See 14 n. 44: "Horsley asserts that 'a principal reason that Galileans and Judeans proved so persistent in rebellion against Roman imperial rule was the prominence of resistance to oppressive alien rule in Israelite tradition.'" Quotation from Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World*



In understanding the scribal resistance strategy in Daniel as demonstrated by Portier-Young, I shall turn to Gene Sharp for further definition and understanding of nonviolent resistance, so as to integrate Daniel's *maskilim* resistance, the modern understanding of nonviolent resistance, and the current Occupy Central civil disobedience action. Sharp's basic definition of nonviolent action is: a variety of "specific methods of protest, noncooperation and intervention, in all of which the actionists conduct the conflict by doing—or refusing to do—certain things without using physical violence. As a technique, therefore, nonviolent action is not passive. It is *not* inaction. It is *action* that is nonviolent."<sup>36</sup> Sharp understands the effect of civil disobedience social action as, "When people refuse their cooperation, withhold their help, and persist in their disobedience and defiance, they are denying their opponent the basic human assistance and cooperation which any government or hierarchical system requires. If they do this in sufficient numbers for long enough, that government or hierarchical system will no longer have power. This is the basic political assumption of nonviolent action."<sup>37</sup> This seems to be the strategy of the Occupy Central movement.

David Leiter perceived vividly the idea of nonviolent resistance: "Those that recount conflict resolution are not passive in nature but portray some type of action as an alternative to violence. It is 'action that is nonviolent,' not inaction."<sup>38</sup> He goes further to elaborate the action and effect of nonviolent resistance in his study of various passages in the Old Testament:

civil disobedience describe acts of defiance. In most cases, such acts run counter to the legal system and are seen by the powers that be as illegal actions ... [and] acts of civil disobedience were committed by people in positions of little power. Instead of using considerable power to bring about peaceful means through nonviolence, they used what little power

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*Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 37. For a sustained exploration of resistance to empire in Israel's traditions, see the essays in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

36. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), 64.

37. *Ibid.*

38. David A. Leiter, *Neglected Voices: Peace in the Old Testament* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 2007), 34, citing Gene Sharp's concept of nonviolent action.

they had to stand up against oppressive authorities and challenge such authorities by refusing to obey and committing illegal acts.<sup>39</sup>

These modern understandings of civil disobedience nonviolent action remind us of the situation of Jews under the persecution of Antiochus. Will there be some kind of resistance theology generated from the studying of biblical passages on civil disobedience nonviolent action or conflict resolution? Portier-Young concludes her study of apocalypse resistance as follows:

During the persecution, competing demands for absolute loyalty rested on competing claims to absolute power and competing visions and constructions of reality. The apocalyptic worldview envisioned a radical relocation of power and in this way redefined the possible and the real, thus clarifying the context for action and empowering the work of resistance. ... In our sources we find not one apocalyptic theology of resistance (nor can we posit one, unitary "apocalyptic theology" as such), but multiple theologies of resistance.<sup>40</sup>

"Scribal resistance" as *maskilim* resistance demonstrated in Daniel may be transformed and understood in modern terms as civil disobedience by public intellectuals, such as that of the Occupy Central movement. Although Occupy Wall Street has ended in uncertain effects, Occupy Central, as a new form of civil resistance in Hong Kong that has emerged since January 2013, considers it a means of last resort to force a reform in the election of the chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), via a so-called genuine universal suffrage for the Hong Kong people. In his study on apocalyptic literatures, Richard Horsley observes that "resistance by people who are enlightened, or 'instructors,' is the turning point of the stories. It has long been suspected that the attention given to these stalwart resisters constitutes the footprints of those who composed these texts."<sup>41</sup> The result of the Occupy Central movement initiated by the law professor still awaits its outcome in 2014, pending to the

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39. Leiter, *Neglected Voices*, 34–50. Passages studied include, under Peaceful Acts of Conflict Resolution: Gen 26:12–33; 2 Kgs 6:8–23; Isa 42:1–4; under Civil Disobedience: Exod 1:15–22; Dan 3.

40. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 4.

41. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 3.

success of its “public instructing” effect as its plan suggested. Daniel certainly encouraged such nonviolent action for the cause of justice.

### POSTCOLONIAL COMMUNIST HONG KONG

Since its return to be part of the administrative region of Communist China from being a colony of the British Empire, Hong Kong has suffered a liminal identity, with its people holding both a British National (Overseas) passport and a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport, a hybrid international identity. Its common spoken language is Cantonese, while in mainland China most governmental officials use Putonghua. It has its own currency, foreign reserve, and a Basic Law to govern itself, though the NPCSC of the People’s Republic of China has the final say on the interpretation of its law, despite a final court of appeal installed in its legal system provided for by the Basic Law. The rule of law has often been challenged by the administration, headed by the chief executive officer, who is elected by only a handful of qualified elites. Thus the government’s public policies often lack the necessary checks and balances that define the system of a democratic society, which would help the city to grow into a healthy part of the nation. Genuine universal suffrage is a necessity if Hong Kong is to be prevented from becoming a city modeled after its neighboring cities in the north, where “trust” is the most demanding commodity of the common people from their government officials.

### CONCLUSION

The book of Daniel has inspired scribal resistance throughout ages—since the time of its original context under the persecution of Antiochus—and likewise inspires our contemporary contexts today. I cannot help but instinctively project these ideas onto the postcolonial Communist Hong Kong’s volatile context when reading Portier-Young’s succinct summary of the persecuted state of the Jews under Antiochus and characteristics of scribal resistance:

In 167 BCE the king Antiochus IV Epiphanes issued an edict that sought to annul the ancestral laws of Judea, proscribing traditional Jewish religion and mandating new religious practice in its place. According to 2 Maccabees, 22,000 Seleucid troops already occupied the city of Jerusalem, and had already massacred and enslaved thousands among its

population. Now they would kill any who did not comply with the king's edict. Many Judeans did comply with Antiochus's program of terror. In so doing they saved their lives and the lives of their families. Others resisted. They resisted by remaining faithful to the law of Moses, circumcising their children, reading the scrolls, and refusing to eat pork or sacrifice to other gods. They resisted by preaching and teaching, praying, fasting, and dying. These first martyrs of the Jewish faith have inspired generations of Jews and Christians who have told and retold (and relived) their stories of courage and faithfulness. Others resisted with arms, fighting in self-defense and to reclaim their temple and city, ultimately expelling the occupying Seleucid troops from Judea. They succeeded in establishing Judea as a semi-independent nation-state after over four hundred years of colonial rule.<sup>42</sup>

State-led massacres have occurred far more commonly on nearly every continent, according to Barbara Harff's study of genocide and political mass murder from 1955 to 2001.<sup>43</sup> Rudolph Joseph Rummel, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Hawaii, coined the term *democide* for murder by government (cf. *genocide*): "There were 262 million people murdered by their own government in the last century; six times as many people died of democide during the 20th century than in all that century's wars combined."<sup>44</sup> He further argues that "democracy is the form of government least likely to kill its citizens and that democracies do not wage war against each other."<sup>45</sup>

I would like to conclude the essay with the following quote:

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42. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, xxi.

43. Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 57–73.

44. Cf. Rummel's webpage, n.p. Online: <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/20TH.HTM>. On the same page, he further writes: "Just to give perspective on this incredible murder by government, if all these bodies were laid head to toe, with the average height being 5', then they would circle the earth ten times. Also, this democide murdered 6 times more people than died in combat in all the foreign and internal wars of the century. Finally, given popular estimates of the dead in a major nuclear war, this total democide is as though such a war did occur, but with its dead spread over a century." See also his conclusions at <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/PK.CHAP1.HTM>.

45. Rudolph Rummel. Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolph\\_Rummel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolph_Rummel).

In order to prevent the recurrence of similar tragedies like Tiananmen Square in Mainland China, Hong Kong or any part of the world, implementing universal suffrage then becomes a must.

If we do not have genuine universal suffrage in Mainland China or Hong Kong, they simply lack a crucial institution to defend a fundamental human right (right to survive), and against the most brutal form of crime against humanity.<sup>46</sup>

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46. Sing Ming, "Is the Remembrance of June 4 Really Relevant to Hong Kong People?" *Apple Daily*, June 4, 2013, referring to the annual remembering activity at the Victory Park in Hong Kong, of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre. He states, "The remembrance should also keep reminding us [of] the utmost importance of building universal suffrage in Hong Kong, Mainland China and everywhere in the world for defending the humanity against the most brutal crime in the world." Online: <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20130604/18283314>.



## VOICE AND IDEOLOGY IN ECCLESIASTES: READING “CROSS THE GRAINS”<sup>1</sup>

Barbara M. Leung Lai

### 1. POINT OF DEPARTURE: TEXT, IDEOLOGY, AND READER

Two notions, rooted in the rubrics of biblical interpretation in general and reading strategy in particular, form the conceptual framework and specific directives for this endeavor. First, the biblical text is an ideological production. This not only means that all texts have ideology, but that interpreters also read the text from their respective ideological formations.<sup>2</sup> The ideologies of the ancient community of Israel ingrained in the Hebrew Bible are “historically and culturally far removed from the ideologies of our own

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1. I have picked up Carol A. Newsom’s “plywood” analogy here but with a more focused appropriation. When “cross-graining” is applied to the production of plywood through gluing together layers (veneers) of adjacent plies having their wood grain at right angles to each other, a high-quality, high-strength wood panel is formed. Specifically, plywood is bonded with grains running against one another and perpendicular to the grain direction; it is very strong and hard to bend. Plywood was invented around 3400 B.C.E. by the ancient Mesopotamians. Modern plywood was invented by Emmanuel Nobel, who realized that several thin layers of wood bonded together would be stronger than one single thick layer of wood. I have found this “cross-graining” imagery quite fitting to a reading strategy that incorporates both conventional “against the grain” and “with the grain” and moving into a potential multilayered, richer reading by “cross-graining.” See Carol A. Newsom, “Reflections on Ideological Criticism and Postcritical Perspectives,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 553–57.

2. Let it be political, confessional, religious, or established through one’s “Text-of-Life.” See David J. A. Clines, *The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), ch. 1.

days.”<sup>3</sup> Engaging in ideological critical reading is, in essence, the merging of the two horizons—the horizon of the ancient text and that of the contemporary reader. The outcome will either be the clashing of the two ideologies, or a reshaped interpretation through negotiating with (sometimes) conflicting hermeneutical choices.

This situation is well exemplified in Athalya Brenner’s remark in the series editor’s preface of *The Meanings We Choose: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations*.<sup>4</sup> In an age of methodological pluralism, perspectival readings abound; and, as a result, indeterminacy and conflicts in interpretation are common. Reading texts with embedded ideologies different from our own and coming out with one’s chosen interpretation has been, in essence, the result of ideological-critical endeavors. David J. A. Clines further articulates the dynamics of this process by noting that writers and readers alike are highly motivated parties. They are not disinterested bystanders but advocates of their own ideology as they interact with the texts.<sup>5</sup> The enticing “I”-voice of Qoheleth that calls for the engaged reader’s encounter with his discourse gives witness to this dynamic, which is expected to be at work in reading Ecclesiastes.<sup>6</sup>

Second, employing the imagery of woodworking (i.e., just like wood, text has grain/directionality), Carol A. Newsom underscored in her statement that reading self-consciously “against the grain” of the biblical text is a distinctive feature of all ideological-critical engagements.<sup>7</sup> While reading “with the grain” seems to find little place among practitioners of ideological criticism in the postmodern interpretive situation, reading Ecclesiastes demands a strategy tailored to possess a certain degree of intentionality.<sup>8</sup>

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3. Ibid., 19.

4. Charles H. Cosgrove, ed., *The Meanings We Choose: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations* (JSOTSup 411; Bible in the Twenty-First Century Series 5; London: T&T Clark, 2004). Brenner commented that, in essence, all articles in the two-part volume (Part I: Reflections on Indeterminacy and Hermeneutical Judgment; Part II: Case Studies in Indeterminacy and Hermeneutical Judgment) can be compartmentalized as “ideological criticism” (ix).

5. Clines, *Interested Parties*, 24.

6. Throughout the article, I use *Qoheleth* for the “preacher/speaking voice” and *Ecclesiastes* to refer to the book.

7. Newsom employs the same imagery of woodworking in the beginning and challenging conclusion of her reflective review. See Newsom, “Reflections on Ideological Criticism,” 541, 553–57.

8. An array of intentional approaches emerges in the recent past. See, e.g.,



## 2. TOWARD A READING STRATEGY

With respect to the interconnectedness of text, implied author, and reader, at least two levels of ideological critique are at work in reading Ecclesiastes. First, Qoheleth is interacting “against the grain” with a different set of ideologies embedded in traditional Israelite wisdom (his “pretext”). Second, Qoheleth is inviting all readers (his first audience and contemporary readers), from their/our different ideological locations to respond to his discourse “with the grain” through his compelling “I”-voice.<sup>9</sup> This involves consideration of the roles of both the narrator (1:1–11; 7:27)<sup>10</sup> and the epilogist (12:8–14).<sup>11</sup> There are subsequently three potential ideologies represented in this kind of reading: (1) the *text’s* ideology to which Qoheleth is responding by reflecting “against the grain” represents the ancient Israelite wisdom; (2) the *multilayered* ideology upheld by Qoheleth and rooted in his community’s collective lived experience that he defends through his reflective “I”-voice; and (3) the *reshaped* ideology proposed by the narrator and especially by the epilogist in 12:8–14.

While *Qoheleth’s* ideology clashes with the ideology ingrained in traditional wisdom, readers are left with three interpretive choices: (1) being drawn to the affirmation of Qoheleth’s ideology—the absurdity of life overarching the “order of things”;<sup>12</sup> (2) adopting the reshaped ideology proposed by the epilogist, reaffirming the reality of the two-way doctrine, or one that is cause-effect (12:13–14; cf. Deut 11:26–28); or (3) bringing

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Timothy Walton, “Reading Qohelet as Text, Author, and Reader,” in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation: Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. W. Th. van Peursen and J. W. Dyk; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 113–31; Andrew G. Shead, “Reading Ecclesiastes ‘Epilogically,’” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 67–91; Gary Salyer, “Vain Rhetoric: Implied Author/Narrator/Narratee/Implied Reader Relationships in Ecclesiastes Use of First-Person Discourse” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997); and more recently Kyle R. Greenwood, “Debating Wisdom: The Role of Voice in Ecclesiastes,” *CBQ* 74 (2012): 476–91.

9. This could be considered as a unique example in the Hebrew Bible.

10. For a detailed analysis of the narrative structure of Ecclesiastes, esp. the “frame narrator” in 1:1–2, 7:27, and 12:8–14, see Eric S. Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup 280; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 45–50.

11. See esp. Shead, “Reading Ecclesiastes ‘Epilogically,’” 86–91.

12. The same dynamics and alternatives have been spelled out in Walton, “Reading Qohelet,” 130.

into the text another *readerly* ideology (through embracing, rejecting, or reshaping Qoheleth's and the epilogist's explanations and resolutions), by putting the conflicting ideologies together—like the production of plywood, with wood grains running against each other. A reading that is “cross the grains” has the potential of coming up with a more enriched meaning-significance of the collective message of the book.

Ecclesiastes is a multivoiced text. If one attends to polyphony as its characteristic feature, the analysis and textual dynamics of narration, reflection, inner debate, explanation, and resolution take on new dimensions of meaning. The study of the interface between voice and selfhood, voice and ideology/interiority has been an area of increased scholarly interest and investment.<sup>13</sup> However, though the interconnectedness between voice and ideology is a well-established maxim, and the blurry distinction between monologue and dialogue has been elucidated in the works of Luis Alonso Schökel and Meir Sternberg, the Bakhtinian view on polyphony and dialogism demands further reorientation in reading voices and ideology.<sup>14</sup>

In reading Ecclesiastes as Wisdom literature, the common denominator of two-level ideological critical engagements stands out significantly, that is, that all ideologies (the ancient Israelite wisdom, Qoheleth's, as well as that of the contemporary reader) are accumulatively drawn from humanity's collective lived experience under the sun—the Grand Narrative. This common denominator may close the “historical” and “cultural” gap between the ideologies ingrained in Ecclesiastes and that of present readers.

A threefold reading strategy is featured in Donald F. Murray's treatment of 2 Sam 5:17–7:29.<sup>15</sup> Dealing with an utterly ironic text like Ecclesiastes, I adopt the same reading dynamic here. With a focus on “prag-

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13. See, e.g., my monograph *Through the “I”-Window: The Inner Life of Characters in the Hebrew Bible* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 34; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011); Greenwood, “Debating Wisdom.”

14. See Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998); Meir Sternberg, “The World from the Addressee's Viewpoint: Reception as Representation, Dialogue as Monologue,” *Style* 20 (1986): 295–318. For Bakhtin see esp. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (ed. Michael Holquist; trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); idem, “The Problem of Speech Genre,” in *Speech Genre and Other Late Essays* (trans. Vern W. McGee; ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60–102.

15. Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poet-*

matics" (reader's construction of meaning), "poetics" (what makes the "I"-discourse effective to readers through Qoheleth's different modes of expression), and "polemics" (elements of ideological conflict), it entails a heuristic reading strategy that is "crossing the grains of the wood/text."<sup>16</sup> While "reading with the grain" and "against the grain" are already at work in exemplifying the ideologies of the text and that of Qoheleth, the ideology I bring to the text (though as an "I" embedded in the collective lived experience of all contemporary readers) demands a reading that aims at uncovering the existence of the many cross-graining fibers (or veneers with grains running against each other) that constitute Ecclesiastes—with centuries of the collective lived experience of the ancient community of Israel as its resources. Reading "cross the grains" is an integrated approach with promising results, appropriately applied to an ironic, multivoiced ideology text like Ecclesiastes.

### 3. VOICE AND IDEOLOGY: POLYPHONY, MODES OF EXPRESSION, DIALOGIC DYNAMICS

Identification of the different voices represented in Ecclesiastes has been an area of interest especially in the recent past.<sup>17</sup> Incorporating earlier attempts, Kyle R. Greenwood has provided a precise analysis and presented her thesis on the identification of the three voices in Ecclesiastes.<sup>18</sup> First is the "true voice of wisdom," who primarily speaks in the second person imperative. The second voice is the voice of Qoheleth speaking as Solomon in the first person "I"-voice. The third voice serves as the "Frame Narrator," and is found in the third person sections of chapters 1 and 12. Among the variety of speaking voice analyses, it is still a matter of the

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*ics and Polemics in a Narrative Sequence about David (2 Sam 5:17–7:29)* (JSOTSup 264; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

16. See n. 1 and Newsom, "Reflection on Ideological Criticism," 541.

17. See, e.g., Robert D. Holmstedt, "אני ולבי: The Syntactic Encoding of the Collaborative Nature of Qoheleth's Experiment," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2010): 1–27; Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 75–83, where he summarized and responded to Michael Fox's analysis of the speaking voices in Ecclesiastes. See Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qoheleth," *HUCA* 48 (1997): 83–106.

18. Kyle R. Greenwood, "Debating Wisdom: The Role of Voice in Ecclesiastes," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 476–91.

interpreter/reader's interpretive choice—the perspectives represented through different voices. Based on the nature of Ecclesiastes as “narration,” my identification and analysis will focus solely on the level of “speaking voices” as indicated in Ecclesiastes and not on the conceptual level. The Bakhtinian notion of polyphony and dialogism may potentially provide an additional dimension to the speaking voices, particularly in terms of interacting/dialogic textual dynamics.

### 3.1. THE QOHELETHIC “I”-VOICE

Ecclesiastes is a polyphonic text. The most prominent “I”-voice in this “I”-discourse is that of Qoheleth. Francis Landy has argued convincingly regarding the interplay of voice and interiority that “if vision suggests clarity and exteriority, voice evokes the interiority of the person and an intimation beyond the horizon.”<sup>19</sup> Among the representative first person texts of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., where the characters speak in the first person “I”-voice)<sup>20</sup> are the Isaianic and Danielic “I”-voices,<sup>21</sup> which share a great degree of hiddenness (or shielded selfhood/ideology).<sup>22</sup> The Qohelethic “I”-voice also takes on a highly reflective character. The cycle of “turning-seeing-reflecting-perceiving-concluding” (1:14–18; 2:1–11, 12–26; 3:16–22; 4:1–3, 4–6, 7–10, 11–12, 15–16; 5:12–19 [Eng. 13–20]; 6:1–12; 7:15–18, 25–29; 8:10–12, 14–17; 9:1–10, 11–12, 13–18; 10:5–15) characterizes Qoheleth's persistent and intentional engagement in life. The results of such life-engagements are exemplified in his summary appraisals (e.g., 2:13–14; 3:16–17; 7:15–17; 8:12–14). Yet though the Qoheleth's “I” is contemplative and deep, here there is no shielding but a voice that always positions itself at the center stage of the “I”-discourse. It echoes everywhere.

The ideology of Qoheleth is made known to readers through the prominent “I”-voice in the following modes of expression. First, he dem-

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19. Francis Landy, “Vision and Voice in Isaiah,” *JSOT* 88 (2000): 36.

20. Other than the book of Psalms, e.g., Dan 7–12, Habakkuk, and the bulk of Nehemiah.

21. Cf. Isa 5:1–30; 6:1–13; 8:1–18; 15:1–16:14; 21:1–12; 22:1–15; 24:1–23; 25:1–12; 26:1–21; 40:1–8; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 51:17–23; 61:1–11; 63:7–19; and Dan 7–12.

22. Along with the “I”-voice in Habakkuk and Nehemiah. For the Danielic and Isaianic “I,” see the extended discussion in Leung Lai, *Through the “I”-Window*, esp. 19–21, 31–153.

onstrates the breadth of his experience by taking on the Solomonic persona (1:12–2:11).<sup>23</sup> In other words, he highlights the empirical dimension of his exploration in life—"I once lived like a king." Second, and most significantly, he foregrounds his "I"-voice/worldview in the form of concluding statements (e.g., 2:13–14; 3:16–17; 7:15–17; 8:12–14) that are grounded in the reality of humanity's collective lived experience under the sun (e.g., **ראתי** in 1:14; 2:13; **חשמש תחת ראתי** in 3:16) and through an intentional "seeing-reflecting-perceiving-concluding" search process. Third, in transcending from seeing to perceiving, Qoheleth engages in internal dialogues/monologues with his "inner self" (or through doubling himself into two halves to create a space for debate and resolution—e.g., 1:16 **דברתי אני הנה** **עם-לבי** **לאמר אני הנה**, lit. "and I spoke with my heart saying, I, behold";<sup>24</sup> **בלבי אני אמרתי** in 2:1; 15 [twice]; and 3:17 in the context of 2:1–9; 2:15–16; 3:17–22).<sup>25</sup> As pioneers in the field of speaking voice analysis, Sternberg and Alonso Schökel have been successful in exemplifying "monologue-dialogue" in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>26</sup> Contained within the pericope are pockets of monologue within dialogue and imaginary dialogues within monologues. In essence, one can collapse the distinction between monologue and dialogue as they serve the same function of self-representation. Taken into the consideration of the thrust in the "I"-discourse, one may wonder why this monologue-dialogue (saying to one's own heart) employed by Qoheleth is considered as an effective means of expressing his ideology.

Essential to Bakhtinian notions of discourse or literature is that the basic unit of speech is not the sentence construct or even the word, but

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23. I made no attempt to enter into the discussion of the identity issue of Qoheleth here. I have adopted Bartholomew's conclusion that Ecclesiastes "is not written by Solomon, nor should Qoheleth be literally equated with Solomon" (see *Ecclesiastes*, 53; see 43–59). For counterarguments supporting the dating of Ecclesiastes fitting into the Solomonic age and setting, see Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary 16; Nottingham, Eng.: Apollos, 2010), 31–36.

24. It is a triple emphatic use of the Qoheleth's "I"-voice here. As Adele Berlin has noted, **הנה** functions almost like an "interior monologue," an "internalized viewpoint" that provides a kind of "interior vision" (*Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994], 62–63).

25. To Eric Christianson (*Time to Tell*, 21), **לב** used in Ecclesiastes represents "Qoheleth's intellectual nature, and it is from here that all his observations flow."

26. Sternberg, "World from the Addressee's Viewpoint"; Alonso Schökel, *Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, esp. 178.

the “utterance.” Any utterance or discourse, whether spoken or written, is always addressed to someone, and therefore possesses a dialogic quality.<sup>27</sup> Thus at the foundation of Bakhtin’s ideology is the view that any form of discourse is always a reply and therefore always takes shape in response to what has already been said. This also includes “the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments.”<sup>28</sup>

The implications of appropriating Bakhtinian perspectives on polyphony and dialogism to the speaking voices in Ecclesiastes are significant. The Bakhtinian notion of dialogic truth introduces a whole new dimension of the function of the Qoheleth’s monologic-dialogic discourse (saying to one’s own heart). Alonso Schökel qualifies monologue as “the breaking into a context of dialogue with a reflection directed to oneself.”<sup>29</sup> This dialogic/interacting dynamic fits in beautifully with Qoheleth’s monologic-dialogic mode of expression. Qoheleth is entering into free dialogue with the other speaking voices: that of the frame narrator in 1:1, 7:27, and 12:8–14; and the third unmerged utterance, the collective voice of the sages.

### 3.2. THE SAGES’ COLLECTIVE VOICE REPRESENTING THE ORTHODOXY OF “BLESSINGS AND CURSING”

This is the weighty collective voice that Qoheleth is responding to throughout the book (e.g., 3:1–8; 4:5–6, 9–14; 4:17–5:16 [Eng. 5:1–17]; 7:1–14, 16–22; 10:1–4, 8–20; 11:1–10; 12:1–7). Ecclesiastes is Wisdom literature with perspectives that are deeply embedded in the collective lived human experience under the sun. If we adopt the Bakhtinian view of dialogism and polyphony to the reading here, it becomes clear that Qoheleth engages in response to and in reply to this voice in a dialogic, dynamic way. The direction of the Qohelethic responses is not toward resolution or coming to terms with paradoxical outcomes; the continuous efforts of engaging in cycles of reflection and dialogue with the conflicting life situations/con-

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27. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genre,” in *Speech Genre and Other Essays*, 60–102; Andrés A. Haye, “Living Being and Speaking Being: Toward a Dialogical Approach Intentionality,” *Integrative Psychological Behavior* 42 (2008): 157–63, esp. 160–61.

28. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 281.

29. Alonso Schökel, *Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 81.

clusions signify that this is an *ongoing* life process and is never meant to be *finalized*.

### 3.3. THE VOICE OF THE FRAME NARRATOR (1:1–2; 7:27; 12:8–14)

There is not much dispute that the structure of Ecclesiastes is hard to pin down. One common consensus does surface in the recent commentaries and reference works on the identification of a “frame narrator” (1:1; 7:27; and 12:8 [or epilogist]) who introduces Qoheleth in the third person and quotes him in a “direct speech” (1:1–2; 12:8).<sup>30</sup> The two direct speeches echo in an emphatic tone the same concluding theme: “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Through a detailed lexical and thematic study of the epilogue (12:9–14), Andrew Shead argues convincingly that, on the one hand, the epilogue shares coherent terms and themes with the rest of the book. On the other hand, the two framing key words **הבל** and **ירא** provide a certain direction to the message of Ecclesiastes, particularly by shaping the dynamic that exists between 12:8–12 and 12:13–14.<sup>31</sup> The pain of the search for wisdom could not be resolved through understanding life under the sun. The wise way is to live in obedient fear of God, who knows and judges all.<sup>32</sup> Michael Fox also supports the idea that in an effort to protect Qoheleth, the epilogist is combining **הבל** and **ירא** to present a composite view of reality: fear of God is the right attitude, along with the trust that God is “just.” However, to Roland Murphy, reading Ecclesiastes from the perspective of the epilogist as exemplified above is an “oversimplification” of Qoheleth’s ideological conflicts as echoed everywhere in his “I”-voice.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.4. READERLY IDEOLOGY BY “STEPPING IN” TO THE THREE VOICES/IDEOLOGIES OF THE TEXT

In this analysis of the existence of the three voices in Ecclesiastes, three ideologies are potentially interacting within the text. The deep and reflec-

30. See Michael V. Fox, “Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qoheleth,” *HUCA* 47 (1977): 83–106; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, e.g., 74–79, 82–84, 102–7.

31. Shead, “Reading Ecclesiastes ‘Epilogically,’” 91.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes* (WBC 23A; Dallas: Word, 1992), lxv.

tive Qohelethic “I”-voice has the power to entice readers, to step inside<sup>34</sup> the text and engage us in the ongoing dialogue with the three-voice/ideology text (i.e., a consideration of the poetics, the affective elements of the voices upon the readers). As readers, we also bring in our perspectives to the text from our particular theological/confessional and ideological locations. It is then a matter of “interpretive choice” (pragmatics, i.e., constructing meaning) with potential ideological conflicts (i.e., “polemics”). The threefold reading dynamics as proposed by Murray are at work here.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. WHAT WOULD A READING THAT IS “CROSS THE GRAINS” YIELD?

##### 4.1. QOHELETH: READING ANCIENT ISRAELITE WISDOM IDEOLOGY “AGAINST THE GRAIN”

As mentioned previously, at least two levels of ideological critique are at work in reading a text like Ecclesiastes. The textual dynamic indicates that Qoheleth is using his reflective “I”-voice in dialogical response to the deep-rooted, underlying ideology upheld in traditional Hebrew wisdom—broadly speaking, “the order of things.” Within the text, Qoheleth loudly attests to the fact that his search for this “order” brings him utter disappointment. This sentiment is first declared in an emphatic fashion in 1:2 and then echoed also emphatically as a concluding statement in 12:8 before the missional epilogist jumps in (12:9–14), as an *inclusio* enclosing all his lifelong, ongoing explorations in 1:3–12:7. The most striking thing in his emotive response is that the senselessness and absurdity in humanity’s collective lived experience under the sun (e.g., 2:7; 3:16–17; 7:15; 8:12–14) are in essence the “commonalities”—a complete reversal of what the wisdom ideology upholds—the “order” of God’s ruling. That this “preacher” has been perceived as a skeptic, his voice as “cynical,” and

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34. I employ the same “spacial metaphor” used by Alice A. Keefe in “Stepping In/Stepping Out: A Conversation between Ideological and Social Scientific Feminist Approaches to the Bible,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 1 (1999): 1–22. Keefe also noted that most feminist theological critics practice stepping outside the text, with the assertion that the Hebrew text is an androcentric representation, and thus “stepping outside” and reading “against the grains” is a necessity.

35. See Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension*, 22–23.



his engaged reflection as “ironic/pessimistic” literature<sup>36</sup> attests that he is responding to his “pretext” (the traditional Israelite wisdom ideology) in an “against the grain” fashion.

The existence of this “pretext” as Qoheleth’s “frame of reference” is evident in his responses to each of the life situations. He cites wisdom poems and axioms (3:1–8; 4:9–12; 4:17–5:6 [Eng. 5:1–7]; 7:1–12, 19–22, 29; 8:1–5, 17; 10:1–4, 8–20; 11:1–4); affirms the creation order and the order of God’s ruling (1:4–7; 2:26; 3:11, 14, 17–18; 6:2; 7:13–14; 8:6–8; 9:1; 11:5–6; 12:1, 7); and seeks to hold on to enjoyment in life, a gift from above (3:12–13; 9:7–10; 11:7–9). Yet the magnitude and absurdity of life drive the preacher to a weighty summary appraisal—seeking to make some sense out of the nonsensical in life is like “a chasing after the wind”—doomed to fail! (12:8 echoes 1:2). Simply going by the pretext’s “cause-effect” logic will lead to utter disappointment.

As a resistant explorer/seeker of the realities laid out in classical wisdom, Qoheleth’s loud remark in 10:5 touches on the core and true dynamic of his search for the order of things—“There is an evil [רעה] I have seen under the sun [השמש תחת], like an error [כשגגה] that comes from a ruler.” Three important elements of his search surface here: (1) his observation is grounded in humanity’s collective lived experience “under the sun”; (2) it appears to be an “evil error,” deviating from the norm;<sup>37</sup> and (3) he intentionally presents an existing “chaotic situation” (vv. 6–7).<sup>38</sup>

#### 4.2. READING “WITH THE GRAIN”: A READERLY CHOICE

The second level of ideological critical engagement I bring to the text is distinct from Qoheleth’s reflective response on three grounds. First, readers are interacting with the whole text of Ecclesiastes, including other merged or unmerged speaking voices (esp. the collective voice of the sages as well as the narrator/epilogist). Second, the reflective “I”-voice of Qoheleth has the power to entice readers’ engagement into his “I”-discourse, reading “with the grain” along his treatise (as Clines puts it, “writers and readers alike are not disinterested bystanders to their own activity, but promoters

36. See Izak J. J. Spangenberg, “Irony in the Book of Qohelet,” *JSOT* 72 (1996): 57–69.

37. In contrast with Prov 8:16, the norm in traditional wisdom is that it is by wisdom and not wealth that rulers rule.

38. Cf. discussion in Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 322–23.

of their own ideological causes”).<sup>39</sup> Third, Qoheleth, the collective voices of the sages, the epilogist, and contemporary readers alike all draw on the same locale in our ideological formations—collective lived experience “under the sun.” The context of this “I”-discourse entails an ideological critical endeavor arising out of our flesh-and-blood, lived experience, perhaps, in a more up-close and personal way.

For those engaging in ideological critique, to read “against the grain” is expected, particularly when we are dealing with a Hebrew text. However, when the three reading parameters are laid out for me, I find a reading that is “with the grain” both possible and natural. I witness the same chaotic situations Qoheleth describes and resonate with his summary appraisals. Reading Qoheleth’s “I”-voice with the momentum of “thinking out loud,”<sup>40</sup> I empathize with his disappointment and have a window into the understanding of his apparently unorganized, up-and-down moments in the discourse. His emotive responses have become my felt emotions.<sup>41</sup> The cited wisdom materials throughout the book give the impression that there is still a certain movement in Qoheleth’s exploration—he seeks to make some sense out of the “chaos” and head back to the “norm.” As a true seeker of truth, this momentum positions him in a more healthy tension. One thing, however, is beyond denial: Qoheleth faces utter disappointment, and the result of his self-engaged explorations can be a “pain-embracing” process (8:16).

The notion that the “frame narrator” in the text introduces Qoheleth in 1:1–2 and 7:27 and provides some sense of continuity within a lengthy “I”-discourse is well taken. I find the role of the epilogist in 12:9–14 as a protector for Qoheleth difficult to follow. The moral upheld by the epilogist is at odds with the deep, reflective momentum in this “I”-discourse. In a way, it disrupts the vein of Qoheleth’s arguments—that there is no order of things in human experience under the sun—a total chaos. All human efforts to search for this order will be “a chasing after wind” (2:26). In

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39. Clines, *Interested Parties*, 24.

40. See Barbara M. Leung Lai, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Global Perspectives on the Old Testament* (ed. Mark Roncace and Joseph Weaver; Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, forthcoming).

41. Along the line of the “empirics” of reading, I have argued elsewhere regarding the affective impact of the text on readers. See Leung Lai, *Through the “I”-Window*, esp. 154–59; idem, “Hearing God’s Bitter Cries (Hosea 11:1–9): Reading, Emotive-Experiencing, Appropriation,” *HBT* 26, no. 1 (2004): 24–49.

this respect, reading Ecclesiastes “with the grain,” the epilogue is an overly simplistic attempt toward a quick fix for the limits of wisdom. As with the book of Job, it is an open ending. Readers find it difficult to come to a closure of the senselessness of life laid “raw” in front of us with such a heavy statement—“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments—for this applies to every person” (12:13). This conclusion deconstructs the whole ethos spelled out in Qoheleth’s burdensome “I.” It silences the inquiring voice of all “faith-seeking-understanding” inquirers!

#### 4.3. READING “CROSS THE GRAINS”: TOWARD A COLLECTIVE MESSAGE OF ECCLESIASTES

Two distinct ideologies surface in the two different directional readings exemplified above. First, Qoheleth holds on to the ideology that all attempts to search for the order of things in this chaotic world will meet with sheer disappointment. Second, the ideology ingrained in the text—“fear God and keep his commandments”—is required for all humanity. God’s work (מעשה, 12:14) is beyond our understanding but ultimately is just (משפט, 12:14; cf. also 1:4–7; 2:26; 3:11, 14, 17–18; 6:2; 7:13–14; 8:6–8; 9:1; 11:5–6; 12:1, 7).<sup>42</sup> Qoheleth seeks to embrace both in all “flesh” but finds it burdensome and oppressive. The epilogist seeks to defend the latter by underscoring twice in the “afterword” of Qoheleth’s reflective “I”-discourse: “And more than that” (שהיה ויתר, v. 9) and “and more than these” (ויתר מהמה, v. 12). Two sets of ideology are presented side by side. My attempt is neither to seek to harmonize (or synthesize) the two conflicting ideologies nor to pick one against the other as a hermeneutical choice. A reading that is “cross the grains” or “crossing the grains of both ideologies” may help to put the two side by side together as a coexisting reality. The woodworking imagery of the production of plywood fits in beautifully to this endeavor. By placing the veneers with wood grains running against each other and gluing them together at right angles perpendicular to each other, I aim at uncovering the existence of the many cross-graining fibers that constitute Ecclesiastes—that is, the collective message of the book.

42. Shead, “Reading Ecclesiastes ‘Epilogically,’” 89.

To Roland Murphy, “everygnomicsayingneedsabalancingcorrective.”<sup>43</sup> Leo Perdue is perceptive in proposing the “dialectic of cosmology/theodicy and anthropodicy” as the best approach to the study of Wisdom literature. The two apparently contrasting concepts should be held in true dialectic to each other.<sup>44</sup> In the context of the commonality—“humanity’s experience under the sun”—all interested parties (speaking voices in Ecclesiastes and contemporary readers) can witness the coexistence of the two sets of reality. Upholding both ideologies and being sustained in this dialectic tension is the moral of Ecclesiastes.

Timothy Walton suggested that, as one of the three readerly interpretive choices, readers “can allow the truth of both perspectives to remain side by side and confess that a solution to how these can both be true escapes us, even the wisest among us (cf. 8:17).”<sup>45</sup> I have just made that informed choice.

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43. Identified as his “axiom”; cf. “Murphy’s Axiom: Every Gnostic Saying Needs a Balancing Corrective,” in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995), 344–54.

44. Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 48.

45. Walton, “Reading Qohelet,” 130.

# POSSIBILITIES AND PROSPECTS OF POSTCOLONIAL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE\*

Jeremy Punt

## 1. POSTCOLONIAL READINGS: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Biblical scholarship is (generally) self-reflective and self-critical. Scholars investigate and interpret biblical texts while exploring the value as well as the limitations of theories and methodologies in their work.<sup>1</sup> Older, existing theories are adjusted and new models are probed and developed.<sup>2</sup> Various biblical scholars see in postcolonial biblical interpretation a further development along the lines of ideological criticism—even if not perpetuating it. But what is postcolonial biblical interpretation? And how does it manifest in South(ern) Africa? The answer is of course determined by both inquirer and respondent, constituted as they are *within* and constitutive as they are *of* their respective yet overlapping social locations and con-

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1. Biblical hermeneutics in which "the Bible (or early Christian experience as confirming or correcting it) [is] deemed immediately and unquestionably *normative* for contemporary life," and where theological and moral concerns are "lifted out" with "intolerable and disingenuous hermeneutical inconsistency" (Margaret M. Mitchell, "Why Family Matters for Early Christian Literature," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* [ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 348, emphasis original) testifies to assumptions about the nature of biblical texts as well as about hermeneutical processes, theoretical positions, and convictions.

2. Cf. Ritva Williams, "Social Memory," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41 (2011): 189.

texts. Today *postcolonial* is used mostly as a qualifying term in studies of colonial history, as a temporal or spatial point of reference (or both), even though postcolonial theory is about engaging imperialism and hegemony operating in different forms and at different levels. As a critical theory and approach, postcoloniality is a notion considered to engage the complex aftermath of colonialism, and to theorize without excluding the colonial itself. Postcolonial theory has been shaped largely by histories of repression and repudiation, reclaiming and celebrating the indigenous in particular, but also and in complex ways by the attractions afforded by colonialist, imperialist endeavors, as well as relations with and reactions to them.

The question “What is postcolonial biblical interpretation?” may imply a promise that will be difficult to fulfill, given the many and diverse aspects and angles incorporated in the question, including theoretical, practical, ethical, and any other single or multiple focal points. Asking such questions one also has to interact with the presumptuousness inherent to and accompanying positions of “defining” or even describing or mapping.<sup>3</sup> Dealing with the nature of the colonial or even imperial<sup>4</sup> beast should not imply a corresponding imposition or domination. Rather, it requires a return to the well-worn question of whether using the master’s tools will result in bringing the master’s house down (cf. Lorde).<sup>5</sup> Many interesting

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3. I acknowledge that I, too, am implicated in such endeavors. On postcolonial discourse’s Western captivity, exemplified by its epistemic and cultural imperialism as much as in its use of Western terminology and categories, see Annamaria Carusi, “Post, Post and Post: Or, Where Is South African Literature in All This?” in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-colonialism and Post-modernism* (ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin; New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 95–108 (97). On the dangers in any mapping exercise, see Virginia Burrus, “Mapping as Metamorphosis: Initial Reflections on Gender and Ancient Religious Discourses,” in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele; BIS 84; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1–10; see also my earlier arguments in “Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa: Some Mind and Road Mapping,” *Neot* 37 (2003): 59–85.

4. “Colonial” and “imperial” are not used here simply as synonyms, and their confluence *and* divergence, their overlap *and* contrasts will be addressed below, albeit in no great detail.

5. Is it therefore possible to invoke historical-critical work as a mode of postcolonial studies? Where historical criticism assumes also that the Bible is a norm for life (Segovia)? Anna Runesson distinguishes between postcolonial interpretive work done within a Western, historical-critical framework and work done outside it; see her *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (BIS 103; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 91–122. But is such a distinction possible, when historical-critical work

recent discussions on postcolonial studies and biblical studies suggest, not unexpectedly, that theoretical considerations in the theory and practice of biblical interpretation require further contemplation. What, for example, would it take to see “postcolonial biblical interpretation” as a reasonable scholarly enterprise? Who assumes or is taken to assume such authority and powers of sanction? And what do scholarly “practitioners” consider as required for validating a certain approach? Would claims to the creation or existence of a “criticism” suffice in the battle to legitimize a new approach? Suggestions that biblical scholarship generally has been less interested in theory and more in “applying” theory as the means to achieve a larger goal, namely, generating particular interpretations, explanations, or understandings of texts in the Bible, are often heard.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, “criticism” in biblical studies may often amount to an accumulation of interpretive interests and accompanying terminology. What lies behind the perceived need to frame and legitimize a set of interpretive claims, interests, and terminology into an independent, demanding, and comprehensive criticism in order to render such claims and interests valuable? Or is it rather about a place at the (hermeneutics) table? But whose table? To eat or to serve? Whose food? Who sits at the table? Who are excluded or made to feel unwelcome?—and so on.<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding such risks, the important and by no means neutral or uninterested question is how to make useful comments about an area of study that is spatially and temporally so broad.<sup>8</sup> How does one

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is hardly an enclosed methodological approach? And why is the historical-critical deemed the valuable dividing line? What sort of academic power is wielded by this distinction?

6. See Jeremy Punt, “Dealing (with) the Past and Future of Biblical Studies: A New South African Perspective,” in *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key* (ed. Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia; SemeiaSt 66; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 29–45.

7. There is considerable danger in naming and describing postcolonial criticism, because of the hybridity of its subject matter (practitioners and ideological concerns; see the quote of Padmini Mongia in Susan V. Gallagher, “Mapping the Hybrid World: Three Postcolonial Motifs,” *Semeia* 75 [1996]: 229), its relatively recent emergence, and also the imperialist tendencies incorporated in the impulse and act of definition.

8. General descriptions of postcolonial theory are helpful but need further elaboration, e.g., “a paradigm of critical interpretation, analyzing historical constructs of political domination by means of colonization and marginalization. It involves a number of different disciplines in order to deal with complex power relations, and to

approach the development of a certain epistemology and critical method that is widely and diversely informed regarding theoretical positions and social locations and various historical, contextual, discursive, and other markers?<sup>9</sup> Such questions about postcolonial biblical studies for our purposes may be subsumed in two questions, allowing them to determine the agenda. Why would one want to read the New Testament postcolonially? And what would such a reading entail? This presentation is therefore somewhat of an appraisal exercise, done necessarily from a specific perspective, a mapping of some current trends, with the aim to identify possible avenues for the future.

## 2. WHY A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Postcolonial is less temporal or spatial and more conceptual, less a moment than an optic. These elements are of course not exclusive of one another but distinguished here to show my own priorities and interest in describing a possible approach to the postcolonial.<sup>10</sup> As I use it here, *postcolonial* is understood as a psychological or social term related to consciousness

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identify the relationship between the colonized, the collaborators and the colonizers is in itself an act of resistance"; so Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winninge, eds., *Identity Formation in the New Testament* (WUNT 227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), vii.

9. It is impossible to attempt a historical unpacking here, but for a recent theoretical account of postcolonial work, see Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001); Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making*, 17–133. Runesson has confirmed that little theoretical or other agreement exists as to what is meant by "postcolonial" (3); she uses "postcoloniality" as an analytic-descriptive term, "as the entire outcome of and reactions to a colonial situation" or "consequences of or reactions to the colonisation" (2, 24). Runesson distinguishes "postcoloniality" from "postcolonialism," which is "the scholarly discipline studying the phenomenon." However, as confirmed by a sketch, Runesson tends to assume a distinct break with the political end of colonization (23).

10. The intricate hermeneutical mapping exercises characteristic of traditional biblical scholarship are subverted by Rasiah Sugirtharajah's insistence that from a colonial perspective only two categories are required and really make sense: colonial and postcolonial; see "Biblical Studies after the Empire: From a Colonial to a Postcolonial Mode of Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 15, which for all its apparent simplicity hides much ambiguity. Segovia situates postcolonialism amid cultural studies but proceeds to plot biblical criticism, and its major foci, on and according to the postcolonial map (56–63). After identifying three important foci or dimensions in biblical studies—



rather than a descriptive reference to historical conditions.<sup>11</sup> As is the case in the development of many critical theories or approaches, initial trends in a particular direction take their cue from leading scholars in the field. Even facetious references to the holy or unholy trinity of Bhabha, Spivak, and Said nevertheless acknowledge the initial work and theorizing done by these scholars, and their continuing influence on postcolonial discourse. Postcolonial thinking is often identified with references to notions such as orientalizing, ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, and some other critical terms. Nevertheless, postcoloniality can also be understood differently with references to its perceived broad areas of work, its approaches, and its “methodologies.”

With such pluriformity, attempts to constrain natural diversity in the sense of the inclusion of different and dissonant voices are resisted within postcolonial theory. Usurping viability through monolithic heuristic frameworks and reductionist tendencies has to be resisted. Clearly, as a dynamic approach or, better still, range of approaches, postcolonial work should not be whittled down to a specific theory or methodology or the most accommodating general denominator. Or maybe still worse is to position the field in such a way that postcoloniality and postcolonial work be held ransom to the specific work or theory of any given scholar.

It follows, then, and is borne out by current scholarly work, that a precise focus for postcolonial studies remains elusive, given different philosophical, theoretical constellations and ideological agendas.<sup>12</sup> In South Africa, as elsewhere, literary production largely finds itself between the three “posts” of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism. But at first glance, the postcolonial debate is often driven by a search for national identity, a reclaiming of precolonial incorruption, or literary political intervention strategies.<sup>13</sup> Such concerns burden

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texts, “texts” or readings of texts, and readers—Segovia aligns them with colonialism/imperialism and its historical development.

11. Cf. Fernando F. Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope,” in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 67; pace Young, *Postcolonialism*.

12. Cf. Fernando F. Segovia, “Reading-Across: Intercultural Criticism and Textual Posture,” in *Interpreting beyond Borders* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 68; Kwok Pui-Lan, “Reflection on Women’s Sacred Scriptures,” *Concilium* 3 (1998): 110.

13. For some scholars the interrelationship is more complex, with the postcolo-

possible dialogue with poststructuralism and postmodernism, already trapped in a logical aporia as theoretical constructs that disallow identity and self-determination.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, postcolonial biblical studies can position itself intertextually as a dialogue partner with other “subjugated discourses” such as gender and feminist studies,<sup>15</sup> queer studies,<sup>16</sup> race studies,<sup>17</sup> Marxist studies,<sup>18</sup> and the like. Its focus on relationships of power and hegemony, on domination and subordination, augurs well for investigating wide-ranging and often interconnected areas of gender, race, sexuality, and economics in biblical texts, as well as in later and current interpretations of biblical texts and their originators. Although the ethics of interpretation are consistently if implicitly present in the work of postcolonial critics, also autobiography<sup>19</sup> is often overtly present for the sake of positionality (situating self and other), for the sake of hermeneutical up-frontness and intellectual honesty and also for the sake of ethical responsibility and accountability.

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nial being different from postmodern since it is “a condition that exists within, and thus contests and resists the colonial moment itself with its ideology of domination” (Françoise Lionnet, quoted in Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 37).

14. Postcolonial biblical interpretation accepts with postmodernism that truth is mapped, constructed, and negotiated, and rejects the notion of objective and neutral truth as expressions of political, religious, and scholarly power. As far as the Bible is concerned, it is also no longer *the* meaning of the text that is sought after, as a multiplicity of meanings is acknowledged from the outset.

15. Cf. Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

16. Cf. Jeremy Punt, “Sex and Gender, and Liminality in Biblical Texts: Venturing into Postcolonial, Queer Biblical Interpretation,” *Neot* 41 (2007): 382–98; idem, “Intersections in Queer Theory and Postcolonial Theory, and Hermeneutical Spin-offs,” *Bible and Critical Theory* 4/2 (2008): 24.1–16.

17. Cf. Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002).

18. Cf. Roland Boer, “Marx, Postcolonialism, and the Bible,” in Moore and Segovia, *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 166–83.

19. Autobiographical biblical criticism can transform and enlarge the horizon of the reader. But it also acts as a “provisional monologue” that invites replies from other readers from other locations, while the inviting self creates space for others in their alterity.

Broadly speaking, then, postcolonial biblical criticism is less about propounding the virtues of a new methodology and much more about a shift in focus. It employs a reading strategy of training the eye on that which was missing in previous analyses, while pursuing a rewriting and correction of past texts—it involves exposure, restoration, and transformation.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, the subaltern's voice is heard through a hermeneutic of retrieval or restoration; while on the other hand, and acknowledging its ideological critical roots, postcolonial criticism's textual politics take a bow with a hermeneutic of suspicion.<sup>21</sup> At a macro- or metalevel questions are raised of how to proceed with the business at hand, but also how business is determined, handled, and on whose behalf.<sup>22</sup> Challenging hermeneutics in interpretive practices of the West that continue as totalizing endeavors, it exposes the church's and the academy's co-optation by imperial interests, working toward destabilizing such frames of meaning.<sup>23</sup>

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20. The hegemonic context in the first century C.E. was due to the power imbalance imposed and maintained by the Roman Empire, supported by other social configurations such as patriarchalism and slavery. A postcolonial perspective acknowledges the complexity of cultural and political configurations and structures that form boundaries between the powerful and marginalized within a hegemonic context; see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 173.

21. Postcolonial biblical studies is "ideological reflection on the discourse and practice of imperialism and colonialism from the vantage point of a situation where imperialism and colonialism have come—by and large but by no means altogether so—to a formal end but remain very much at work in practice, as neoimperialism and neocolonialism" (Fernando F. Segovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Optic," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 51 n. 3). See also Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998), 23; Kwok, "Reflection on Women's Sacred Scriptures," 110.

22. A number of current scholarly debates in South African biblical studies are related to the postcolonial paradigm, e.g., the tension between African versus Western readings, "ordinary" versus "trained" readings, and nationalist versus hybridical readings; see Jeremy Punt, "Current Debates on Biblical Hermeneutics in South Africa and the *Postcolonial Matrix*," *Religion and Theology* 11 (2004): 139–60.

23. Like cultural studies, postcolonial studies is deliberately not disciplinary but an inquisitive activity, intent on disciplining the disciplines (see Georg M. Gugelberger, "Postcolonial Cultural Studies," in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* [ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994], 582), making scholars aware of the type of knowledge they produce and disseminate; see Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 27.

Postcolonial theory tends to advantage “appropriation” above “abrogation,” trying to avoid a cultural essentialism in favor of multiculturalism.<sup>24</sup> It is, however, about more than accommodating wide-ranging indigenous, marginalized, subaltern, and decolonizing moments, movements, and memories where these are found (and specifically not found) in texts. A postcolonial approach deliberately forms a counterhegemonic discourse, paying special attention to hidden and neglected voices<sup>25</sup> as well as the voices of protest or opposition in the texts.<sup>26</sup> It includes and gives voice to the voiceless, the muted voices of the colonized, the marginalized, and the oppressed. It addresses disproportionate power relationships at geopolitical as well as subsidiary levels; at the level of the empire, the relationship between the imperial and the colonial, but also at social and personal levels of the powerful ruler and the subaltern, to the extent of investigating relationships and interaction between center and periphery.<sup>27</sup>

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Critical biblical studies has hidden its affiliation and subliminal support for Western imperialism under the cloak of scientific objectivity; see Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Reading Scripture in the Context of Empire,” in *The Bible in the Public Square: Reading the Signs of the Times* (ed. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, Ellen B. Aitken, and Jonathan A. Draper; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 164. The effect of the cultural turn for theology, Sheila G. Davaney claims, is twofold: first, the rejection of the study of religions as sui generis, it is one dimension of human culture; and second, a strong argument exists for including theology as an integral part of the study of religion; see Davaney, “Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis,” in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (ed. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 12–13.

24. Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 153.

25. Kwok, “Reflection on Women’s Sacred Scriptures,” 110.

26. Cf. Sugirtharajah, “Biblical Studies after the Empire,” 21.

27. The scope of postcolonial studies is, as far as operative breadth is concerned, covering the wide range of imperial-colonial formations since the empires of antiquity up to the present reach of global capitalism; as for underlying frameworks or foundational contexts, both economic and political environments are included, up to and including capitalism and modernity; see Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic,” 70–72. With reference to the early Jesus follower communities, the city of Rome constituted such a metropolitan center, and areas such as western and in particular eastern parts of the ancient world, including subcontinents such as Asia, were peripheral areas; see Steve J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17. Other scholars affirm the imperialism-colonialism distinction, but perceive center and periphery as mutu-

### 3. THE NATURE AND SCOPE/REACH OF A POSTCOLONIAL NEW TESTAMENT READING

What, then, does a postcolonial reading of the New Testament want to deliver, what does such work entail and promise?<sup>28</sup> Matters are complicated; since no specific methodology is in attendance, employing a postcolonial approach is anything *but* a monolithic enterprise.<sup>29</sup> Postcolonial hermeneutics is interdisciplinary and includes a potentially wide diversity of criticisms and methods,<sup>30</sup> even if as a mode of critical inquiry it is aligned with ideological criticism. As a result, postcolonial studies are multidimensional, multiperspectival, and multidisciplinary.<sup>31</sup> However, if no attempt is made to reflect upon the specific scope, nature, and reach of the postcolonial theoretical venture, it of course may be banalized into oblivion.

The nature or characteristic approach of postcolonial biblical criticism is defined in the first place by the interest it takes in the subaltern,<sup>32</sup> and “dealing with the ‘other’ in a new way.”<sup>33</sup> Postcolonial hermeneutics reintroduces *representation*, not in the mimetic sense but by recognizing the once colonized’s place in the chronicles of history, and affirming their agency in the present. Those previously perceived to be on the periphery and margins are now acknowledged to be in the center too! On the one hand, postcolonial criticism is a counterhegemonic discourse, paying special attention to the hidden and neglected voices<sup>34</sup> as well as the

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ally constitutive relations, e.g., Joseph A. Marchal, *The Politics of Heaven: Women, Gender, and Empire in the Study of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 4–5, 128 n. 8.

28. Useful overviews with some mapping of important characteristics in a postcolonial approach in biblical studies is found in Kwok, “Reflection on Women’s Sacred Scriptures,” 105–12; Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic,” 64–70; Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*, 15–24.

29. Sugirtharajah, “Biblical Studies after the Empire,” 15; cf. Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making*, 2, 3, 23–24.

30. See Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic,” 24.

31. Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000), 11–12.

32. “The key function of postcolonial criticism is to register how the knowledge we construct and impart as academics is structured by the absence, difficulty or impossibility of representation of the subaltern” (Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 201).

33. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 27.

34. Kwok, “Reflection on Women’s Sacred Scriptures,” 110.

voices of protest or opposition in the texts.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, it therefore also encourages and welcomes contributions from marginalized groups that have been neglected: the *dalits*, the indigenous peoples, the migrants, people in diaspora and in borderlands, and especially women in these communities.<sup>36</sup>

Second, as hinted above, a postcolonial hermeneutics is interested in the relationships of power and domination, and their effects.<sup>37</sup> Postcolonial studies illustrate how the positions of colonizer and colonized, or powerful and powerless, were constructed and linked to one another, even though such interactions were hardly on equal terms. For this, postcolonial hermeneutics requires a different *reading posture*, aimed at exposing the relationship between ideas and power, language and power, and knowledge and power, and how these relationships prop up Western texts, theories, and learning.

Third, postcolonial hermeneutics assists in pursuing the effects and implications of such interactions and their resultant hybridities. Postcolonial hermeneutics highlights the acquisition and propagating of a *new* or different *identity*. Realizing the importance of hybridity,<sup>38</sup> one understands identity as hyphenated, fractured, multiple, and multiplying, as it exists within “a complex web of cultural negotiation and interaction, forged by imaginatively redeploying the local and the imported elements.”<sup>39</sup>

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35. See Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*, 21.

36. Kwok, “Reflection on Women’s Sacred Scriptures,” 110. Postcolonial biblical criticism does not romanticize or idealize the poor, and refuses to blame the victims but is concerned with social and other structures that contribute to victimhood; cf. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*, 22–23. The importance of context (as in context of interpretation) directs postcolonial work away from a “meta-perspective” (Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making*, 7–8).

37. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*, 16–17; see below on coloniality of being.

38. A concept popularized by Bhabha as “a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once,” and so colonial otherness is situated in a separateness—between the colonialist Self and colonized Other—and not in a particular (essentialist) identity of either colonizer or colonized; cf. Sze-Kar Wan, “Does Diaspora Identity Imply Some Sort of Universality? An Asian-American Reading of Galatians,” in *Interpreting Beyond Borders* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 110. Hybridity is more than “what happens to a person living in the cross section between countries and cultures” (Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making*, 20), and invokes deeper concerns with identity formation and mutuality.

39. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*, 16–17. On moving away from

In terms of range or scope of investigative possibilities, postcolonial theory enhances biblical hermeneutics in its efforts to investigate and explain the contexts of origin of biblical and related contemporary texts and documents. In particular, a postcolonial optic is interested in figuring how texts were influenced by imperialist, sociocultural, and economic-political powers, in past and present. For the New Testament, postcolonial theory offers a viable theoretical position for interpreting texts that originated in settings dominated by the Roman Empire and its collaborators. A postcolonial reading goes beyond an anti-imperial(ist) reading,<sup>40</sup> since the understanding of what constitutes the postcolonial—and the imperial—requires consideration.<sup>41</sup> In picking up on surface-level and underlying tensions in texts, postcolonial biblical criticism is useful *and* effective in studying empire not only as a material setting but also as a heuristic grid for biblical interpretation.

The scope that postcolonial studies pursues and can accommodate has been variously described. Notwithstanding the variety it incorporates, it challenges the totalizing forms of Western interpretation<sup>42</sup> by exposing its co-optation by imperial interests and destabilizing its frame of meaning. However, beyond describing broad characteristics of postcolonial biblical criticism, scholars have developed constructive proposals, some-

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the positivist and essentialist notions of “identity,” “consciousness,” and “origin,” see Carusi, “Post, Post and Post,” 100.

40. This is partly a problem with terminology: should all forms of political rule in the Bible be posed as “empire,” as some scholars appear to do, e.g., Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)? Greater sensitivity is needed for the most plausible sociohistorical settings as well as for the intricacies (as gleaned from social and political sciences) and involved nature of empire.

41. Imperial-colonial contact has always been multifarious in nature (Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic,” 68), but (post)colonial and imperial studies are best distinguished from one another (Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 133–35).

42. That is, a colonial reading informed by theories of the innate Western cultural superiority, privileging the male as subject and indigenous people, women, and minorities as other and needful of control. Such readings were and still are reinforced by the replacement of indigenous practices, biased representations of indigenous people, and the use of such exegetical strategies in commentary and discourse as would serve to strengthen and legitimize imperial control. Hence colonial reading privileges the text over the living communities that interact with it, and it becomes a “frozen artifact” that needs expert readers to activate and re-present its meaning; see Sugirtharajah, “Biblical Studies after the Empire,” 15.

times related to other hermeneutical programs. A hermeneutical model of otherness and engagement views texts, readings of texts, and their readers as others, not to be bypassed, overwhelmed, or manipulated but to be acknowledged, respected, and engaged.<sup>43</sup> It can be supplemented by a reading strategy of intercultural criticism, which approaches texts, readings of texts, and their readers as literary or aesthetic, rhetorical or strategic, and ideological or political products, which have to be analyzed as well as critiqued in dialogue.<sup>44</sup>

In short, then, postcolonial is a psychosocial notion related to consciousness rather than a description of historical conditions; it involves a spatial understanding of imperialism and colonialism as center and periphery; it sees the area of inquiry as analyzing cultural production and material matrix; it offers a broad referential reach that allows for understanding the periphery in its own right and not only in its inevitable relationship with the center; and it shows imperial-colonial contact as multifarious in nature.

#### 4. POSTCOLONIAL CONTENDERS?

Other interpretive frameworks contend as alternative but cognate hermeneutical strategies also for investigating New Testament texts from the vantage point of colonialist endeavor, hegemonic practices, and reception-critical concerns regarding (the ethics of) interpretation. Brief comments on each will have to suffice, adding some contours for mapping postcolonial work.

##### 4.1. CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE BIBLE: A USEFUL VANTAGE POINT

Can a viable alternative be suggested for the often still dominating influence of the historical-critical approach in biblical studies, not relinquishing important gains made in historical work or reneging on linguistic and textual concerns, yet acknowledging readers, interpretive communities,

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43. Fernando F. Segovia, "The Text as Other: Towards a Hispanic American Hermeneutic," in *Text and Experience: Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible* (ed. Daniel Smith-Christopher; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 276–98.

44. Intercultural criticism's textual posture is "reading across," breaking with scientific reading strategies' characteristic competitiveness, hierarchism, empiricism, and objectivism (Segovia, "Reading-Across," 59–83).



and histories?<sup>45</sup> In light of newer approaches to history and taking the social location of scholars into account, historical consciousness is best included in scholarship that takes the social embeddedness of biblical studies as its point of departure and frame of understanding. Cultural studies increasingly intersects with and impacts on biblical studies. Cultural studies includes other voices in society in the interpretation of the Bible as such work favors and supports a “polyphonic hermeneutics.”<sup>46</sup> It proceeds from the vantage point of seeing the text as “construction,” that is, interpretation and meaning is the result of an interactive process between reader and text but never in a neutral way since the text is “filtered by and through the reader.”<sup>47</sup>

In cultural studies, biblical texts are regarded like other contemporary social groups, as socially and culturally conditioned “others,” since texts are never disconnected from specific settings in time and social location. Furthermore, readers are equally regarded as socially and culturally conditioned “others” in relation to the text and other readers. Readers are taken seriously not as unique or independent individuals but rather as members of distinct social configurations in social locations, through whom texts are filtered.<sup>48</sup> Beyond the otherness of reader and text, the interaction between text and reader (reading) consists of construction and engagement. Attempts at reconstructing texts regardless of the rigors

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45. The value and authenticity of popular readings are acknowledged, also that they can be “an uneven mix of insights, prejudices, contradictions, and images imposed by hegemonic discourse” (Jennifer A. Glancy, “House Readings and Field Readings: The Discourse of Slavery and Biblical/Cultural Studies,” in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium* [ed. J. Cheryl Exum and Stephen D. Moore; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 476), and not necessarily innovative or beneficial.

46. *Ibid.*, 461. Although issuing caution for it being a tentative description, Segovia refers to his preference for the fourth option (besides historical criticism, literary criticism, and cultural criticism) in contemporary biblical studies: cultural studies or ideological criticism; see Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies,” 49–51 and n. 3. However, cf. the contribution of Brian K. Blount, *Cultural Interpretation: Reorienting New Testament Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), among others.

47. Segovia, “Text as Other,” 28–31.

48. Since conventional scholarship is rather reluctant to reflect upon its relationship to society generally, the social engagement presupposed and required (also) by postcolonial criticism is at times considered ideologically laden and thus either irrelevant for or a threat to traditional and established approaches.

involved—also the text as “other”—are nothing else but constructions.<sup>49</sup> However, perceiving it as “other” requires *critical* engagement with the text underway toward an emancipatory goal. Nevertheless, engagement with the text as “other” requires an effort to understand also how the text was interpreted by others.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.2. POSTCOLONIAL AND EMPIRE STUDIES

*Colonial*, *postcolonial*, and *decolonial* as well as *imperial* and *anti-imperial* are nomenclature often used somewhat indiscriminately to indicate similar or analogical approaches. Postcolonial studies is mostly a synecdoche for imperialist-(post)colonial studies.<sup>51</sup> The rather loose use of terminology leaves much theoretical confusion and debilitation in its wake, since inter alia the areas of investigation, the theoretical points of departure, and epistemological orientations complicate the claimed overlaps.<sup>52</sup> Even imperial and anti-imperial studies are not simply different approaches in

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49. As Vincent Wimbush (“Reading Texts through Worlds, Worlds through Texts,” *Semeia* 62 [1993]: 129) argues, the “cultural worlds of readers” determine which texts are to be read, how they are to be read, what they mean—even the meaning of the term *text* itself.

50. A danger associated with a cultural turn is the balkanization of knowledge, especially when traditional scholars withdraw to their “bounded communities” away from the public realm, or when more liberal scholars engage in uncritical celebration of popular culture, or simply when social location and identity replace reason giving as the source of legitimation for or disallowance of certain positions; cf. Davaney, “Theology and the Turn,” 10.

51. Segovia claims that it is a “classic and confusing study of synecdoche,” opting rather for “Imperial/Colonial Studies”; see Fernando F. Segovia, “Interpreting beyond Borders: Postcolonial Studies and Diasporic Studies in Biblical Criticism,” in *Interpreting beyond Borders* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 14 n. 1.

52. Said distinguished between imperialism and colonialism as, respectively, “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan city ruling a distant territory” and (as a consequence of imperialism) “the implanting of settlements on distant territory”; see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 9–10. However, both are related to political and economic structures, and other social-cultural configurations. Used more loosely, *colonialism* refers to “any relation of structural domination which relies upon a self-serving suppression of ‘the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question’” (Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 85, referring to Talpade Mohanty).

dealing with more or less the same concern. While postcolonial studies often exhibit a fair amount of interest in empires, ancient and modern, a postcolonial optic unfolds and operates mostly along different lines.

In all the different dimensions of reading texts in relation to empire—past, present, readerly—questions of culture, ideology, and power are central for postcolonial interpreters.<sup>53</sup> The study of ancient texts in relation to their sociocultural context is placed within the larger dimension of the omnipresent, inescapable, and overwhelming sociopolitical reality of empire, which assumed many forms in the past: Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek/Hellenistic, and Roman. Modern readings of these texts are similarly situated amid the overpowering and relentless presence of empire, but in this context the reference is mostly to the West, whether Europe or North America.<sup>54</sup> The focus on real readers and the producers of “texts” (or readings of texts) both inside and outside dominant Western traditions takes place within the postcolonial two-thirds world and the neocolonial West.

However, amid their different guises, postcolonial studies need not be construed in contention with empire studies, as the two constellations of approaches may feed off each other. Yet postcolonial theory often provides for further theoretical complexity and for an increased measure of sophistication in dealing with matters of power and ideology. These do not guarantee or ensure specific dividends but in the interpretation of New Testament texts allow for coming to terms with the harsh realities of the Roman imperial world, displacements, and socioeconomic structures impacting first-century communities and people.

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53. Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies,” 54.

54. And here further caution is advised. Segovia (*ibid.*, 58–59) identifies (with Sprinker and Walls, respectively) three eras of Western imperialism. The first missionary surge coincided with early imperialism, and the second assisted in the move from early to high imperialism, and in its apex (monopoly capitalism) at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. For the ambivalence of the missionary enterprises, see Gallagher, “Mapping the Hybrid World,” 238–39, and a reference to work by L. Sannah (*sic*; read: Sanneh).

### 4.3. DECOLONIALIZING STUDIES

The difference between postcolonial and decolonial studies is largely situated in their different genealogies of thought<sup>55</sup> that gave both energy and vision to such studies. In biblical studies, work from a decolonization point of view is represented in a wide spectrum of stances and practices. It emerged with the awareness of imperial forces and accompanying domination strategies. It also included strategies for resistance while exploring alternative positions and practices to foster “liberating interdependence” between nations, races, genders, economics, and cultures.<sup>56</sup> Decolonial thinking “is the pluriversal epistemology of the future; an epistemology that de-links from the tyranny of abstract universals (Christians, Liberals or Marxists).”<sup>57</sup>

Decolonizing studies introduced the concept of coloniality of being,<sup>58</sup> together with coloniality of power and coloniality of knowledge—although recognition of the constructed and negotiated nature of such notions at times seems to bend the knee to a more essentialist and mechanical understanding thereof.<sup>59</sup> Taking a cue from decolonizing thinking, the *postcoloniality* of being is a useful heuristic device to explain disproportionate power relations in ancient and modern contexts and texts. Postcoloniality of being acknowledges the coloniality of being, of

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55. Postcolonial theory relies upon Foucault, Gramsci, Derrida, Lacan, Said, Guha, Bhabha, and Spivak; decolonial work proceeds from the base established by Mariátegui from Peru, Latin American dependence theory, and the philosophy of liberation of the 1970s, and from thinkers including Puma de Ayala, Cugoano, Ghandi, Cabral, Césaire, Fanon, DuBois, and Anzaldúa; see Walter D. Mignolo, “Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007): 163–64; cf. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*—with some historical figures jointly claimed.

56. Musa W. Dube, “Reading for Decolonization (John 4:1–42),” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 38.

57. Mignolo, “Introduction,” 159.

58. Frantz Fanon already in his 1952 work *Black Skin, White Masks* referred to the harmful psychological constructs caused by racism, the blind subjection of black people to a universalized white norm, and the alienation of the conscience of black people.

59. Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21/2 (2007): 449–514; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 240–70.

knowledge, and of power, but also the ambivalence of all three, complete with mimical actions and with identities hybridically constituted.

The usefulness of a “decolonial” approach, on the one hand, appears to be evident: for the conceptual clarity it would offer for distinguishing between colonizer and colonized, perpetrator and victim, powerful and weak (“the wretched”). It can chart the terrain in terms of the “coloniality of being,” even if this notion is not fully colonial but ambivalent and ambiguous. On the other hand, can a decolonial approach take on board what lies beyond “public transcripts,” beyond structural contexts of empire, and also reflect the web of relations of domination and submission that constitutes the blood of the imperial body? In other words, in addition to a focus on ideology and power-mongering, does the *normalization* of authority, control, and violence across all spheres of human life within in imperial context not require investigation as well?

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the end, the interpretation of biblical texts stands to benefit from postcolonial criticism in today’s always complex, often tense situations, characterized by uneven power relations between people and groups and structures.<sup>60</sup> This is the nature of what prevails in the wake of colonization in Africa, after the fall of the South African apartheid regime in the 1990s (1994), and in what is globally discerned as neocolonialization in the form of globalizing economic and military imperialism by powerful countries such as the United States and China. Postcolonial work is averse to exclusivist binaries, given its focus on mimesis and hybridity in the postcolonial setting. It would rather make theoretical perspectives available with which to address pressing and lingering tensions in and around texts, without claiming primary agency toward reversing alienation, marginalization, and disenfranchisement.

As a multidimensional theoretical approach, postcolonial biblical hermeneutics renders some conspicuous gains. It is probably more capable than many others of acknowledging tensions identified in texts and hermeneutics, without invoking or reverting back to binaries; and

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60. Given postcolonial questions regarding “the pieties of the powerful” (Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 27), the perception of postcolonial work as tantamount to being beyond the interest of faith communities and therefore problematical in Africa, is too simplistic.

of accounting for complex relationships of power as identified in reading texts and contexts. The postcolonial endeavor goes beyond the accusatory mode, which insists on the absolution of guilt. Postcolonial work reacts to guilt by perpetration but also to implicated guilt due to the reestablishing of other replacement structures of privilege and want, oblivious to hegemonic patterns criticized previously. Postcolonial interpretation brings these relationships built upon unequal power and existing at both geopolitical and local or subsidiary levels into focus, emphasizing the complex yet co-constituting interrelationships between powerful and marginalized. A postcolonial optic, whether with ancient or contemporary alignment, focused on framing and investigating hegemony, and construing and analyzing power relations in and through and of texts, holds great promise for South African biblical interpretation.<sup>61</sup>

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61. Criticism against postcolonial theory and practice has not stayed out South African interpretation, found among others by scholars promoting liberation hermeneutics and those advocating a Marxist approach; cf. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 136–40. Postcolonialism's reach extends to the global *academic* world, providing "an ethical paradigm for a systematic critique of institutional suffering" (Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 174).

DEPLOYING THE LITERARY DETAIL OF  
A BIBLICAL TEXT (2 SAMUEL 13:1–22)  
IN SEARCH OF REDEMPTIVE MASCULINITIES

Gerald O. West

INTRODUCTION

Until recently African biblical hermeneutics was characterized as a comparative project.<sup>1</sup> Analysis was done of both the biblical text and the African context, and the two sets of analysis were then “compared,” in a range of different ways.<sup>2</sup> What has become more evident on closer scrutiny,<sup>3</sup> however, is that this “comparison” of text and context is a mediated process, involving a third pole, that of forms of ideological/theological appropriation.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Eric Anum, “Comparative Readings of the Bible in Africa: Some Concerns,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 457–73; Knut Holter, “Old Testament Scholarship in Sub-Saharan African North of the Limpopo River,” in West and Dube, *Bible in Africa*, 54–71.

2. Justin S. Ukpong, “Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions,” in West and Dube, *Bible in Africa*, 11–28.

3. Gerald O. West, “Interpreting ‘the Exile’ in African Biblical Scholarship: An Ideo-theological Dilemma in Post-colonial South Africa,” in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa OTWSA/OTSSA, Pretoria August 2007* (ed. Bob Becking and Dirk Human; OtSt 50; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 247–67.

4. Jonathan A. Draper, “‘For the Kingdom Is inside You and It Is outside of You’: Contextual Exegesis in South Africa,” in *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. P. J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 235–57; Jonathan A. Draper, “Reading the Bible as Conversation: A Theory and Methodology for Contextual Interpretation of the Bible in Africa,” *Grace and Truth*

Because the two “comparative” poles have been apparent to the scholarly gaze for longer than the third pole, they have received more careful critical attention. The critical techniques and discourses that have been forged over centuries to interrogate the various dimensions of “text” are often referred to as “exegesis.” And although exegesis has had a quite narrow connotation in the earlier parts of the last century, being restricted to historical-critical analysis, the term has expanded its embrace, even if reluctantly, to the literary, semiotic, and sociological detail of “text,” roughly in that historical order.<sup>5</sup> Of these “textual” dimensions, African biblical scholarship has tended to emphasize the sociohistorical, seeming to follow the dominant fashions of the wider guild, but doing so for local contextual reasons.<sup>6</sup>

Within African biblical scholarship, as in other “contextual” forms of biblical interpretation, the other pole, that of “context,” has also developed a critical discourse, though not a discourse specific to biblical studies. With respect to “context,” African biblical scholarship has drawn on the social sciences to analyze African contexts. While we have not always been as meticulous and rigorous in our use of social scientific forms of analysis with respect to context as we have with the textual forms of analysis, we aspire to a careful and critical analysis of context, moving beyond the anecdotal.

Here, then, is the “science” of our work as African biblical scholars.<sup>7</sup> And while we too have followed other scholarly discourses in downplay-

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19.2 (2002): 12–24; Gerald O. West, “Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa,” in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (ed. Diane B. Stinton; London: SPCK, 2010), 21–31.

5. Bernard C. Lategan, “Current Issues in the Hermeneutic Debate,” *Neot* 18 (1984): 1–17.

6. Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

7. I invoke the term *science* here for three reasons. First, an earlier form of this article was presented as a paper at the second Joint Conference of Southern African academic societies in Pietermaritzburg from 18–22 June 2012, which had the theme “Knowing, Believing, Living in Africa: Perspectives from Religion, Theology and Science.” Second, I offered an earlier version of this article to honor the work of my South African colleague Jurie le Roux, who regularly recalls us to the scientific rigor of our discipline. Third, in offering this version of the article to honor the work of David Clines, I celebrate the role he has played and the path he has paved in problematizing the very notion of “scientific exegesis.”



ing claims to neutrality and objectivity, we still want to insist that our work with “text” and “context” is done “critically,” that is, using an array of structured and systematic “scientific” questions. Indeed, as Itumeleng Mosala has cautioned us, in contexts such as ours, where the Bible matters, an “unstructural” analysis of the Bible often “reinforces and confirms” an “unstructural” understanding of the contemporary context in which the Bible is being appropriated.<sup>8</sup>

However, precisely because we have insisted on the “scientific” quality of our work, we have been reluctant to acknowledge *how* we connect “text” and “context.” A hallmark of most African biblical scholarship is that we do connect “text” and “context,” as I have indicated. This has long been acknowledged. But we are still developing a vocabulary for *how* this takes place. Throwing the term *hermeneutics* at the two poles of “text” and “context” is not sufficient. Precision about what is we are doing when we connect “text” and “context” is required, and an overtly “tripolar” model is offering us further theoretical incentive to do so.

As in many other aspects of African biblical scholarship, the late Justin Ukpong has shown the way: “The goal of interpretation is the actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today’s context so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation.”<sup>9</sup> Following his lead, Jonathan Draper and I have become more overt about the ideological dimension of appropriation. Clearly African biblical scholarship is driven by both ideological and theological agendas in the dialogue between biblical text and African context. And among the most common forms of appropriation within African biblical hermeneutics are inculturation, liberation, African feminism, and post-colonial forms of ideological-theological (ideo-theological) appropriation.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE EXEGESIS/APPROPRIATION NEXUS

My focus in this essay is on the relationship between exegesis and appropriation. So in a sense I am negotiating here the relationship between “science” and “ideo-theology.” In so doing I journey with two colleagues, one

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8. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 32.

9. Ukpong, “Developments,” 24.

10. The shift from the slash (/) to the hyphen (-) to the hybrid form (ideo-theological) is deliberate, signifying a growing recognition within African biblical hermeneutics of intersections between sociopolitical and religio-cultural agendas.

who has emphasized the former and one who has emphasized the latter. Jurie le Roux has been at the forefront of reminding us African interpreters that our work must not neglect the “substantial contribution” of the “critical scholarship of the past two centuries.”<sup>11</sup> And though his own work has emphasized the historical detail, he affirms the synchronic dimensions of text as well.<sup>12</sup> “Detailed exegesis” is what is important, requiring “an investigation of the smallest detail in the text.”<sup>13</sup> David Clines has, as both the title and subtitle of one of his books asserts, long recognized the role ideology plays in the work of both the writers and the readers of the biblical text, and indeed in the relationship between particular readers and particular texts.<sup>14</sup>

Like the bulk of African biblical scholars, le Roux refuses to terminate the interpretive process with exegesis. The detail is important precisely because it offers the potential for African appropriation. Critical *historical* scholarship, which is le Roux’s focus, offers this potential in two related ways. First, it offers “information on how the Old Testament was appropriated in different contexts and how it addressed social issues,”<sup>15</sup> and in so doing enables a responsible appropriation as we locate ourselves and our “re-telling” and “re-living” of Israel’s story within the long conversation of Israel’s “constant process of interpretation and re-interpretation, appropriation and actualisation.”<sup>16</sup> “Thus,” argues le Roux, “the actualisation of the Old Testament for the present day depends on the exegete’s competence to immerse him-/herself in the text and relive Israel’s past.”<sup>17</sup>

Le Roux is profoundly aware that entering into this hermeneutical process cannot be done “in a detached and formal way, merely describing objectively what was going on in the Hebrew text or what happened in the history of Israel.”<sup>18</sup> What I have called ideo-theological appropriation

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11. Jurie le Roux, “Africa and the Future of Our Scholarly Past,” in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 307–8.

12. Jurie le Roux, “Old Testament Studies: The Story of a Department,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30.3 (2009): 1–9.

13. *Ibid.*, 4, 5.

14. David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

15. Le Roux, “Story of a Department,” 2.

16. *Ibid.*, 6.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 7.

is part of the hermeneutical process, though le Roux does not use such terms. In his words, "the exegete's life context determines the exegesis of a text. The exegete's own life context (or '*praxis*') influences the exegetical process right from the beginning. Right from the onset the exegete 'sees' things in the text and this is determined by his/her own life context."<sup>19</sup> So, in sum, le Roux argues that "we in Africa must not shun from the scholarly challenges and results of the Old Testament science of the past two centuries. We must rather appropriate them because there-in lies great possibilities for understanding the text and our context."<sup>20</sup>

Clines too is interested in the ideology of scholarly interpreters, "especially the ways in which they either uncritically adopt the ideology of the text they are commenting on or impose the values of their own ideology upon the biblical text."<sup>21</sup> What interests Clines is this "clash of ideologies," as well as how ideo-theologies "influence people's actions" within a world in which there "is almost always a dissymmetry of power."<sup>22</sup> And whereas le Roux has championed the historical detail of text (when most of his colleagues were focused on forms of structuralism), Clines has been a defender of the literary detail of the text (when most of his colleagues were focused on forms of historical criticism). Clines's recognition and advocacy of literary modes of reading, since the 1970s,<sup>23</sup> has enabled a whole generation of scholars to find a place in the biblical studies academy.

Leaning on the contributions of these two scholars, le Roux and Clines, I will use the remainder of this essay to explore a recent example of exegesis seeking appropriation and appropriation seeking exegesis. I begin with the "science" of exegesis of a particular text, recognizing from the outset that I am using a rather constrained notion of "exegesis." Some would contest that there is a separate moment of "exegesis," insisting that all "exegesis" is already appropriation.<sup>24</sup> However, I allow myself to be constrained by the traditional denotations of "exegesis" because I want to affirm the

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19. Ibid., 2.

20. Le Roux, "Africa and the Future," 311.

21. Clines, "The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible," in *Interested Parties*, 18.

22. Ibid., 18, 24.

23. See, e.g., David J. A. Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1976); idem, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978).

24. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 11–27.

importance of the detail of the text, along with le Roux and Clines, in all the many dimensions of textual detail.<sup>25</sup>

In 1984 Phyllis Tribble published a landmark book, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*.<sup>26</sup> All three poles of the interpretive process are present in her work, but the bulk of the work is focused on literary exegesis. Indeed, a careful reading of the book today demonstrates that Tribble's treatment of "context" and "ideo-theological appropriation" is rather modest. The power of the book lies in its (literary) exegesis.

As one of the pioneers of literary exegesis (like Clines), at a time when conjoining these two terms would have been considered odd, Tribble is attentive to her exegetical craft/science. I remember well reading this book, together with a group of postgraduate students from different parts of the world, under the tutelage of Clines, at the University of Sheffield, in 1985 or 1986. And while most of us were in the class because of our contextual commitments (that is, because of our ideo-theological concerns), we were spellbound by Tribble's close and careful exegesis, what she did with the detail of the text.

I offer one example here, the story of Tamar (2 Sam 13:1–22). Tribble identifies the literary unit as combining "chiasmus and alternation,"<sup>27</sup> framed within a ring composition:<sup>28</sup>

- A. Introduction: Characters and Circumstances, 13:1–3
- B. Jonadab and Amnon, 13:4–5
- C. David and His Children, 13:6–9c
- D. The Crime: Amnon and Tamar, 13:9d–18
- B'. Tamar and Absalom, 13:19–20
- C'. David and His Children, 13:21
- A'. Conclusion: Characters and Circumstances, 13:22

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25. My emphasis will be on literary or synchronic exegesis, but my arguments hold for sociohistorical exegesis as well; see Gerald O. West, "Do Two Walk Together? Walking with the Other through Contextual Bible Study," *AThR* 93 (2011): 431–49. Indeed, my identification of this text as a literary unit, having an earlier "independent" existence outside the so-called Succession Narrative, is based on historical-critical criteria.

26. Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

27. *Ibid.*, 61 n. 50. For the whole outline, see 37–55.

28. *Ibid.*, 37, 49.

Given her ideo-theological commitments, which she is overt about, she attends in particular to the female figure of Tamar within this literary composition. In a footnote she makes an astute comment with regard to the relationship between exegesis and appropriation, noting that by employing “a feminist perspective” her “hermeneutical emphases” are different from those of other scholars, “even when literary observations concur.”<sup>29</sup> In what follows I will examine how “hermeneutical emphases” (or ideo-theological orientations) and “literary observations” (or textual details) engage each other.

Trible’s attention to the literary detail of this text dwelt with me for many years before some of this detail was activated by a contextual call for appropriation. It was in 1996 that colleagues and I from the Ujamaa Centre, an interface between socially engaged biblical scholarship and local communities of Bible “readers,”<sup>30</sup> were invited by a group of women to facilitate a workshop on the theme of women and violence.<sup>31</sup> Tamar’s story, opened up to me by Trible’s careful exegetical work, seemed a fitting biblical text to interpret together in this specific context, offering as it did considerable detail that might be appropriated. Following what was then an emerging shape of what has come to be called Contextual Bible Study, in which the Bible study begins and ends with the knowledge of the participants but includes the resources of biblical scholarship in between, we began to develop a Bible study on 2 Sam 13:1–22 that has come to have the following shape:

We read 2 Sam 13:1–22 aloud, preferably dramatically. A series of questions follow.

1. Read 2 Sam 13:1–22 together again in small groups. Share with one another what you think the text is about.

Each small group is then asked to report back to the larger group. Each and every response to question 1 is summarized on news-

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29. Ibid., 57 n. 2.

30. Gerald O. West, “The Not So Silent Citizen: Hearing Embodied Theology in the Context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa,” in *Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on Religious Work for the Disadvantaged* (ed. Trygve Wyller; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 37–40.

31. Gerald O. West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, “The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond),” *Ministerial Formation* 103 (2004): 4–12.

print. After this report, the participants return to their small groups to discuss the following questions.

2. Who are the main characters in this story, and what do we know about them?
3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
4. What does Tamar say, and what does Tamar do? Focus carefully on each element of what Tamar says and does.

When the small groups have finished their discussion, each group is invited to present a summary of its discussion. After this report, the smaller groups reconvene and discuss the following questions.

5. Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.
6. What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?

Once again, the small groups present their report back to the plenary group. Creativity is particularly vital here, as often women find it difficult or impossible to articulate their responses. A drama or a drawing may be the only way in which some groups can report.

Finally, each small group comes together to formulate an action plan.

7. What will you now do in response to this Bible study?

The action plan is either reported to the plenary group or presented on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.

The Contextual Bible Study is framed by “community knowledge” questions (questions 1, 5–7), with “critical biblical studies knowledge” in the form of questions in between (questions 2–4).<sup>32</sup> This format to “The Tamar Campaign” Bible study has taken years to evolve as we have worked with it in the action-reflection cycle of our praxis. We worked through a range of critical questions before we found the question that would focus the participants on the extensive literary detail of Tamar’s story. While the

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32. Gerald O. West, “The Contribution of Tamar’s Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities,” in *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim; LHBOTS 465; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 184–200.

overall shape of the Bible study draws on the exegetical detail of Tribble's work, focusing, as she does, on character, it is her careful work on the "central unit" of this text that has given this Bible study its impact in communities across the world.

The rape, or "the crime," is identified by Tribble as the "central unit" (D) (see above). Here, she says, "form and content yield a flawed chiasmus that embodies irreparable damage for the characters."<sup>33</sup> "The rape itself," she goes on to argue, "constitutes the center of the chiasmus. This design verifies the message of the preceding circular patterns: Tamar is entrapped for rape."<sup>34</sup> So within the central unit (13:9d–18), Tribble identifies the following "flawed" chiasmus, which she then goes on to analyze in detail:<sup>35</sup>

- a Amnon's command to the servants and their response (13:9de)
- b Amnon's command to Tamar and her response (13:10–11a)
  - c Conversation between Amnon and Tamar (13:11b–14a)
    - d Rape (13:14b–15b)
  - c'–b' Conversation between Amnon and Tamar:  
Amnon's command to Tamar and her response  
(13:15c–16)
- a' Amnon's command to a servant and his response (13:17–18)

This exegetical analysis became crucial to our work and is offered to the participants in the form of question 4. Question 4 compels the participants to return to reread the text, yet again, this time focusing carefully on this central unit. Our question 4, however, expands Tribble's central unit, extending it to include Tamar's actions (13:8–19), for in our analysis Tamar is an agent before and after she is a victim. The chiasmus we work with begins and ends with Tamar, not Amnon.

- a Tamar "went" (and other actions) ... (13:8–9b)
- b Amnon's command to the servants and their response  
(13:9de)
  - c Amnon's command to Tamar and her response  
(13:10–11a)

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33. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 43.

34. Ibid., 44.

35. Ibid.

- d Conversation between Amnon and Tamar  
(13:11b–14a)
- e Rape (13:14b–15b)
- d'–c' Conversation between Amnon and Tamar:  
Amnon's command to Tamar and her response  
(13:15c–16)
- b' Amnon's command to a servant and his response  
(13:17–18)
- a' Tamar "put" (and other actions) ... (13:19)

Why did we expand the chiasmus? What made us reexamine Tribble's literary analysis? Surely a chiasmus is an "objective" structure? My tone here is ironic, for all exegetes know that our science remains open to contestation and even "falsification,"<sup>36</sup> that most noble of scientific virtues! The honest answer is that our African feminist ideo-theological appropriation, shaped by the women's struggle in our South African context, wanted to emphasize the agency of women. And as we brought this contextual concern to the text, via the mediating conversation of our African feminist ideo-theological framework, we noticed a detail that Tribble had "missed." Our chiasmus is in the text. We are not importing it into the text; we are not doing eisegesis. Our ideo-theological orientation has opened up a detail of the text not previously picked out by Tribble's analysis. Our appropriation has led to exegesis.

So question 4, to some extent, takes us beyond Tribble's emphasis, for just as our extended chiasmus emphasizes the agency of Tamar, so too does the focus of this question. In her analysis of what is the third element of her construction of the chiasmus (c), Tribble does give careful attention to the detail of Tamar's "deliberations,"<sup>37</sup> but her emphasis is on how the narrative design "verifies the message of the preceding circular patterns. Tamar is entrapped for rape."<sup>38</sup> This is a persuasive reading of the details, particularly when we remember that Tribble's intention in this book is to offer "a third approach" to feminist hermeneutics. The first and most familiar approach "documents the case against women," showing "the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of the female in ancient Israel and the early church." The second approach "discerns within the Bible critiques of patriarchy. It

36. Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1978).

37. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 45.

38. *Ibid.*, 44.



upholds forgotten texts and reinterprets familiar ones to shape a remnant theology that challenges the sexism of scripture.” The third approach, says Tribble, “incorporates the other two. It recounts tales of terror *in memoriam* to offer sympathetic readings of abused women.”<sup>39</sup> While Tribble seems to lean in her exegesis of 2 Sam 13:1–22 more toward the first approach (as part of her third approach), we have tended to lean in the direction of the second approach, emphasizing the resisting detail of the text.

Tribble notes that Amnon’s imperatives in elements (a) and (b) of the chiasmus are met with “objection” from Tamar. In the presence of the rapist, Tamar does not panic. “In fact,” asserts Tribble, “she claims her voice.”<sup>40</sup> But while Tribble gives careful attention to each of the components of Tamar’s direct speech, noting how the deliberations of Tamar “slow the movement of the plot,” Tribble’s emphasis is on how “they are unable to divert it.”<sup>41</sup> The plot, together with the narrator (who does not use Tamar’s name in introducing her speeches), argues Tribble, portrays “her powerlessness.”<sup>42</sup> Our emphasis, as I have said, is on Tamar’s speech as resistance. By extending the chiasmus as we have done to include the actions of Tamar in verses 8–9b and 19, we are able also to emphasize the agency of Tamar in her conversations/contestations with Amnon (d, and d’–c’). Question 4 has the potential to open up these dimensions of the detail of the text.

This process of exegesis offering us a form of appropriation in the Tamar Contextual Bible Study, and of the Tamar Contextual Bible Study returning us to the text “to see” new (“objective”) detail in the text, has continued. The decades in which the Tamar Contextual Bible Study has been done around the world have produced a common refrain from the many women with whom we have worked. The focus on Tamar, a young woman who is sexually abused, is important, but what about a focus on men? The Ujamaa Centre has endeavored to heed this call (as has David Clines in his work)<sup>43</sup> and has produced a series of Contextual Bible Studies exploring a range of aspects of masculinity.<sup>44</sup> The reason we did not use

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39. Ibid., 3.

40. Ibid., 45.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 46.

43. David J. A. Clines, “David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Interested Parties*, 212–43.

44. See the series on “Redemptive Masculinity.” Online: <http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Practical.aspx>.

the Tamar Contextual Bible Study in our emerging work on masculinity was that the text portrays each of the male characters as implicated in the rape of Tamar. We were in search of “redemptive masculinities” and so had to look elsewhere in the Bible for resources. But because we continued to do the Tamar Contextual Bible Study we continued to be confronted with the text. While working with the Tamar Contextual Bible Study, as part of the Fourth Pan African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Yaoundé, Cameroun, in 2007, I reread (again) 13:2, seeing it in a new way. Tribble had translated this verse as follows:

So tormented was Amnon that he made himself ill  
on account of Tamar his sister,  
for a virgin was she,  
and it was impossible in the eyes of Amnon  
to do to her anything.<sup>45</sup>

Here is a powerful portrayal of character, full of detail. Tribble’s analysis picks up on Amnon’s “desire, lust-sickness and violent yearning” as she carefully probes the narrator’s emphasis on familial ties.<sup>46</sup> In terms of plot, 13:2 is, for Tribble, the start of the complication. Though she does not use this form of plot analysis, her analysis indicates that 13:2 is part of the plot’s “complication.” There are, of course, many ways to approach plot. But a common way of analyzing how plots “move,” since Aristotle,<sup>47</sup> has been to see plot as having three fundamental movements: exposition, complication, resolution.<sup>48</sup> “Plots move,” argues Jerome Walsh, “like an arc from a situation of (relative) stability, through a process of tension or destabilization, to a new situation of (relative) stability.”<sup>49</sup> For Tribble, verse 1 is the exposition (a situation of relative stability), and verse 2 is the beginning of

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45. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 39.

46. *Ibid.*, 38–39.

47. Aristotle, *Poetics* (trans. Gerald F. Else; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 30.

48. David J. A. Clines, “Reading Esther from Left to Right: Contemporary Strategies for Reading a Biblical Text,” in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 292–293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1:5.

49. Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 14.

the narrative tension. But what if 13:2 is part of the “exposition”? What if the “complication” or tension only begins in 13:3?

Our problem with using this text in our work with men was that it portrayed men as perpetrators, with each of the male characters playing some role in the rape of Tamar. Indeed, question 3 of the Bible study above invites such an analysis. But if verse 2 can be considered an aspect of the narrative’s exposition, then it portrays an Amnon who is full of desire but who does not act, precisely because, as Tribble notes, “as a virgin, Tamar is protected property, inaccessible to males, including her brother.”<sup>50</sup> Amnon’s state of heightened desire could be considered a state of relative stability! Verses 1–2 form the exposition, introducing the family (13:1), and introducing the initial “stable” state of the relationship between Amnon and Tamar. On this exegesis of the text, Amnon is a normal male. Like most males he experiences sexual desire, but he does not (initially) act on this desire, because of a whole range of sociocultural constraints. It is Jonadab who ushers in the complication (13:3).

This insight, this recognition of the detail of the text, offered us a way of working with this text with men. So we have returned to this text and have begun to evolve a Redemptive Masculinity Contextual Bible Study using this text. At the moment, its form is somewhat flexible, but a relatively stable version of it is as follows:

We read 2 Sam 13:1–22 aloud, preferably dramatically. After the text has been read, a series of questions follow.

1. Have you heard this text (2 Sam 13:1–22) read publically ... on a Sunday? Share with one another if and when and where you have heard this text read.
2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
4. How would you characterize Amnon’s masculinity in this text? Consider:  
What prevents Amnon initially from acting on his love/lust for Tamar (v. 2)?

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50. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 38.

What is it that changes Amnon's love (v. 1) to lust (v. 2), and then enables him to act on his desire/lust (vv. 4–6)?

What is it then that enables him to act on his love/desire/lust (vv. 4–6)?

How does he react to Tamar's arguments (v. 14)?

How does he behave after he has raped Tamar (vv. 15–17)?

5. What does Tamar's response to Amnon's assault tell us about her understanding of masculinity? Consider: What does she say (vv. 12–13, 16), and what do each of the things she says tell us about her understanding of what it means to be "a man"?

What does she do (v. 19), and what do each of things she does tell us about her understanding of what it means to be "a man"?

6. What are the dominant forms of masculinity in our contexts (in various age groups), and what alternative forms of masculinity can we draw on from our cultural and religious traditions?
7. How can we raise the issue of masculinity in our various gender and age groups?

The action plan is either reported to the plenary or presented on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.

Question 1 performs a similar function to that of the first question in the Tamar Contextual Bible Study, but draws attention to the absence of the text in the male-dominated world of religious life, whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim (and this Bible study has been done by participants from each of these faith traditions, in each case at their own initiative). Questions 2 and 3, as in the Tamar study, draw attention to the details of characterization in the text and provide an overall orientation to the story. Questions 4 and 5 slow the "reading" process down considerably,<sup>51</sup> posing two related and quite difficult questions. In working with this Redemptive Masculinities Contextual Bible Study, we have wrestled with these two questions, often reformulating them, in order to devise a form of question that combines a careful reading of the text with the participants' own

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51. John Riches, ed., *What Is Contextual Bible Study? A Practical Guide with Group Studies for Advent and Lent* (London: SPCK, 2010), 41.

understandings of notions of “masculinity.” So far, we have settled on a general question and then some prompting subquestions that focus the participants on particular details of the text, such as the characterization of Amnon in verse 2. By introducing these prompting subquestions in question 4 we direct the rereading process to particular textual details and so offer participants some of the fruits of the critical literary analysis of biblical scholarship, including the kind of detail Tribble identifies in her exegesis of the central chiasmus.

By introducing the prompting subquestions in question 5 (of the Redemptive Masculinities Contextual Bible Study), we again offer participants the opportunity to engage with the kind of literary detail discussed in terms of the Tamar Contextual Bible Study (above). But in addition we offer participants the opportunity to retell and relive Tamar’s story by imagining with her what kind of masculinities she and we yearn for. Question 5 enables participants both to focus “on the smallest detail in the text, by a close reading of each word,” and to “re-enact” part of Israel’s past.<sup>52</sup>

Once again, appropriation has opened up details of the text not emphasized by Tribble. Appropriation has led to exegesis, for it is clear that the detail is “in the text.” And while this detail is literary rather than historical, the argument le Roux puts forward holds: “Historical [and literary] investigation illuminates the many facets of our shared humanity; it is a way of relating to life and its challenges, a way of discovering life’s meaning by understanding the lives of others, a way of understanding humanity’s hopes and fears, and a means of providing some direction and orientation in this life.”<sup>53</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The science of exegesis will remain a resource beyond the confines of the academic community as long as the Bible is a significant text for faith communities, for exegesis offers important details to ordinary readers of the Bible that they do not usually have access to. Often, the very details denied them by the church is vital in their daily struggles to live full abundant lives. Second Samuel 13:1–22 is not normally read in church on a Sunday (or other Sabbath days), as any lectionary will demonstrate. Yet here is a

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52. Le Roux, “Story of a Department,” 5, 6.

53. *Ibid.*, 6.

text with important details for women and men in the context of gender violence.

But as I have also shown, bringing our contexts to bear on the Bible, acknowledging the ideo-theological orientations that enable this encounter, provides the impetus to exegetical innovation, enabling the (socially engaged) scholar “to see” details of the text that have gone unnoticed.

PART 3  
LANGUAGE AND LEXICOGRAPHY





## NEOLOGISMS: A SEPTUAGINT PROBLEM

James K. Aitken

What makes a new word? Invention in the material world or technological innovation are common causes in our day for vocabulary innovation: computer, mainframe, mobile (phone), tweet, blog. Such innovations lead to the creation of new words, or as in some of these cases (e.g., mobile), an extended denotation of an already existing word. An invention such as the bicycle not only gave us the new word itself, but led to the semantic extension of the verb “to ride.”<sup>1</sup> No longer did we ride only animals, but now we could also ride bicycles or other vehicles. Less tangible but equally influential are innovations within a sociolect, most prominently within popular culture or among the vocabulary of the young. The extension in contemporary English of the adjective *wicked* to mean something positive is a striking example of this. Invention too by literary authors for the effect of the sound of the word or to convey a new concept is well known. Lewis Carroll’s poem “Jabberwocky” is an extreme example of this, with its opening lines:

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.<sup>2</sup>

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1. This example is common in semantic discussions, e.g., John Lyons, *Semantics* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1:263; Frank R. Palmer, *Semantics: A New Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 78. It derives from the work of Walter Porzig, “Wesenhafte Bedeutungsbeziehungen,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 58 (1934): 78.

2. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (London: Macmillan, 1872), 21.

The majority of words are invented or nonce words, yet resemble other words in English sufficiently that native speakers feel they understand their meaning. Alice rightly comments upon reading the poem: "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are!"<sup>3</sup> Most of Carroll's words were not adopted into the language,<sup>4</sup> but, nonetheless, such literary invention will be familiar to anyone reading academic writers, where terms are created for conveying particular innovative concepts. In such cases the terms can often catch on, although equally often they do not. Linguists even have a word for such terms, *protologisms* (itself a modern neologism), a word that is new and not yet established beyond a small group.<sup>5</sup> Finally, language contact inevitably leads to a further class of neologisms, namely transliterations and loanwords.

In the study of ancient languages all these aspects of neologisms can be found. David Clines has taken a particular interest in this area of Hebrew, presenting in a range of conference papers "new words" that he has identified.<sup>6</sup> In such cases, these are words that arise from scholarly proposals for new meanings or for the bifurcation of known roots into separate classifications, either through contextual exegesis or cognate linguistic evidence. It does raise the questions, though, as to how to identify a new word in a language and how one might come about. Undoubtedly,

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3. Ibid., 24.

4. Some were, the most notable being *chortle*, a type of laughing (a combination of *chuckle* and *snort*).

5. Coined by Mikhail N. Epstein, "Типы новых слов: футурологизм, одно-слобие, протологизм [Types of New Words: Futurologism, Univerbalism, Protologism]," in *Русская академическая неография (к 40-летию научного направления): материалы международной конференции* [Russian Academic Neography (Toward the 40-year Anniversary of the Scholarly Direction): Papers from an International Conference] (ed. T. G. Butseva and O. M. Kareva; St. Petersburg: Russian Academy, 2006), 180–84. It has now caught on as a term and is thus no longer itself a protologism.

6. E.g., David J. A. Clines, "725 New Words Beginning with Mem or Nun," in *"Basel und Bibel": Collected Communications to the XVIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT), Basel 2001* (ed. Matthias Augustin and Hermann Michael Niemann; BEATAJ 51; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 281–96; cf. David J. A. Clines, "Was There a ברה II 'vex' or ברה III 'wound, bruise, pierce' or ברה IV 'bar' in Classical Hebrew?" in *Shai le-Sara Japhet: Studies in the Bible, Its Exegesis, and Its Language* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al.; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 285\*–304\*. It is a pleasure to dedicate this paper to David, in recognition of his scholarship and of his friendship and support over the years.

much of the scholarly focus has been on identifying new meanings as a method of unraveling an interpretive knot; and in Biblical Hebrew, where we have such a limited corpus of the language, suggestions are aimed at elucidating a meaning or word that is unknown or lost to us but presumably familiar to an ancient reader. However, it is possible that authors as creative literary writers invented neologisms for their own purposes, in the manner if not to the extent of Lewis Carroll. Some of our difficulties in reading works such as the book of Job or Ecclesiastes could easily arise from such invention or extension of meaning. Our limited resources for the language render it nigh impossible to determine such cases, although greater attention to the formation of neologisms might assist in this task. I have chosen to focus on the Septuagint here, since the far greater extent of the attestation of the language, from Homer (or even the earlier Mycenaean of Linear B) continuously through to the Roman period (after the completion of the LXX), allows for more precision in this area. At the same time, the type of evidence is far more diverse, covering a range of literary genres and providing different registers in the language, including evidence from nonliterary sources in papyri and inscriptions. There is a greater chance of identifying a word as a neologism with such corroborating evidence. The Septuagint also raises its own particular problems, as well as opportunities: as a translation there is a chance to see the creativity of an artist at work, as we gain a glimpse of the translator's grappling with rendering Hebrew into Greek.

#### A SEPTUAGINT PROBLEM

At first blush the Septuagint would appear to contain a high number of neologisms. Certainly the older theories of Biblical Greek being a peculiar dialect of Greek, a "Jewish Greek," implied that the translators had been inventing new meanings, particularly by imposing Hebrew meanings on Greek words.<sup>7</sup> The discovery of papyri and inscriptions would change that. Adolf Deissmann was the leading proponent of a new understanding that showed how much Biblical Greek, both of the Septuagint and of the New

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7. The standard summative critique of this view is Gregory H. R. Horsley, "The Fiction of 'Jewish Greek,'" in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 5: *Linguistic Essays* (ed. G. H. R. Horsley; North Ryde: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1989), 5–40.

Testament, was typical of contemporary Greek.<sup>8</sup> Taking into account bilingual interference either from the translation task or from the spoken language, one could call it the standard Greek of the time. Where the idiom seemed to be Semitic, Deissmann was able to show it was in fact attested in contemporary Greek and that apparent new words in Biblical Greek were already known at the time. One such case is the word ἀντιλήμπτωρ (appearing sixteen times in LXX Psalms), which Deissmann was the first to identify in papyri as having a significance for Biblical Greek.<sup>9</sup> He noted in the case of this word that it had not hitherto been authenticated outside biblical literature, and had been seen as “peculiar to the LXX,” but now was seen as a word of petition to the Ptolemaic king.<sup>10</sup> Such discoveries led him and others to confirm that the language of the Bible was comparable to the language that was attested in some documentary papyri and typical of the vernacular used in Egypt in Ptolemaic times.

This does not rule out the possibility that some words have nonetheless been influenced by the Hebrew source text that they are rendering, or that terms have been invented to convey new concepts in the language.<sup>11</sup> This is undoubtedly the case with transliterations (e.g., σαβεκ, Gen 22:13), some of which were probably already in use in the language before being chosen as translation equivalents (e.g., πάσχα, Exod 12:48). A problem arises in that speakers of Koine were particularly productive in their generation of new words, so that if we recognize that the language of the Septuagint is the language of everyday use in Egypt, we also need to recognize that words could have been in use without our knowing them. It is important to be aware that the language of the time period within which the Septuagint falls has not been as well documented in modern reference works of Classical Greek, and the interval between classical and the second or first century B.C.E. is sufficiently large for shifts in the language. Furthermore, the particular need in the new Ptolemaic Empire for a trained scribal class

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8. See in particular for the LXX, G. Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (trans. Alexander Grieve; 2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909).

9. Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, 91; cf. O. Montevecchi, “Quaedam de graecitate psalmorum cum papyris comparata,” in *Proceedings of the IX International Congress of Papyrology (Oslo, 1958)* (Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press, 1961), 293–310.

10. See, e.g., Ulrich Wilken, ed., *Papyri aus Unterägypten* (vol. 1 of *Urkunden der Ptolemäerzeit*; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1927), 14 r2.18.

11. For a good example of this, see Cameron Boyd-Taylor, “Lexicography and Interlanguage—Gaining Our Bearings,” *BIOSCS* 37 (2004): 55–72.

to manage the bureaucracy probably led to technical training and vocabulary. Dorothy Thompson has suggested that this new administrative system in Greek, with its official communications and legal procedures, generated a complex vocabulary and syntax, a bureaucratic jargon.<sup>12</sup> She points to extensions in meaning (σκέπη meaning “patronage” or “protection”), and the unusual use of vocabulary, whether abstract nouns (συκοφαντία “sycophancy” or “extortion”; φιλαντία “selfishness”; ἀντίληψις “defense”—two of which incidentally are found in the LXX) or colorful verbs (σκύλλομαι, διασεῖω, περισπάω, all meaning “to harm”).<sup>13</sup> To this we might also add the need for terms to identify officials or administrative tasks, some of which are also found in the Septuagint: ἀρχισωματοφύλαξ, τοπάρχης, φορολόγος, γασβαρηνός, and so on. These are comparable to the technical innovations of our own day.

The extent to which the Septuagint is striking in its inclusion of seemingly new vocabulary can be shown by reference to the *Lexicon* by Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie.<sup>14</sup> They mark words as neologisms in two ways: those words that seem distinctive to the Septuagint and literature dependent upon it are marked with the abbreviation “neol.,” although the editors recognize that suggestions are tentative; and those words also appearing in “contemporary” papyri and literature (beginning with Polybius in the second century) are marked with “neol.?”<sup>15</sup> A search of this *Lexicon* indicates that there are a total of 1,689 words marked by either “neol.” or “neol.?” Similarly, in Muraoka’s *Lexicon* we are told that there are 9,548 headwords, of which 1,900 are marked by an asterisk, indicating that the word is not attested earlier than the Septuagint.<sup>16</sup> He admits that this does not necessarily mean that those words are created by the translators, and recognizes that an appearance in Polybius, for example, implies the word is simply poorly attested but would have existed earlier, and that one must take into account the existence of etymologically or semantically related

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12. Dorothy J. Thompson, “Literacy and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (ed. Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76–77.

13. *Ibid.*, 77.

14. Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (rev. ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003) (originally published in two parts, 1992, 1996).

15. *Ibid.*, xiv.

16. Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), xiii.

words too. Nonetheless, taking the crude designations of these lexicons as a starting point, it would suggest that one in five (20 percent) Septuagint words could be a neologism. This clearly cannot be the case, and although the editors recognize their designations are merely indicators of current attestation, it can be misleading. There needs to be far greater refinement of the definition of *neologism*.

The reality is that ancient Greek was receptive to the creation of new words. Much of John Lee's influential *Lexical Study of the Septuagint* is focused upon innovations, classed as new semantic developments (in existing words), new formations (on existing stems), new words (primarily loanwords or dialectal variants), and innovation through obsolescence.<sup>17</sup> This last point is one important indication of how to recognize when a word is a neologism—the disappearance of an earlier word in a language leads to the compensatory appearance of another. In contemporary politically charged discussions this is seen as a negative result of neologization: linguicide. For the historian, however, it is one method to trace developments in the language. Lee takes a restrained approach to the identification of new words, noting throughout that even if a word is not attested outside the Septuagint, there is in most cases, given the ability to create new formations from existing stems in Greek, no reason why it has to be unique to the Septuagint. He thus points to *πλινθεία* “brickmaking,” only attested in the Septuagint (Exod 1:14, etc.) and Josephus (*Ant.* 2.289) but one of many derivatives of *πλίνθος*; and to *διασάφησις* “explanation, interpretation,” only attested in the Septuagint (Gen 40:8) but a normal formation of the verb *διασαφέω*, well attested in papyri. Accordingly for these he concludes that there is no reason to doubt that they are “normal Greek.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Lee's questioning of the invention of a technical word *προσήλυτος* for “convert”<sup>19</sup> might now have been vindicated by the discovery of a documentary papyrus with the very word.<sup>20</sup>

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17. John A. L. Lee, *A Lexical Study of the Septuagint Version of the Pentateuch* (SBLSCS 14; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 53–84, 85–113, 114–17, 118–28. See too his general discussion of the issue of new words (40–44).

18. *Ibid.*, 47. Indeed, the noun *διασάφησις* has now been reconstructed in a first-century B.C.E. inscription from Mysia in Thessaly (*IG IX.2*), which, if valid, would support his suspicion.

19. John A. L. Lee, “Equivocal and Stereotyped Renderings in the LXX,” *RB* 87 (1980): 112–13.

20. David M. Moffitt and C. Jacob Butera, “P.Duk.inv. 727: A Dispute with ‘Proselytes’ in Egypt,” *ZPE* 177 (2011): 201–6.

There is a need for more descriptors of so-called new words, identifying them as semantic extensions, unattested compounds, morphological extensions, foreign loans, and so on. It still remains possible that authors and, in the case here, translators could form new words for particular purposes, as much as new words were easily formed for administrative purposes in Egypt. One sees this very much happening in Hellenistic poets, where the endings of nouns are remodeled in the manner of Homeric vocabulary.<sup>21</sup> As an illustration, then, of the complex process of analyzing neologisms in the Septuagint, I will now focus on a few select examples from the Greek version of Ecclesiastes. I will pay attention to the negotiation a translator must make between rendering his source text and producing a target text that has some effect in Greek. The examples chosen are those that reflect some difficulties but more importantly illustrate how we should be examining the multicausal explanation of any one phenomenon.

#### THE CASE OF QOHELETH/ECCLESIASTES

The Hebrew text of Qoheleth contains a striking range of vocabulary, whether it be words particularly favored by the author or new senses for words. The possible position of the book within Late Biblical Hebrew and the presence of Persian loanwords, Aramaisms, and Grecisms contribute to a distinctive and at times unique lexical stock.<sup>22</sup> There are a potential forty Hebrew words unique to Qoheleth within the biblical corpus,<sup>23</sup> and in addition another thirty-two that can be considered typical of Qoheleth but less frequently used elsewhere in the corpus.<sup>24</sup> As a result any study of the lexicon of the Greek translation is bound to prove informative, and yet at the same time could run the risk of telling us more about the distinctive character of the Hebrew source language than of the translator's

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21. For examples in the Sibylline Oracles, see Jane L. Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles: With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 172.

22. On the vocabulary, see esp. Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth*, part 2: *Vocabulary* (OLA 143; Leuven: Peeters, 2004). See too the essay by Stuart Weeks in ch. 26 of this volume. On loanwords, see Schoors, *Preacher*, 501.

23. *Ibid.*, 423–70.

24. *Ibid.*, 197–260.

own profile. As a result a careful analysis of the types of lexemes chosen is necessary.

The Greek of Ecclesiastes, usually considered one of the latest books in the Septuagint owing to its similarity to Aquila (early second century C.E.), contains a distinctive vocabulary in comparison to the rest of the Septuagint. This was elegantly put by Erich Klostermann in 1892: “For such a small book there is found a vast number of rare words or *hapax legomena*.”<sup>25</sup> To my count, of the 631 words in Ecclesiastes, at least 37 are *hapax legomena* within the Septuagint, and of these at least 16 could be said to be neologisms, without taking into account new senses.<sup>26</sup> The list of words not attested elsewhere is itself a demonstration of the independence of the translator from the other Greek translations. The examples chosen will illustrate the choices he made. In each case the translator can be said either to have created a new word or sense (a true neologism), or to have chosen a rare form for a particular purpose (a neologism within the LXX).

ἀνθέμιον (Eccl 12:6)

The noun ἀνθέμιον, attested in Koine at the same time as the early Septuagint books, would normally denote a flower or anything that blossoms, being a diminutive (in form at least) of ἄνθος.<sup>27</sup> As an extension of this, ἀνθέμιον also denotes the representation of plants in architecture, such as the honeysuckle pattern on Ionic columns (IG I.322). The noun in Ecclesiastes could be interpreted differently, however. The advice given to the young man is to remember his Creator and be mindful of his death:

עד אשר לא־חבל הכסף ותרך גלת הזהב

25. Erich Klostermann, *De libri Coheleth versione Alexandrina. Dissertatio inauguralis quam consensus et auctoritate amplissimi philosophorum ordinis in universitate Christiana Albertina Kiliensi ad summos in philosophia honores rite capessendos* (Kiel: Ex officina Schmidt & Klaunig, 1892), 38: “Vocabulorum pro libelli volumine magnus invenitur numerus rarorum vel ἅπαξ λεγομένων.”

26. Namely, ἀνθέμιον (Eccl 12:6), βούκεντρον (12:11), δόκωσις (10:18), ἔντριτος (4:12), ἐντρύφημα (2:8), ἐπικραταιόομαι (4:12), κόπωσις (12:12), κόσμιον (12:9), ὀκνηρία (10:18), ὀχληρία (7:25), περασμός (4:8, 16; 12:12), περίλημψις (3:5), περισσεία (1:3, etc.), πληροφορέω (8:11), σύναγμα (12:11), συντροχάζω (12:6).

27. George B. Caird (“Towards a Lexicon of the Septuagint I,” *JTS* 19 [1968]: 460) describes it as a “pathetic diminutive,” but the presence of common Koine diminutives elsewhere in the book means that it is not required to interpret its sense as diminutive.



ἕως ὅτου μὴ ἀνατραπῇ σχοινίον τοῦ ἀργυρίου,  
καὶ συνθλιβῇ ἀνθέμιον τοῦ χρυσοῦ

NETS: before the cord of silver is ruined and the blossom of gold is crushed

In Koine it is common to find diminutive forms of nouns used where the regular form would have sufficed, and thus we need not infer a diminutive sense.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in Ecclesiastes diminutive nouns are frequent, some being already standard in Koine, some perhaps owing to the translator's predilection.<sup>29</sup> In this verse LSJ (139) provides a unique gloss for ἀνθέμιον, "of gold, *the purest quality*," evidently influenced by their third category of meanings for ἄνθος as "*brightness, brilliancy*, as of gold." Caird suggests that LSJ's definition has no justification and makes no sense in the passage.<sup>30</sup> The justification is provided, however, by certain frequent uses of ἄνθος (LSJ 140: "III. *brightness, brilliancy*"), while the meaning of destruction of perfect gold or of the brilliance of gold would make as much sense as the destruction of an object made of gold. Nevertheless, Caird is correct that there is no reason to discount the common senses of ἀνθέμιον. He proposes that the adjectives silver and gold in the verse might be descriptive genitives, retaining the metaphorical character of the Hebrew: "or ever the silver cord (of life) snaps and the golden bloom (of youth) is shattered." Alternatively, he explains that the nouns ἀργύριον and χρυσίον usually denote silver and gold money, so that the translator might have meant "or ever the cord of silver (money) snaps and the lustre of gold is shattered." Either is a legitimate reading of the Hebrew, although it should be noted that in his alternatives Caird has given different definitions of ἀνθέμιον (once as bloom of "youth," and once as "lustre"). In fact, in the second case ("lustre") he comes close to the LSJ definition of which he disapproves.

To account for the choice of ἀνθέμιον here, it needs to be seen in context. While it is not a neologism in Greek, given its use in early Koine and the likely late date of Greek Ecclesiastes, it is a striking use. In the Greek the noun is translating הַלָּא, a word appearing in five other places in the

28. E.g., Donald C. Swanson, "Diminutives in the Greek New Testament," *JBL* 77 (1958): 134–51; Keith Elliott, "Nouns with Diminutive Endings in the New Testament," *NovT* 12 (1970): 391–98.

29. Note ἀργύριον, βιβλίον, βουκόλιον, ἱμάτιον, κόσμιον, νεανίσκος, παιδίσκη, ποίμνιον, σιδήριον, σπαρτίον, στρουθίον, σχοινίον, χρυσίον.

30. Caird, "Towards a Lexicon I," 459.

Hebrew Bible. In Joshua it refers to springs (Josh 15:19; cf. Judg 1:15), in 1 Kings (7:41–42) it is an architectural feature of a capital, and in Zechariah (4:2–3) it is an object placed on a golden lampstand. This last use has led to some presuming it is a similar object, a “golden bowl,” in Ecclesiastes.<sup>31</sup> Septuagint translations for these citations reflect the various uses of the Hebrew, merely transliterating (Γολαθμαιν, Josh 15:19; γωλαθ, 2 Chr 4:12, 13) or translating by “discharge [of water]” (i.e., “spring”; λύτρωσις, Judg 1:15 [A, B]) and “small torch” (λαμπάδιον, a diminutive form of λαμπάς, Zech 4:3).

We might have an insight into the translator’s working method here. He has not followed any of the other translations but made his own choice. In its denotation of a spring of water, the Hebrew can be understood as something that springs out or erupts, a sense also inferred for Greek ἄνθος (so LSJ 140 §2). It is possible he was aware of Zechariah’s λαμπάδιον and wished to allude to that through a diminutive, but the diminutive creates parallelism in the verse with σχοινίον. It seems most likely that ἀνθέμιον is an object to complement σχοινίον, but there could be an attempt to convey the double meaning of the Hebrew. The noun ἄνθος can denote anything thrown up, including precious metals from a furnace, and therefore the translator chooses a word that conveys the sense of the Hebrew “discharging” used of springs of water. At the same time he has indicated an object, a golden flower, which is something special, perhaps known through Zechariah as a decorative part of a lampstand. He has additionally created a morphological parallelism with the first part of the verse, and perhaps too with an allusion to the diminutive in Zechariah. He has the triple intention of representing the ambiguity of the Hebrew, alluding to Zechariah, and providing a Greek text that makes sense. I have opted for the expected meaning of cognate ἄνθος “flower,” rather than resort to a complex hypothesis, but suggest that the choice of the word has a number of explanations.

βούκεντρον (Eccl 12:11)

דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים כְּדֶרֶבֶנּוֹת וּכְמַשְׁמְרוֹת נְטוּעִים

Λόγοι σοφῶν ὡς τὰ βούκεντρα καὶ ὡς ἥλοι πεφυτευμένοι

The words of the wise are as oxgoads and as planted nails

31. Schoors, *Preacher*, 378.

It is difficult to evaluate βούκεντρον “oxgoad” as it is rarely attested outside patristic commentaries on Ecclesiastes. It renders בִּזְרֵי, which does not elicit the need for a compound noun and whose translation elsewhere is unclear (1 Sam 13:21). Nevertheless, the formation of the compound is natural in Greek (cf. the Homeric βουπλήξ, *Il.* 6.135), so it is possible the word did exist in Greek independent of Ecclesiastes, but equally possible for a translator to have invented it through simple analogy. The ancient lexicographers and scholiasts often cite βούκεντρον as a gloss for the Homeric βουπλήξ, implying that it was the norm for the obsolete Homeric term (e.g., Pausanias, *Attic Names*, s.v.; Photius, *Lexicon*, s.v.; Suda, s.v.). Since the lexicographers do not seem to be dependent upon Ecclesiastes here, it might be evidence that the word existed in Greek but has not survived in our sources, whether literary or documentary. Its restriction to discussions on Homer, though, could imply that the standard word for a “goad,” κέντρον, is used for the gloss to account for Homeric πλήξ. Since Homeric πλήξ appears in a compound βουπλήξ, then a compound is formed to represent the Homeric compound with βου-: βούκεντρον. The obscure element is modernized, while the familiar “ox” does not need modifying.

As the translator could have chosen the simple κέντρον or equivalent it still can be said that at the least he has chosen a rare form, seeking a stylish compound where none had been warranted by the Hebrew. Compound nouns in Ecclesiastes are usually the equivalents of two Hebrew words (e.g., וּבְנֵי-בֵית is rendered by the idiomatic Koine καὶ οἰκογενεῖς, Eccl 2:7; cf. LXX Gen 14:14; 15:2; and, אֲרָרְךָ-יְיָ by μακρόθυμος, Eccl 7:8; cf. LXX Exod 34:6; but contrast κυοφορέω at Eccl 11:5). Where compounds are not standard words in Hebrew, they can be a sign of literary embellishment. Perhaps too the translator felt there was a Homeric resonance to the word, especially if he saw it as modeled on the Homeric compound βουπλήξ.<sup>32</sup> Alternatively the preservation of the word only in ancient glossaries indicates that it could have been part of the educational system when teaching Homer, and the translator either knew it himself from such study or heard it used by others. The result is that the translator gives a literary air, preferring a word that is an elegant compound, with a possible allusion to Homeric style or a Koine equivalent of a Homeric term.

32. It is presumed that studying Homer was a part of any Greek curriculum and therefore a literate Greek would be familiar with Homeric literature. Note too in Ecclesiastes the use of Homeric νέφος (Eccl 11:3) and the literary, if derived originally from Homer, χόλος (5:16).

ἔντριτος (Eccl 4:12)

וְאִם־יִתְקַפּוּ הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נֶגְדוֹ וְהַחוּט הַמְּשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בְּמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק

NRSV: And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

καὶ ἐὰν ἐπικραταιωθῇ ὁ εἷς, οἱ δύο στήσονται κατέναντι αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὸ σπαρτίον τὸ ἐντρίτον οὐ ταχέως ἀπορραγῆσεται.

And if one prevails, two will stand against him, and the threefold cord will not quickly be broken.

The adjective ἔντριτος is first attested in Ecclesiastes in Greek. Indeed, apart from quotations from Ecclesiastes in the church fathers, it is only attested elsewhere in a second-century C.E. papyrus (P.Petaus 117, 184–187 C.E.). Given the Hebrew equivalent (מְשֻׁלָּשׁ) and the simplex adjective τρίτος, it must mean “third.” LSJ (577) and others have preferred the meaning in the Septuagint of “threefold” for contextual reasons since that would be appropriate for a cord (i.e., of three strands). In the passage in question it forms part of a series of numbers, and it is possible the translator invented the form with the intention of representing each part of the Hebrew. Whereas the other numbers are preceded only by definite articles, מְשֻׁלָּשׁ might have been misinterpreted as beginning with the preposition מִן “from,” although it may be reading too much into it to suggest the translator chose the ἐν- prefix as an equivalent. In the one attestation in a papyrus, P.Petaus 117 (lines 12, 17, 21), it has been thought to be an error for τρίτος (cf. τρίτος in lines 29, 44, etc.), although it is unlikely to have been erroneously written three times. It is a case where the Septuagint might support the evidence in other Greek sources, and the two sources together provide evidence of a rare attestation. Its three appearances in the papyrus are in a list of names, presumably a tax register, and do seem to be the equivalent of τρίτος “third.” Although this papyrus is close to the possible time of the translation of Ecclesiastes, it is not certain if this is the sense in the Septuagint translation. The rendering “third,” while not making sense as a “third cord,” would nevertheless continue the sequence of “one” and “two” earlier in the verse, and therefore could be a possibility. Whatever its precise explanation, either a quantitative equivalent for the Hebrew or a mere alternative for τρίτος, the rarity of the form and the possibly literary feel of a compound conveys a poetic air. One could compare it to the rare form ἔγκοπος (Eccl 1:8). One can conjecture that the translator and the author of the papyrus each created the word independently, and as such it was a protologism, a new word that never found its feet in the language.

οἶνοχόη (Eccl 2:8)

עֲשִׂיתִי לִי שָׂרִים וְשָׂדוֹת ... שְׂדֵה וְשָׂדוֹת  
ἐποίησά μοι ἄδοντας καὶ ἀδούσας καὶ ... οἶνοχόον καὶ οἶνοχάας  
I made for myself male singers and female singers and ... a vintner and  
jugs

The final example shows the translator at his creative best. The meaning of the last Hebrew pair is not clear to us and might not have been to the translator,<sup>33</sup> but he has maintained the appearance of a pair without necessarily providing the same meaning. In Greek an οἶνοχόος was a wine steward, while an οἶνοχόη was normally a jug for pouring wine and libations.<sup>34</sup> The sense has changed from “male and female cupbearers,” if that is how the translator understood the Hebrew, to “cupbearers and jugs.” In that case, the translator has sacrificed the sense for a phonetic effect. The masculine and feminine pairs of words (ἄδοντας καὶ ἀδούσας; οἶνοχόον καὶ οἶνοχάας) recall equivalent pairs in the Hebrew, although the alliteration of the sibilants in the Hebrew is lost. The sound of the pair has taken precedence over the meaning, which is intelligible but not synonymous. For Françoise Vinel this is an example of the creative ability of the translator in choosing a phonetic equivalent to render an obscure Hebrew word.<sup>35</sup>

The translator might, however, also be taking one step further and creating a semantic neologism. For it is conceivable that the translator was trying to form a feminine of οἶνοχόος,<sup>36</sup> and the parallelism would allow the

33. The meaning of the Hebrew is obscure, but seems to have been understood by the translator as deriving from Aramaic אָדָּשׁ “to pour”; see Godfrey R. Driver, “Problems and Solutions,” *VT* 4 (1954): 239–40; Peter J. Gentry, “The Relationship of Aquila and Theodotion to the Old Greek of Ecclesiastes in the Marginal Notes of the Syro-Hexapla,” *Aramaic Studies* 2 (2004): 70–71.

34. For the history of the word, see J. Richard Green, “Oinochoe,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 19 (1972): 1–16. Both Françoise Vinel (*L’Ecclésiaste* [Bible d’Alexandrie 18; Paris: Cerf, 2002], 112, “coupes pour le vin”) and Gentry (“Relationship of Aquila and Theodotion,” 70, “drinking cups”) have interpreted the word as a “wine cup,” perhaps an attempt to match with a cupbearer. Both LSJ (1208) and Lust et al. (*Greek-English Lexicon*, 431) translate as “female cupbearer,” presumably under the influence of the Hebrew. Although Vinel (*L’Ecclésiaste*, 113) suggests that οἶνοχόη with the meaning “female cupbearer” might be found in Philo (*Ebr.* 221), it seems unlikely.

35. Vinel, *L’Ecclésiaste*, 48. See too James K. Aitken, “Rhetoric and Poetry in Greek Ecclesiastes,” *BIOSCS* 38 (2005): 59–60.

36. R. M. Gwynn (“Notes on the Vocabulary of Ecclesiastes in Greek,” *Herma-*

reader to recognize that it is a feminine derivative of οἶνοχόος and need not mean “jug.” Although the meaning “jug” would have been well known and presumably in everyday use given its presence in literature and frequently in dedicatory inscriptions, the reader would have to have been alert to a new meaning.

Alice’s puzzlement at the Jabberwocky would be apt here too: the reader would recognize the words and yet at the same time be struck by their oddity. The translator has created a literary effect in Greek to match the Hebrew, and produced Greek that has internal semantic coherence (taking the correct Greek meaning “jugs”). But if the extended meaning is understood, reinterpreting the noun as the feminine of οἶνοχόος, the parallelism is improved and the semantics is apt and not merely coherent. As a successful translator, the author has created a wordplay within the Greek while also matching his Hebrew source text. Lexical innovation then (“male and *female cupbearers*”) is masked beneath an apparently straightforward Greek phrase (“cupbearers and jugs”) but one that requires the reader to be attentive to the nuance.

#### TRANSLATION AND MULTIPLE CAUSATION

This last example illustrates well the various considerations involved in explaining a translation feature, and how, in most of the examples given here, no one explanation is sufficient. The recognition of multiple explanations for any one translation phenomenon has become an important component in translation studies over recent years.<sup>37</sup> The study of multiple causality in translation shares features with functional theories of translation that identify various causes, often simultaneous, for phenomena. Like functional theories, however, its examination has acted largely on a pragmatic level of social constraints and expectations.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, here we have examined the multiple explanations for individual linguistic phe-

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thena 19 [1920]: 116) sees οἶνοχόη (meaning “female cupbearer”) as one of many new senses in Ecclesiastes.

37. E.g., Anthony Pym, *Method in Translation History* (Manchester, Eng.: St. Jerome Publishing, 1998); Andrew Chesterman, “On Explanation,” in *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies: Investigations in Homage to Gideon Toury* (ed. Anthony Pym, Miriam Shlesinger, and Daniel Simeoni; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2008), 375–76.

38. Siobahn Brownlie, “Investigating Explanations of Translational Phenomena: A Case for Multiple Causality,” *Target* 15 (2003): 111–52.

nomena (on the level of semantics, morphology, wordplay, and literary allusion), and to understand this microlevel better we must place translation studies within the study of neologization where comparable phenomena have been identified.<sup>39</sup>

Neologisms remain highly complex features of language, and become all the more complex when integrated into translation studies. No simple or monocausal explanation is usually sufficient. There are cases in the Septuagint where the translator might be seen as an inventor of a word, especially given the translation demands, but any attempt to identify a neologism must be qualified by an explanation of its type, nature, and causes.

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39. The creation of neologisms through a form of folk etymology, combining known roots with apparent roots (cf. our *οἶνοχόη* example) is examined by Uriel Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey* (Oriental Notes and Studies 5; Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1954), 88–94. He recognizes it is conscious and deliberate, unlike folk etymology.





## THE INVENTION OF LANGUAGE IN THE POETRY OF JOB\*

Edward L. Greenstein

The book of Job, particularly its poetic core, appears to contain more unique words and linguistic usages than any comparable work from the ancient Near East. The distinctive language of Job has been attributed to a number of literary factors. For one thing, the characters and events are set in a much earlier, legendary period—the time of the patriarchs.<sup>1</sup> Not only does Job enjoy a lifestyle that is reminiscent of the rural, sheep-and-goat-herding Hebrew patriarchs, but the description of Job and his situation in the narrative framework of the book features language and allusions to the stories of Genesis.<sup>2</sup> The names of Job and his three original companions, as well as the names of the Deity, are drawn from Genesis (see below). In accordance with this setting, the language of Job and his interlocutors is pervaded by archaisms—in both diction and morphology.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See, e.g., Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. H. Knight; London: Nelson, 1967), xx–xxi; Nahum M. Sarna, “Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 13–25; Victor Maag, *Hiob: Wandlung und Verarbeitung des Problems in Novelle, Dialogdichtung und Spätfassungen* (FRLANT 128; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 23–24; Edward L. Greenstein, “Some Chapters in the Biography of Job” (in Hebrew), in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, vol. 10: *Presented to Shmuel Vargon* (ed. Moshe Garsiel et al.; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011), 393.

2. Compare, e.g., Job 1:3 with Gen 26:13–14. For an enumeration of linguistic parallels between Job and Genesis (and the rest of the Pentateuch), see Rachel Margalioth, *The Original Job: Discussion and Proofs of Its Antiquity and Singular Authorship* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Marcus, 1981), 76–84.

3. See Michael Cheney, *Dust, Wind, and Agony: Character, Speech and Genre in Job* (ConBOT 36; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wimsell, 1994), 211–30.

Another known feature of language in the poetry of Job is a routine use of foreign locutions and forms—from Akkadian, Arabic, Phoenician, and especially Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> Since Job and his companions are said to hail from Uz and Qedem, which are associated in the Bible with Aram and Edom (see Gen 10:23; 22:21; 25:6; 29:1; 36:28; Num 23:7; Isa 11:14; Lam 4:21; cf. Ezek 25:10 in connection with Ammon), these Transjordanian figures are characterized as such by coloring of their discourse with foreign, and especially Aramaic, language.<sup>5</sup> The West Semitic languages of the Transjordan are typically more similar to Aramaic than is Hebrew.<sup>6</sup>

Yet a third feature of the poetry of Job is an intense use of literary devices such as wordplay, double entendre, allusion, and metaphor.<sup>7</sup> Such devices as these, and others, give the discourse of the speakers—including, in the end, the Deity—a high and artificial character and lend enhanced dimensions of meaning to their language.

In addition to these three features, another characterizes the poetry of Job, as well as the work of many other great poets: a wealth and diver-

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4. See Edward L. Greenstein, "The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function," *JBL* 122 (2003): 651–66; idem, "The Poetic Use of Akkadian in the Book of Job," *Mehqarim Be-Lashon* 11–12 (*Avi Hurvitz Festschrift* [in Hebrew]; ed. Aharon Maman and Steven E. Fassberg; Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2008), 51–68. Concerning my claim ("Language of Job," 654–55) that *yōm* in Job 3:8 (where it is in parallelism with Leviathan) should be understood as *yām*, "Sea," in the Phoenician pronunciation, compare the pronunciation of the Phoenician letter *yōd* from earlier *yād* and borrowed into Hebrew as *yōd* (courtesy of my friend Prof. Aaron Demsky).

5. See esp. Cheney, *Dust, Wind, and Agony*, 206–7, 242–75; Greenstein, "Language of Job" and the bibliography therein; idem, "Features of Language in the Poetry of Job," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen* (ed. Thomas Krüger et al.; ATANT 88; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007), 87–89.

6. For a decisive rebuttal of a recent contention that Hebrew is Transjordanian as opposed to Canaanite, see Jo Ann Hackett and Na'ama Pat-El, "On Canaanite and Historical Linguistics: A Rejoinder to Anson Rainey," *Maarav* 17 (2010): 173–88.

7. See, e.g., Greenstein, "Language of Job"; idem, "Features of Language"; idem, "Parody as a Challenge to Tradition: The Use of Deuteronomy 32 in the Book of Job," in *Reading Job Intertextually* (ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes; LHBOTS 574; London: T&T Clark, 2013), 66–78; idem, "Remarks on Some Metaphors in the Book of Job," in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, vol. 9: *Presented to Moshe Garsiel* [in Hebrew] (ed. Shmuel Vargon et al.; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), 231–41. A revised English version of that article will appear as "On Some Metaphors in the Poetry of Job," in *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays in Honor of Adele Berlin* (ed. Maxine Grossman, forthcoming).

sity of words.<sup>8</sup> As Gertrude Stein has put it, "Poetry is I say essentially a vocabulary. ... It is a vocabulary entirely based on the noun."<sup>9</sup> "Think of all that early poetry, think of Homer, think of Chaucer, think of the Bible and you will see what I mean you will really realize that they were drunk with nouns."<sup>10</sup> On the extreme end of the biblical continuum, the poet of Job uses virtually in sequence five words for "darkness" (3:5–6: חשך, צלמות, עננה, כמרירים,<sup>11</sup> אפל), five words for "lion" (4:10–11: שחל, אריה), and six terms for a "net" or type of "trap" (18:8–10: רשת, כפיר, לביא, ליש, כפיר, (מלכדת, חבל, צמים, פח, שבכה).<sup>12</sup> Of these sixteen words, most are poetic, some are rare (אפל, ליש),<sup>13</sup> and four (עננה, כמרירים, צמים, (מלכדת occur nowhere else and may be suspected of having been invented by the Joban poet.<sup>14</sup>

N. H. Tur-Sinai has enumerated about three hundred unique lexical usages or locutions in the book of Job.<sup>15</sup> Even if a number of his examples

8. Cf., e.g., David J. A. Clines, "Why Is There a Book of Job, and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?" in *The Book of Job* (ed. W. A. M. Beuken; BETL 114; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 4; Yair Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; JSOTSup 213; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 205.

9. Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 231.

10. Ibid., 233.

11. Cf., e.g., BDB 485a; HALOT 2:482a; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 70.

12. Cf. A. Z. Rabinowitz and A. Avrunin, *כתבי קדש איוב* (Jaffa: Saadia Shoshani, 1916), 15; Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 160.

13. Outside Job, אפל occurs only in Isa 29:10; Ps 11:2; 91:6; and ליש only in Isa 30:6 and Prov 30:30. There is an implied reference to the term ליש in the blessing of the tribe of Dan (Deut 33:22), whose metaphorical depiction as a lion would seem to be derived from the earlier name of the northern site of Dan, viz. Laish; see, e.g., Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 69.

14. The word צמים appears in Job 5:5 as well, but there it would seem to have a different meaning and perhaps should be emended to a form of צמא "thirst" or צנם "being parched." Cf. the discussion in Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 53–54.

15. N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (rev. ed.; Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), viii–xxx; cf. Hoffman, *Blemished Perfection*, 183. The most useful collection of material may be found in Henry J. Weber, "Material for the Construction of a Grammar of the Book of Job," *AJS* 15 (1898): 1–32. For an enumeration

do not convince, there are many and additional examples that do. Francis Andersen counts “about 100 words not found anywhere else.”<sup>16</sup> The density of *hapax legomena* in Job is about the highest in the Hebrew Bible and greatly exceeds the odds of chance occurrence.<sup>17</sup> By any reckoning, the poetry of Job abounds in unusual language. Edouard Dhorme has already suggested that the Joban poet has a “fondness for neologisms or uncommon words.”<sup>18</sup> Our knowledge of ancient Hebrew being limited by the size of the corpus, we cannot ascertain beyond doubt that a unique word or usage is an invention of the Joban poet. However, the amount of unique vocabulary and strange usages one finds in Job increases the likelihood that an unparalleled word or usage was coined by the author, especially when one cannot find a similar word or usage in Hebrew texts of the early postbiblical period, such as Ben Sira, except as an imitation of a phrase from Job (see below).

That the poet of Job mints new words should not be surprising in view of the creative way he subverts ordinary language use for poetic effect. For example, in order to express Job’s sense of solitude and exclude the presence of any other human being from the account of his birth, he has Job relate the womb in which he gestated not to his mother but to himself—“my womb” (בטני) he calls it (3:10).<sup>19</sup> Following the same logic, he has Job refer to his brothers as products of the same place—“my womb” (בני בטני; 19:17)—to the consternation of most interpreters, who think Job is

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of archaic, unusual, and unique expressions and forms by category, see Rabinowitz and Avrunin, אִיּוֹב, pp. יג–יד. For a review of issues in studying the language in Job, see Christian G. Rata, “Observations on the Language of the Book of Job,” *Scripture and Interpretation* 2 (2008): 5–24.

16. Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 56.

17. See Frederick E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of the Phenomenon and Its Treatment since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms* (SBLDS 74; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 36–42.

18. Dhorme, *Job*, clxxv.

19. See Edward L. Greenstein, “The Loneliness of Job,” in *The Book of Job in Scripture, Thought, and Art* [in Hebrew] (ed. L. Mazor; Jerusalem: Mount Scopus Publications, 1995), 43–53; idem, “Jeremiah as an Inspiration to the Poet of Job,” in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East—Essays in Honour of Herbert B. Huffmon* (ed. John Kaltner and Louis Stulman; JSOTSup 378; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 102–3.

mystifyingly referring to his dead children.<sup>20</sup> In Job 18:4 the poet has an irritated Bildad react to Job's depiction of the Deity as a wild animal on the attack (16:9) by taking apart the idiom employed by Job—**טָרַף אֵף** “the anger raged” (cf. Amos 1:11)—and reconstructing it in its literal terms (**אֵף, טָרַף**) by reconfiguring their syntax.<sup>21</sup> Job is the one who has let his anger overcome him, argues Bildad; he has “torn himself apart in his rage” (**טָרַף נִפְשׁוֹ בְּאַפּוֹ**).<sup>22</sup>

Not all poets create new words, but some do. William Shakespeare is credited with having introduced, along with the over twenty thousand previously known words he employs, about seventeen hundred neologisms.<sup>23</sup> The invention of new words and usages may derive from creations based on etymology, adaptations of foreign locutions, adaptations of native locutions, or the investment of apparently novel meanings in old words or forms.<sup>24</sup> The poet of Job plies Hebrew in a variety of ways in order to enrich his vocabulary and usage. In the present essay I will exemplify a number of them. I will attempt to show that diverse locutions are constructed along similar lines—that the Joban poet's inventiveness displays not only great ingenuity but a certain, one might even call it a signature, style as well.

Before proceeding we may do well to recall a paradigmatic instance of poetic inventiveness in Job in the naming of Job and his companions. Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are said to be from Qedem, in the Transjordan or northern Arabia (see above). Accordingly, the author derives their names directly or via a midrashic manipulation from the Bible's richest source of Edomite names, from the genealogy of Esau/Edom and the list

20. See Greenstein, “Features of Language,” 84–86.

21. Another but far less dramatic example is the phrase **דַּמְמָה וְקוֹל** “moaning and voice,” in Job 4:16, where the terms of the construct phrase **קוֹל דַּמְמָה** “moaning voice” (1 Kgs 19:12), employed in another theophanic setting, are separated and reversed.

22. See Edward L. Greenstein, “‘Difficulty’ in the Poetry of Job,” in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum* (ed. D. J. A. Clines and E. van Wolde; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 189–90. Cf., e.g., H. H. Rowley, *Job* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 128; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 285.

23. Amanda Mabillard, “Words Shakespeare Invented,” *Shakespeare Online*. Online: <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/wordsinvented.html>; cf. Eleanor Cook, “Diction,” *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (4th ed.; ed. Roland Greene; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 360.

24. Cf. Cook, “Diction,” 360.

of the Edomite kings found in Gen 36.<sup>25</sup> Eliphaz is a son of Esau and his first-named son is Teiman (vv. 10–11); the juxtaposition suggests Eliphaz the Teimanite. The names Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite are constructed in exactly the same way, using the principles of juxtaposition, as above, and expansion by means of a liquid consonant (*lamed* or *resh*). *Bildad* is formed by inserting *lamed* into the name Bedad (v. 35), and *Shuhite* is made by transposing the letters of Husham from the same verse. *Zophar* is formed by adding *resh* to Zepho (v. 11), and *Naamathite* is made by metathesizing Timna in the very next verse. The name of the legendary Job (אִיּוֹב) was surely inherited from tradition (see Ezek 14:14, 20);<sup>26</sup> but it was identified with Jobab (יֹוֹבָב), an Edomite king (Gen 36:33–34), as the ancient Greek translation and early Jewish literature attest.<sup>27</sup> The Edomite names may not be authentic, but they are drawn from the Hebrew literary tradition, which serves as the resource for most of the Joban poet's language.

The poet would seem to scour the literary sources for rare, archaic, and unusual language. The preposition עֲלֵי, for example, is an archaic form of עַל (cf. Akk. *eli*) occurring exclusively in poetry (in the archaic poems of Jacob's blessings, the oracles of Balaam, the *Ha'azinu* poem of Moses [Deut

25. For this explanation and some bibliography, see Greenstein, "Features of Language," 88 n. 43; idem, "Biography," 391–92. Most commentators recognize the Edomite connection but not the full derivation of the names; see, e.g., Samuel E. Balentine, *Job* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 66; John Gray, *The Book of Job* (ed. D. J. A. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 136. The name of the belated fourth companion, Elihu son of Berachel the Buzite (Job 32:2), is derived differently. Elihu (אֱלִיהוּא) is taken from the genealogy of Samuel (1 Sam 1:1); the patronym Berachel (בְּרַכְאֵל) is otherwise unattested; and Buz (בּוּז) is an Aramean, a son of Nahor (Gen 22:21; but see also Jer 25:23, where Buz is identified with Teima, which is in Edom). The difference in the derivation of the name of Elihu is yet another argument against the originality of the Elihu chapters, on which see, e.g., Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 200–233.

26. The name 'Ayyābu is known as the Transjordanian governor of Ashtarot from the fourteenth-century B.C.E. Amarna correspondence (EA 256; 364); see Greenstein, "Biography," 391 n. 34; cf. Johannes C. de Moor, "Ugarit and the Origin of Job," in *Ugarit and the Bible* (ed. George J. Brooke, Adrian H. Curtis, and John Healey; UBL 11; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 225–57.

27. In addition to the bibliography in Greenstein, "Features of Language," 88 n. 43, see also Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Job as Jobab: The Interpretation of Job in LXX Job 42:17b–e," *JBL* 120 (2001): 31–55.

32], the prophets, Psalms, etc.). Fifteen of its forty attestations occur in Job.<sup>28</sup> By analogy to this archaic usage, the Joban poet creates an enhanced form of the preposition **אֵל** (**אֵלִי**) that occurs nowhere else but in Job.<sup>29</sup> The unique preposition is very likely a Joban invention, and not part of the linguistic repertoire of Second Temple Hebrew; it never occurs in the relatively extensive text of Ben Sira, in spite of Ben Sira's tendency to emulate earlier Hebrew literature, including Job.<sup>30</sup>

Most of the linguistic innovations that I discern in the poetry of Job are, as in the case of **אֵלִי**, a morphological extension or manipulation of an attested Hebrew word or stem. For example, the poet would seem to create the noun **יָגַע** from the intransitive verb **יָגַע** "to be weary" in Job 20:18, where it is parallel to and relatively synonymous with the noun **חֵיל** "wealth."<sup>31</sup> The formation is analogous to the derivation of the noun **עָמַל** "toil, suffering" from the intransitive verb **עָמַל** "to toil." The semantic derivation of "wealth" from a verb meaning "to be weary, to toil" is a familiar development: Semitic verbs often come to denote the result or

28. See Cheney, *Dust, Wind, and Agony*, 221. For the precise nature of the usage in Job, see my "Language of Job," 663–65.

29. Cheney, *Dust, Wind, and Agony*, 219; Greenstein, "Language of Job," 663–64.

30. An interesting case is the reading **כִּמְרִירִי יוֹם** in Sir 11:4. Manuscripts read with *kaph* or *beth*; *The Book of Ben Sira: Text, Concordance, and an Analysis of the Vocabulary* [in Hebrew] (Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language and Shrine of the Book, 1973), 14. In context, the *beth* must be understood—do not curse those who are having a bitter day; e.g., Moshe Zvi Segal, **סֵפֶר בֶּן סִירָא הַשֵּׁלֶם**, (rev. ed.; Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1972), 68; Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 229. The readings with *kaph* show that the phrase is derived from **כִּמְרִירִי יוֹם** in Job 3:5, where the meaning is moot but clearly different from the sense in Ben Sira. I regard the word **כִּמְרִיר** (vocalizing *kamrîr*) as an innovation of the Joban poet, from the root **כִּמַּר** meaning "dark" (see n. 11 above; cf. perhaps **נִכְמְרוּ** in Lam 5:11; see the discussion in Robert B. Salters, *Lamentations* [ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2010], 354–55), on the pattern of **סִגְרִיר** "constant rain" (Prov 27:15); and Dhorme, *Job*, 27. In Job the sense is "gloom" (lit. "darkenings of day"; see further below). My inevitable conclusion is that the author of Ben Sira either misread or misunderstood the phrase in Job. This is not surprising in light of the frequent misreadings and misunderstandings of Job that we encounter in the ancient versions; see, e.g., Gray, *Book of Job*, 76–91.

31. For my analysis of the verse, see "On the Use of Akkadian in Biblical Hebrew Philology," in *Looking at the Ancient Near East and the Bible through the Same Eyes: Minha LeAhron: A Tribute to Aaron Skaist* (ed. Kathleen Abraham and Joseph Fleishman; Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2012), 352–53.

consequence of the activity denoted by their primary meaning. Thus from the verb יָגַע “to toil” develops the noun יָגֵעַ “wages, reward”—the result of the toil.<sup>32</sup> That the Joban poet has already used עַמַּל for “wealth” in a thematically related verse (15:29)<sup>33</sup> may have prompted the creation of another, semantically and morphologically similar, noun: יָגַעַת. Note that, whereas the verb יָגַע occurs twice in Ben Sira (11:11; 34:4), and the well-attested biblical noun יָגֵעַ once (14:15), the unique form in Job 20:18 does not appear there.<sup>34</sup>

A more complex and interesting example of linguistic innovation in Job is the unique use of the *hithpael* conjugation of פָּלַא in Job 10:16. In order to grasp the sense and function of this usage, let us consider the sequence in verses 15–16:

אִם-רָשַׁעְתִּי אֵלָי לִי / וְצִדַּקְתִּי לֹא-אֶשָּׂא רֹאשִׁי / שְׂבַע קָלוֹן וְרָאָה עֲנִי:  
וְיִגָּאָה בְּשַׁחַל תְּצוּדֵנִי / וְתִשָּׁב תְּתַפְּלֵא-בִּי:

If I am guilty—then woe be to me!

But even in the right, I could not hold up my head.

Be sated with (my) disgrace,

And regard my affliction!<sup>35</sup>

And if (my head) were to loom,<sup>36</sup> you would hunt me down like a lion;

You would take extraordinary measures against me over and over!

32. Edward L. Greenstein, “Trans-Semitic Idiomatic Equivalency and the Derivation of Hebrew *ml'kh*,” *UF* 11 (Claude F. A. Schaeffer Festschrift; 1979): 335 with n. 58.

33. For the interpretation of that verse, see Greenstein, “On the Use of Akkadian,” 350–53. In the course of that discussion I also propose that the Joban poet has created a Hebrew word נַמַּל meaning “profit” by borrowing the Akkadian word *nēmelu*, which is cognate to עַמַּל.

34. *Book of Ben Sira*, 153.

35. Or: “being sated with disgrace, and experiencing affliction”; so Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and many others. For the phrase “experience affliction,” see Lam 3:1. For רָאָה as a variant of—or a mistake for—רוּה “to be sated, saturated,” see, e.g., Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* (7 vols.; 1913; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 6:222; Dhorme, *Job*, 151–52. For the phrase רָאָה עֲנִי used of the Deity’s observation of the sufferer’s affliction, as in the translation above, see, e.g., Exod 3:7; 4:31; Deut 26:7; 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Kgs 14:26; Pss 9:14; 25:18; 31:8; 119:153; Neh 9:9.

36. For “head” in v. 15 as the antecedent of “loom” here, see, e.g., Avraham Kahana, *The Book of Job* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Meqorot, 1928), 54.



In this context the unique verb **התפלא** can hardly have the positive connotation of “making oneself wondrous,”<sup>37</sup> except perhaps in a sarcastic manner.<sup>38</sup> There would seem to be a play here between the most common usage of **פלא** and its verbal (esp. *hiphil*) and nominal (esp. **נפלאות**) derivatives, conveying the wondrous acts of God,<sup>39</sup> on the one hand, and a peculiar usage of the verb, in the *piel* (e.g., Lev 22:21) and *hiphil* (e.g., Deut 28:59) conjugations, to express an extraordinary or extreme act, such as undertaking a nonobligatory votive offering (in the former instance)<sup>40</sup> or perpetrating heinous plagues (in the latter),<sup>41</sup> on the other. Accordingly, Job’s complaint is that God would single him out for exceptional persecution, by acting in an extraordinary way vis-à-vis him, a theme that echoes his protest of divine hounding in 7:12–21.

By using a verbal form of **פלא**, which most often denotes the marvelous work of God, the poet gives Job’s protest in chapter 10 a heavily ironic connotation: the Deity’s wonders are ruinous.<sup>42</sup> Job had already made this ironic turn by taking Eliphaz’s doxological statement of God’s wondrous acts (5:9–16)—“(El) who performs great things too deep to probe, / Wondrous things [**נפלאות**], beyond number”—and casting them in a negative light in 9:6–10. That the latter passage alludes to the former is clear from the repetition virtually verbatim of 5:9 in 9:10. That the latter passage is parody, however, is clear from the context. Job introduces his description with a rhetorical question concerning the Deity’s overwhelming power: “The wise of heart and stern of strength—who has ever tried to resist him and come out whole?” (9:4). Whereas Eliphaz’s praise includes such providential divine capabilities as providing rain and discomfiting the arrogant, Job’s features the destructive side of God’s power: the overturning of mountains,<sup>43</sup> the darkening of the sun and stars, the mythological defeat

37. E.g., Dhorme, *Job*, 153; cf. DCH 6:686a: “display wondrous power.”

38. E.g., Rabinowitz and Avrunin, **איוב**, 24; Kahana, *Job*, 54.

39. See, e.g., BDB 810b; J. Conrad, “**פלא**,” TDOT 11:533–46.

40. See, e.g., Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 2:81; BDB 810b.

41. See, e.g., DCH 6:685b; cf. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 272: “unusually severe.” Cf. the adverbial usage of **פלאים** in Lam 1:9.

42. See, e.g., Karl Budde, *Das Buch Hiob* (HKAT; 2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 42; Dhorme, *Job*, 133; Rowley, *Job*, 86; Habel, *Book of Job*, 200.

43. Job 9:5. The expression for moving mountains (**העתיק הרים**) is unique; twice in Job (14:18; 18:4) we have the *qal* verb **עתק** as the predicate of **צור**; while the locution **הרים הפך** occurs only here (9:5) and in 28:9. I tend to regard **העתיק הרים** as a Joban

of the watery chaos.<sup>44</sup> Here (as in the speeches from the whirlwind)<sup>45</sup> the Deity's "wondrous acts" are portrayed in terms of sheer power.

Returning to the passage 10:15–16, in the subsequent verse too we find a neologism—the masculine plural עֲדִים, literally "witnesses" or "testimonies," in the sense of hostility, or more technically "prosecution": "You would renew your prosecution of me."<sup>46</sup> Job has already complained that the Deity has falsely incriminated him (9:28–31),<sup>47</sup> and that he would not play fair with him in a litigation (9:32–34).<sup>48</sup> The use of the term עֲדִים for the violent ("like a lion") hostility that Job describes in 10:15–17 aligns with the forensic framework Job has just delineated. The abstract use of the masculine plural noun would appear to be based on an analogy to such masculine plurals שְׁקִרִים and כְּזָבִים as "lies."<sup>49</sup> The use of the masculine plural noun to convey a general or abstract sense is a favorite linguistic manipulation by the Joban poet. Additional examples of otherwise unattested instances of the masculine plural noun with a general or abstract meaning in Job are: סִדְרִים "(dis)order" (10:22);<sup>50</sup> גְּבוּהִים "height" (11:8);<sup>51</sup>

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innovation because it is attested in Sir 39:28b together with the phrase בָּאֵךְ "in anger," which also occurs in Job 9:5—suggesting that the line in Ben Sira has been influenced by the verse in Job.

44. See Gordis, *Book of Job*, 522.

45. See, e.g., Edward L. Greenstein, "In Job's Face/Facing Job," in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation* (Festschrift for Robert C. Culley; ed. Fiona C. Black, Roland Boer, and Erin Runions; SemeiaSt 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 301–17. In Elihu's anticipation of the divine response from the storm, the unique word מַפְלָאָה, rather than the familiar (and plural) נִפְלְאוֹת, is employed (37:16). It may have been invented as a nonce word in order to play alliteratively on the *mem* of מַפְלִשִׁי(ם) "balance-tray" (of cloud), in the preceding colon; see, e.g., Immanuel M. Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament* (Boston: Cushing, 1894), 42; Weber, "Material," 19; Kahana, *Book of Job*, 201; Amos Hakham, *The Book of Amos* [in Hebrew] (Da'at Miqra'; Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1970), 284.

46. Cf., e.g., Dhorme, *Job*, 153.

47. See Greenstein, "On Some Metaphors."

48. See, e.g., Edward L. Greenstein, "A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. Michael V. Fox et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 242–43.

49. See Greenstein, "Features of Language," 92–93.

50. Note that the singular does not occur in Biblical Hebrew; but it does appear in Sir 50:14.

51. Modern commentators tend to emend the phrase גְּבוּהֵי שָׁמַיִם "height of the sky" to גְּבוּהָהּ מִשְׁמַיִם "higher than the sky" in order to make a more precise formal parallel to עֲמֻקַּת מְשָׁאוֹל "deeper than Sheol" in the following colon; see, e.g., Dhorme,

פחדים “fear” (15:21); דעים “discourse” (lit. “words”; 37:16);<sup>52</sup> מועדים “stumbling (of the foot)” (12:5);<sup>53</sup> קברים “the grave” (17:1); התלים “mockery” (17:2).

In connection with the foot, it is not altogether clear to me why the poet of Job felt the need to invent, so it would seem, a new Hebrew term for “foot”—הלִיךְ—used in the plural in 29:6.<sup>54</sup> The use of a word for “foot” transparently derived from the verb הלך “to go, travel” may have been intended to convey the idea that Job would walk around his town, assisting his neighbors. In the next verse (29:7) Job describes himself going out to the city gate (בצאתי שער עלי־קרת), where he would set himself up as the

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*Job*, 160–61; Gordis, *Book of Job*, 122; Clines, *Job 1–20*, 255. The structure of parallel lines, however, is rarely this uniform. I would interpret the verse: “The height of the sky—what can you do (to it)? / What is deeper than Sheol—what can you know (of it)?”; cf. Hakham, *Book of Job*, 86. One should bear in mind the often telegraphic nature of Joban discourse. Zophar is responding to the question Job has posed to the Deity using the same verb, פִּעַל, in 7:20: “What can I do to you?”

52. The singular noun דֵּעָה and the plural דְּעִים are derived not from יָדַע “to know” but from דָּעָה “to utter”; see *DCH* 2:456 (where the verb is glossed “to ask, desire”—to seek). There may be some confusion between the roots because in context תָּמִים דְּעִים in *Job* 37:16 might have the same sense as the phrase תָּמִים דְּעוֹת “perfect in knowledge” in *Job* 36:4. Compare a similar confusion between the phrase דַּע חוֹה “to render an opinion” in *Job* 32:10, 17, and the phrase חוֹה דַּעַת in *Ps* 19:3 “to make an utterance.” In *Job* 15:2 Eliphaz’s locution דַּעַת רוּחַ “windy utterance,” a pejorative reference to Job’s contentions, corresponds to Bildad’s רוּחַ כְּבִיר “mighty wind” in 8:2; cf. Hakham, *Book of Job*, 110. “Wind” is a recurrent term for putting down the interlocutor’s argument in *Job*; see Greenstein, “Truth or Theodicy: Speaking Truth to Power in the Book of Job,” *PSB* 27 (2006): 246–47. It would seem that in all these cases דַּעַת replaces דַּע “utterance,” which is derived from דָּעָה. This verb may be plausibly found in *Job* 23:5 (where the form is ambiguous and the parallelism with בִּין supports a derivation from יָדַע) and in *Prov* 24:14 (where the masoretic pointing as a לִי verb would seem decisive; however, in both verses commentators identify a form of יָדַע). See, however, D. Winton Thomas, “Notes on Some Passages in the Book of Proverbs,” *JTS* 38 (1937): 401. I suspect that in Ugaritic, too, we find *d’t* in the sense of “utterance” in the phrase *ṯny d’t* (*CAT* 1.2 i [Smith: ii] 16) “to declare an utterance,” in which case it would derive from *d’y*, not *yd’*.

53. Cf. BDB 588. I take the form to be segholate, viz. *mō’ad* (in the singular); cf., e.g., Gordis, *Book of Job*, 136.

54. I have discussed the verse in “Difficulty,” 191–93. Cf. Weber, “Material,” 9. The modern dictionaries and several commentators interpret הַלִּיכִים to be “footsteps” (see David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37* [WBC 18A; Nashville: Nelson, 2006], 935), but it is feet and not footsteps that are “washed” (רָחַץ).

local magistrate, defending the weak against injustice (vv. 12–17).<sup>55</sup> The poet has also used the feminine plural noun הליכות, which is built on the same morphological pattern (*qatīl*), in order to denote the “caravans” or “convoys” of merchants, crossing the desert and depending on oases for sustenance (6:19). The term הליכות occurs elsewhere. In Ps 68:25 it refers to a “march” or “procession.” In Hab 3:6 and Prov 31:27 (and cf. the singular in Nah 2:6) it refers to “paths” or “courses.” Accordingly, in Job 6 the poet adopts a known term but finds for it a different, metonymic usage, as he would seem to seek a poetic synonym for the regular term for “caravan,” ארחת.<sup>56</sup>

The investiture of new meaning in an old term is a widespread poetic practice in Job. Another example is the usage of עפעפים, ordinarily “(gleaming) eyeballs” (dual; e.g., Job 16:16)—a poetic synonym of עינים “eyes” (dual), already found in Ugaritic<sup>57</sup>—in the metaphorical, or perhaps actually etymological, sense of “shining, glimmering,” in the phrase עפעפי שחר “glimmering of dawn” (3:9; 41:10).<sup>58</sup>

More striking is the conversion of the negative particle לא to a substantive in 6:20. Job has compared his friends to a river in the desert that dries up to the great chagrin of the many traders who depended on it (vv. 15–21).<sup>59</sup> Job then turns directly to his companions and exclaims:

כִּי־עַתָּה הֵייתֶם לֹא תִרְאוּ חַתָּת וּתִירְאוּ:

For now you have become naught;

You see a terrifying sight, and you are seized with fear.

55. See, e.g., Habel, *Book of Job*, 410. For the city gate as the local site of rendering judgment, see Ludwig Köhler, *Hebrew Man, with an Appendix on Justice in the Gate* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; London: SCM, 1956), 127–50.

56. Cf. Rabinowitz and Avrunin, *אויב*, p. 10; Dhorme, *Job*, 89.

57. See Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *Diccionario de la lengua ugarítica* (2 vols.; Aula orientalis Supplement 7; Barcelona: AUSA, 1996), 1:84–85, where the sense of “eye”—and not “eyelids” or “eyelashes,” which is a later Hebrew development—is properly understood. Contrast, e.g., *HALOT* 2:861b.

58. The root ע/ו/יף, which is reduplicated in the form עפעפים, has the sense of “brightness,” not “darkness.” See Abulwalid Merwan (R. Jonah) Ibn Janah, *Sepher ha-Shorashim* (ed. Wilhelm Bacher; Berlin: Itzkowski, 1896), 360; and the important discussion in H. L. Ginsberg, “An Unrecognized Allusion to Kings Pekah and Hoshea of Israel (Isaiah 8:23),” *Erlsr* 5 (Benjamin Mazar volume; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1958), 61\*–65\*.

59. See my discussion in “Jeremiah as an Inspiration,” 100–101.

Many follow the Greek version and emend לֹא to לִי, rendering something like, “Thus have you become for me.”<sup>60</sup> However, there is no need for emendation here if one will recognize the unusual, possibly unique, employment of לֹא as a noun denoting “nothing.”<sup>61</sup> The usage of the negative particle לֹא to denote a substantive could well have been made on the analogy of the word אֵין “nothing,” which, in its construct form, serves as a particle negating the participle.<sup>62</sup> The Joban poet performs the same linguistic strategy when he turns the particle אַל, which negates primarily volitive verbs,<sup>63</sup> into a substantive in Job 24:25 (וְיִשֶׁם לְאֵל מַלְחָה “and [who will] turn my words into falsehood [lit. nothing]”).<sup>64</sup> This usage is also unique.<sup>65</sup> There is good reason, therefore, to attribute the twin usages of לֹא and אַל as substantives in the poetry of Job to the inventiveness of the poet. In the scores of instances of אַל and לֹא in Ben Sira, there is not one usage as a substantive.<sup>66</sup>

Tur-Sinai provides a literary reason for the use of לֹא rather than another word for “naught” such as אֵין or אַפֶּס (see, e.g., Isa 40:17) in Job 6:21.<sup>67</sup> Job is responding allusively to what Eliphaz had said to him in 4:5: כִּי עַתָּה תְּבוֹא אֵלַי וְתִלָּא, “But now that [calamity] has come to you, you

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60. E.g., C. J. Ball, *The Book of Job: A Revised Text and Version* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 162; Dhorme, *Job*, 89–90; Clines, *Job 1–20*, 161. For a concise survey of the versions and the interpretive possibilities, see Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (2 vols.; ICC; New York: Scribner’s, 1921), 2:42. The medieval Jewish exegetes tend to follow the alternative masoretic reading לוֹ and to interpret, as do some of the moderns (e.g., Gordis, *Book of Job*, 76), that Job’s friends have become “like it,” i.e., the dried-up wadi. Moshe Kimchi understands the putative pronominal reference to be “him,” viz., God—“you have been justifying Him”; see Moses Kimchi, *Commentary on the Book of Job* (ed. Herbert Basser and Barry D. Walfish; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 64; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 21.

61. So the Targum. Cf. BDB 520a; Tur-Sinai, *Book of Job*, 126; Samuel Terrien, *Job* (CAT 13; Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963), 82; Hakham, *Book of Job*, 52; Habel, *Book of Job*, 149; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 137. There is probably another instance in Job 11:11.

62. See GKC §§141k; 152i–l.

63. See GKC §152f.

64. See, e.g., Dhorme, *Job*, 367; Gordis, *Book of Job*, 272; Markus Witte, *Philologische Notizen zu Hiob 21–27* (BZAW 234; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 121.

65. See BDB 39a.

66. See *Book of Ben Sira*, 86–90, 182–85.

67. Tur-Sinai, *Book of Job*, 126. For many other ways in which Job responds to

cannot [bear it].” Beginning, as does Eliphaz, with **כִּי עַתָּה** “now then,” Job answers the charge that he is incapable of coping with his tragedies—**וְתֹלֵא** “you cannot”—with a recriminating indictment of his companions that mimics through its assonance the words of his critic: “you have been naught [**לֹא**] for me.” In 24:25 the use of the expression **שִׁים לֹאֵל** in the sense of “turn to nothing” creates through its assonance with **מִלְתִּי** another irony. Job challenges his interlocutors to prove that his *arguments* (**מִלְתִּי**, lit. “my word,” i.e., my discourse) are of *no worth* (**יֵשׁם לֹאֵל**)—a challenge to which Job is convinced his companions cannot rise.<sup>68</sup> Job insists repeatedly on the integrity of his speech (e.g., 6:25, 28, 30; 27:3–4).<sup>69</sup>

In order to round out this survey of lexical inventiveness in the poetry of Job, let us consider some examples of the aramaization of Hebrew words and forms, in order to lend authenticity to the dialogue of the Transjordanian characters (see above); and an example of the creation of a new Hebrew word through borrowing from a foreign language, in this case Akkadian.

A recognized strategy of the Joban poet is artificially to aramaize a Hebrew word phonologically in order to give it a foreign, more specifically Aramaic or Transjordanian, sound.<sup>70</sup> For example, the poet replaces the idiomatic Hebrew verb for the “cracking” of teeth, **נָתַץ**, with **נָתַע** (4:10), which does not exist in Aramaic.<sup>71</sup> The obvious basis for this interchange is that in several cognate words, the Hebrew term has *tsade* where the Aramaic term has *‘ayin*. Familiar examples are Hebrew **אֶרֶץ** = Aramaic **אַרְעָא** “land” and Hebrew **עֵץ** = Aramaic **אַעָא** “wood.” In a similar vein, the poet has Elihu use the Aramaic verb **רָעַע** instead of its Hebrew cognate **רָצַץ** “shatter” in 34:24.<sup>72</sup> Analogously, the poet transforms Hebrew **צָרַב** “scorch” into pseudo-Aramaic **זָרַב** in Job 6:17 (“When they are seasonally *scorched*, they are annihilated”);<sup>73</sup> and Hebrew **חָצַה** “cut in half” into pseudo-Aramaic **חִזָּה** in 8:17 (“his [the righteous person’s] roots intertwine

Eliphaz in this discourse (chs. 6–7), see Natan Klaus, *Studies in Biblical Narrative* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1990), 147–50.

68. For the general sense of the verse, see, e.g., Clines, *Job* 21–37, 614–15.

69. See Greenstein, “Truth or Theodicy,” 238–58.

70. See Greenstein, “Language of Job,” 663.

71. See *ibid.*

72. See, e.g., Dhorme, *Job*, 521.

73. See *ibid.*, 87–88; Kahana, *Book of Job*, 33; Gordis, *Book of Job*, 75; contrast, e.g., Hartley, *Book of Job*, 136–37; Clines, *Job* 1–20, 160.

around a pile of stones, he can *cut through* a house of stones”).<sup>74</sup> In these examples, the creative modification of the Hebrew follows from the occasional correspondence of Hebrew *tsade* to Aramaic *zayin*, as in Hebrew צעיר “young, small” (cf. the noun מצער in Job 8:7; 2 Chr 24:24) = Aramaic זעיר “small (e.g., Dan 7:8), small amount” (e.g., Job 36:2),<sup>75</sup> and Hebrew צעק “cry out” = Hebrew/Aramaic זעק (e.g., Dan 6:11).<sup>76</sup>

Finally, let me propose one more example of an Akkadianism in Job in addition to those already known.<sup>77</sup> In Job 8:14 Bildad contrasts the fate of the wicked with that of the righteous.<sup>78</sup> Whereas the home of the wicked is liable to collapse, the home of the righteous is very well secured. Bildad describes the wicked’s home as follows:

אֲשֶׁר-יְקוּט בְּסֻלּוֹ / וּבֵית עֶבְבִּישׁ מִבְּטָחוֹ

That/who יְקוּט his stronghold,

And whose trust is a spider’s house [i.e., web].

Based on the apparent synonymy of בְּסֻלּוֹ “his stronghold” and מִבְּטָחוֹ “his place of trust,” Saadia al-Fayyumi (the Gaon) concluded that the word יְקוּט is not, as many think, a verb,<sup>79</sup> but rather a noun roughly synonymous

74. See Hakham, *Book of Job*, 66; Gordis, *Book of Job*, 92; contrast, e.g., Dhorme, *Commentary*, 122–23; Hartley, *Book of Job*, 159–60; Clines, *Job 1–20*, 200. The latter commentators seem not to recognize the progression expressed in the parallelism: the roots are not only luxuriant enough to encircle the stones, but they are powerful enough to cut through them. On the “dynamic” use of parallelism, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), esp. 62–84 (ch. 3).

75. Cf. HALOT 1:276.

76. Cf. HALOT 1:277. Even though the form זעק occurs frequently in Hebrew, it is also known from Aramaic, unlike צעק.

77. See, e.g., Shalom M. Paul, “Unrecognized Biblical Legal Idioms in the Light of Comparative Akkadian Expressions,” *RB* 86 (1979): 235–36; Greenstein, “Language of Job,” 656–57; idem, “Features of Language,” 88–89; idem, “Poetic Use of Akkadian,” with reference to earlier studies; idem, “On the Use of Akkadian,” 350–53; and see n. 33 above.

78. I have presented this example in lectures at the thirteenth biannual conference on biblical philology, which took place at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-sheva, May 24, 2012 (in Hebrew), and at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago, November 19, 2012.

79. E.g., Rashi, ad loc.; Ibn Ezra, ad loc.; Kahana, *Book of Job*, 42; Hartley, *Book of Job*, 159; Clines, *Job 1–20*, 199–200; David Wolfers, *Deep Things out of Darkness: The*

with “spider’s web.”<sup>80</sup> Several modern commentators agree that the meaning must be an apt parallel to “spider’s web,” and they propose an emendation (such as קורִים; see Isa 59:5) to yield the desired sense.<sup>81</sup> Saadia apparently based his interpretation, “cords of the sun” or “gossamer,” on an etymological connection between יְקוֹט and Aramaic קִיט “summer,” on account of the prevalence of gossamers during that season.<sup>82</sup> Dhorme appreciates this explanation but hesitates to adopt it for lack of etymological support.<sup>83</sup> In the light of the several adaptations made by the Joban poet from Akkadian, I would suggest that the word יְקוֹט is nothing but a contracted, or partly corrupted, form of the Akkadian expression for a spider’s web—*qē ettūti*.<sup>84</sup> The expression is employed, for example, in the Babylonian poem of the destructive deity Erra and in the Annals of Sennacherib.<sup>85</sup> There is no reason that we should not find it in the linguistically rich poetry of Job.

In this brief look at linguistic virtuosity and creativity in the poetry of Job I have surveyed only a sampling of the neologisms and adaptations one can find there. For this reader of Job, the maverick approach of the poet to language is reflected in and reflects the protagonist’s daring and independent approach to God-talk.

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*Book of Job: Essays and a New English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 386–87.

80. Yosef Kafih, *Job with the Translation and Commentary of Rav Saadia Gaon* [in Hebrew] (Israel: Committee for Publishing the Works of R. Saadia Gaon, 1973), 67–68; Lenn E. Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job by Saadiah Ben Joseph Al-Fayyūmī* (Yale Judaica Series 25; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 216–17. Cf., e.g., Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 6:212; Ball, *Book of Job*, 177: “a noun is required.”

81. E.g., Budde, *Buch Hiob*, 38; Driver and Gray, *Book of Job*, 2:51–52; Ball, *Book of Job*, 177; Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT 16; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 185; Terrien, *Job*, 91 with n. 3; Gordis, *Book of Job*, 91; Gray, *Book of Job*, 188; cf. Dhorme, *Job*, 120–21.

82. Cf. Tur-Sinai, *Book of Job*, 150; Hakham, *Book of Job*, 65; Clines, *Job 1–20*, 199–200.

83. Dhorme, *Job*, 120.

84. See CAD Q, 288b.

85. Luigi Cagni, *Lépoepa di Erra* (Studi Semitici 34; Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, 1969), 66 (I 88); D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (OIP 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 79, line 7.



## LINGUISTIC CLUES AS TO THE DATE OF THE BOOK OF JOB: A MEDIATING POSITION

Jan Joosten

In an influential article published in 1974, Avi Hurvitz showed that the language of the prose tale of Job has several features aligning it with the Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) known from Persian-period writings such as Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel.<sup>1</sup> Since the book of Job, a fictional story addressing universal human problems, is otherwise hard to date, the contribution of historical linguistics was much appreciated by commentators.<sup>2</sup> More recently, however, Ian Young has argued that Hurvitz did not make a decisive argument for the lateness of the prose tale of Job.<sup>3</sup> Part of Young's argument is hard to accept, implying as it does that historical linguistics has no bearing on Biblical Hebrew.<sup>4</sup> But some of his observations are valid. In the present paper, I will evaluate the linguistic evidence once more and defend a position slightly different from that of Hurvitz: the prose tale is written not in LBH but in transitional Biblical Hebrew.

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1. Avi Hurvitz, "The Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered," *HTR* 67 (1974): 17–34.

2. See, e.g., Norman Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 40; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 21; James L. Crenshaw, "Job," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (ed. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 332.

3. Ian Young, "Is the Prose Tale of Job in Late Biblical Hebrew?" *VT* 59 (2009): 606–29.

4. For this claim, see in more detail Ian Young and Robert Rezetko, with the assistance of Martin Ehrensverd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts: An Introduction to Approaches and Problems* (2 vols.; London: Equinox, 2009); and see my review of this work in *Babel und Bibel* 6 (2012): 535–42.

## 1. LATE LINGUISTIC FEATURES IN THE PROSE TALE OF JOB

Hurvitz listed seven features or elements in the prose tale that otherwise occur only, or chiefly, in the LBH corpus (Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel).<sup>5</sup> I will briefly review the features to recall the nature of the evidence and its diversity. Linguistic traits are less like entries added up in a ledger than like shards retrieved from a tell, or refugees from a failed state: each of them has its own story to tell.

## 1.1. השטן “The Adversary” (Job 1:6–9, 12; 2:2–4, 6–7)

The image of a personified supernatural adversary called Satan is attested only in relatively late biblical texts. The feature is on the borderline between language and ideas: when the conception of a celestial “adversary” was born, the linguistic expression must have followed immediately. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the closest analogue to the usage in Job comes from Zechariah (3:2, השטן), with a less striking parallel in Chronicles (1 Chr 21:1, שטן without the definite article).

## 1.2. קבל D “to receive, to accept” (Job 2:10)

The distribution of קבל D “to receive” indicates clearly that the verb gained ground over classical לקח “to take, to receive” in LBH. This should probably be explained as owing to the influence of Aramaic, where קבל D is a regular equivalent of Hebrew לקח in many of its meanings. It should nevertheless be noted that the verb expresses a special nuance, “to accept, to undergo willingly,” in Job 2:10. Moreover, in Prov 19:20, which is not part of the LBH corpus, it occurs with the same nuance: קבל מוסר “receive/accept discipline.” Perhaps, then, the verb existed as a rare expression in earlier forms of Hebrew.

1.3. התפלל על “to intercede for” (Job 42:8)<sup>6</sup>

In Classical Hebrew the notion of intercession is expressed by the set phrase בעד התפלל; only in LBH do we find התפלל על used with this meaning.

5. Hurvitz, “Prose-Tale,” 19–30.

6. Ibid., 23.

#### 1.4. אחרי זאת “after this, thereupon” (Job 42:16)

The apparent lateness of this expression was noted already in BDB. In more recent times, some scholars have suggested that it may be a calque from Persian *pasa ava*, which could have reached Hebrew via Aramaic.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, the resemblance with Persian may be accidental.

#### 1.5. התיצב על “to present oneself to” (Job 1:6; 2:1)

While Classical Hebrew uses התיצב לפני seven times, התיצב על in the meaning “to present oneself to someone” is attested only in Zech 6:5; 2 Chr 11:13; Job 1:6; 2:1. The evidence is somewhat weakened, however, by the fact that the nearly synonymous niphal of יצב/נצב is constructed with the preposition על in classical texts.

#### 1.6. עד “while, during” (Job 1:18)

Classical Hebrew uses the adverb עוד to stress that a process expressed by a participial clause was still going on when something else happened. The construction is found in Job 1:16, 17. In the next verse, however, the syntax is varied and עד is used instead. עד with a participial clause is normal in Aramaic and is found elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew only in Neh 7:3. Note also that the stylistic variation of עוד and עד, both meaning “still,” finds a parallel in Hag 2:19.<sup>8</sup>

#### 1.7. איש היה בארץ-עוץ איוב שמו “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job” (Job 1:1)

Noting the similarity of this clause to the introduction of Mordecai in Esth 2:5, Hurvitz argues that the syntax here is typical of LBH and that

7. The Persian connection was quoted by Aren Wilson-Wright in a paper presented at the SBL meeting in San Francisco in 2011 from John Makujina's unpublished dissertation; see John Makujina, “Old Persian Calques in the Aramaic of Daniel” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001).

8. As observed by Gary Rendsburg, “Late Biblical Hebrew in the Book of Haggai,” in *Language and Nature: Papers Presented to John Huehnergard on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday* (ed. Rebecca Hasselbach and Na'ama Pat-El; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2012), 331.

Classical Hebrew would have begun the story with the *wayyiqtol* form וַיְהִי. It is true that several clauses with וַיְהִי introducing a new character in the story occur in the Classical Hebrew corpus.<sup>9</sup> One should take into consideration, however, that apart from Gen 1:1, there are hardly any absolute beginnings in that corpus. The clauses with וַיְהִי follow upon earlier narratives. The one case where a story inserted into the narrative does being by introducing the characters is indeed constructed with a *qatal* form, exactly as Job 1:1 is: see 2 Sam 12:1, שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים הָיוּ בְעִיר אֶחָד, “There were two men in one city.” Although this story mentions two men, not one, and although we do not learn of their names, the syntax is essentially the same. This appears to be a rare case where Hurvitz’s evidence breaks down under close scrutiny.

Several other features in the prose tale have been characterized as late. Hurvitz himself added an appendix with two more speculative examples, Young signaled four possible traits, and Rendsburg another one.<sup>10</sup> None of these additional elements can be securely established as being only late. As seen in the above discussion, clear-cut examples of late usage in the prose tale are not easy to come by. Nevertheless, the quality of the evidence brought by Hurvitz is on the whole very high. Although proof is not readily attainable in these matters, as in historical studies in general, Hurvitz has shown with tolerable precision that the narrative frame of Job is not written in classical prose such as one finds in Genesis or Samuel. Although the author of the prose tale probably consciously attempts to lend his story a patriarchal coloring, imitating turns of phrase from the classical corpus,<sup>11</sup> he also, unwittingly perhaps, uses expressions that unequivocally point to a later form of Hebrew.

## 2. EARLY LINGUISTIC FEATURES IN THE PROSE TALE OF JOB

A valid point of criticism in Young’s study is that late elements are not widespread in the prose tale. Comparable stretches of prose text in the LBH corpus usually display a much stronger concentration of late fea-

9. Hurvitz refers specifically to Judg 13:2; 17:1; 1 Sam 1:1; 9:1.

10. Hurvitz, “Prose-Tale,” 33–34; Young, “Prose Tale,” 619–20; Rendsburg, “Haggai,” 331.

11. Note such expressions as בְּנֵי קֶדֶם “sons of the east” (Job 1:3); הַשָּׁכִים בִּבְקֶר “he rose early” (1:5); יָחַר אָף “my anger was kindled” (42:7), all of which are far more typical of Classical than Late Hebrew.

tures.<sup>12</sup> This observation does not render the linguistic approach to the dating of Job unfeasible, as Young argues, but it does demand an explanation. As it turns out, the scarcity of late usages in the prose tale is directly related to the fact that most of the language of the prose tale conforms to early Hebrew.

By itself, the use of classical forms of expression is not very relevant to the issue of the date of the text. From early on, the linguistic approach has been based almost exclusively on the identification of late elements.<sup>13</sup> A passage using such elements is judged to be late, a passage where they are lacking can be held to be early. The rationale of this methodology is that early elements were known to later writers, and could therefore be used by them even if they were not an organic part of the language system in which they would naturally express themselves. In other words, the eventuality of archaizing disqualifies early linguistic features as evidence in the dating of biblical texts. For instance, in Job 42:11 the occurrence of the old and somewhat obscure word קשיטה, known otherwise only from Gen 33:19 and the allusion to it in Josh 24:32, does not indicate that the prose tale is early. The author of the prose tale may well have borrowed the word from the patriarchal narratives, even if in his time it was no longer in use.<sup>14</sup>

In principle, the scruple to use early features in the debate on linguistic dating is well founded. Nevertheless, recent research has shown that it stands in need of qualification. A number of grammatical usages typical of Classical Hebrew more or less completely disappear in later texts. Where it can be shown that the function of these early usages is expressed by other constructions in LBH, the conclusion is warranted that they have effectively fallen from use. The theoretical postulate standing behind this reasoning is that language users are much less conscious of grammar than of vocabulary. While it is relatively easy to pick up archaic items of vocabulary from an old writing, imitating the grammar of early texts is much

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12. Young, "Prose Tale," 623.

13. This methodological bias is already present in Wilhelm Gesenius's early work, *Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache und Schrift* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1915). See Jan Joosten, "Wilhelm Gesenius and the History of Hebrew in the Biblical Period," in *Biblische Exegese und hebräische Lexikographie* (ed. Stefan Schorch and Ernst-Joachim Waschke; BZAW 427; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 94–106.

14. Another element in the prose tale that is otherwise attested only in earlier texts (as well as in the poetry of Job) is the adverb אולם "but."

harder to do. Texts of doubtful date in which such exclusively early usages are found must, all other things being equal, be considered relatively early.<sup>15</sup> Several features occurring in the prose tale come in this category, as I will argue presently.

## 2.1. Iterative *weqatal*

In Biblical Hebrew *weqatal* mostly has a future-modal function. In classical texts, it also regularly expresses repeated or habitual processes in a past-tense context.<sup>16</sup> Iterative *weqatal* forms tend to occur in clusters, often interspersed with *yiqtol* in the same function. More than once, such clusters are found near the beginning of a narrative unit, where they depict the background of the intrigue that will develop in the following story.<sup>17</sup> There are around 150 instances of iterative *weqatal* in the classical corpus, from Genesis through 2 Kings. The usage is found also in Amos, First Isaiah, Ps 78, and Jeremiah. But it is absent from the LBH corpus, where other constructions, notably participial clauses, are used to express iterative-habitual action in the past.<sup>18</sup> In light of this distribution, it is interesting to observe the clustering of iterative *weqatal* forms in one passage in Job, 1:4–5:

וְהָלְכוּ בְנָיו וְעָשׂוּ מִשְׁתָּה בֵּית אִישׁ יוֹמוֹ  
וְשָׁלְחוּ וְקָרְאוּ לְשִׁלְשֵׁת אַחֲיוֹתֵיהֶם לְאֵכָל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת עִמָּהֶם:  
וַיְהִי כִּי הִקְיפוּ יָמֵי הַמִּשְׁתָּה וַיִּשְׁלַח אִיּוֹב וַיְקַדְּשֵׁם  
וְהַשִּׁבִּים בְּבִקְרָה וְהָעֵלָה עֲלוֹת מִסְפָּר כָּלֵם  
כִּי אָמַר אִיּוֹב אוֹלִי חֲטָאוּ בְנֵי וּבִרְכוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּלִבָּבָם  
כָּכָה יַעֲשֶׂה אִיּוֹב כָּל־הַיָּמִים:

15. See Joosten, “Gesenius.”

16. See Joüon, §119v; Jan Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew: A New Synthesis Elaborated on the Basis of Classical Prose* (Jerusalem: Simor, 2012), 305–7.

17. See, e.g., Gen 29:2–3; 1 Sam 1:3–7; Judg 6:3–5; Isa 6:3–5.

18. See Jan Joosten, “The Disappearance of Iterative WEQATAL in the Biblical Hebrew Verbal System,” in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (ed. Steven Ellis Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 135–47.

<sup>4</sup> Now his sons used to go [*weqatal*] and hold [*weqatal*] a feast in the house of each one in turn, and they would send [*weqatal*] and invite [*weqatal*] their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

<sup>5</sup> And when the days of their feasting were finished [*qatal*], Job sent [*wayyiqtol*] and sanctified them [*wayyiqtol*].<sup>19</sup>

He would get up early [*weqatal*] in the morning and offer [*weqatal*] burnt offerings according to the number of them all.

For Job thought, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.”

Thus Job used to do [*yiqtol*], all the time.

Iterative *weqatal* is used here in an expository function that finds good parallels in the classical corpus, but has no attestation whatsoever in LBH or later forms of the language. The verses are not directly modeled on a classical passage, and it is hard to imagine that the author of the prose tale produced this brilliant use of tenses while imitating the syntax of earlier texts. It appears rather that the iterative use of *weqatal* was still alive and well in the Hebrew he practiced.

It is difficult to tell exactly when the earlier type of syntax became obsolete and when the later type took over. What can be said is that iterative *weqatal*, which still functions regularly in Jeremiah, is quite defunct by the time of Nehemiah. Its absence in Ezekiel may perhaps suggest that the usage died out over a short period stretching across the turn of the seventh century.<sup>20</sup> But such a conclusion is probably overly confident. However this may be, in the comparison of Classical to Late Biblical Hebrew, the prose tale clearly aligns with the older corpus on this precise point.

## 2.2. Narrative וַיְהִי Followed by Temporal כִּי

Narrative וַיְהִי “and it happened,” invariably followed by a temporal phrase, is much more typical of classical prose than of LBH.<sup>21</sup> There are around three hundred instances of it in the books of Genesis through 2 Kings, but

19. The switch from *weqatal* to *wayyiqtol* is remarkable, but it is paralleled in passages such as Judg 6:2–5. For an explanation of this phenomenon and a list of other examples, see Joosten, *Verbal System*, 177–78.

20. So Joosten, “Disappearance,” 178.

21. See Jan Joosten, “Diachronic Aspects of Narrative *Wayhi* in Biblical Hebrew,” *JNSL* 35 (2009): 43–61.

only around thirty-eight in the LBH corpus. With its five attestations in 46 verses (1:5, 6, 13; 2:1; 42:7), the prose tale comes close to the proportion observed in classical texts.

More significant than these statistical data is that one of the patterns of narrative **וַיְהִי** in Job is completely lacking in LBH. The sequence *wayhi ki qatal* is attested 16 times in Genesis–2 Kings.<sup>22</sup> It recurs nowhere else, in the Bible or in Postbiblical Hebrew, except in Job 1:5 (quoted in the preceding section). The absence of this pattern in later texts is not due to accident. Several scholars have observed that temporal **כִּי** becomes obsolete in LBH.<sup>23</sup> Note that where Samuel–Kings has narrative **וַיְהִי** followed by a **כִּי** clause, Chronicles has a different type of syntax:

2 Sam 7:1

וַיְהִי כִּי־יָשָׁב הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּבֵיתוֹ

Now when the king was settled in his house

1 Chr 17:1

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר יָשָׁב דָּוִיד בְּבֵיתוֹ

Now when David settled in his house<sup>24</sup>

As in the case of iterative *weqatal*, the syntax of the prose tale conforms to Classical Hebrew in a way that distinguishes it markedly from LBH.

### 2.3. **אִי מִזֶּה** “whence”

In Classical Hebrew the particle **אִי** invariably means “where?” Like other interrogative pronouns, it is often strengthened with enclitic **זֶה**. The

22. See Gen 6:1; 26:8; 27:1; 43:21; 44:24; Exod 1:21; 13:15; Josh 17:13; Judg 1:28; 6:7; 16:16, 25; 2 Sam 6:13; 7:1; 19:26; 2 Kgs 17:7. Note that several of these occurrences are in passages attributed to relatively late strata in the classical corpus.

23. See Allen R. Guenther, “A Diachronic Study of Biblical Hebrew Prose Syntax: An Analysis of the Verbal Clause in Jeremiah 37–45 and Esther 1–10” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1977), 212. Temporal **כִּי** in reference to the future has been retained in a few parallel passages in Chronicles: 1 Chr 17:11 par. 2 Sam 7:12; 2 Chr 6:28 par. 1 Kgs 8:37. See also, similarly in reference to the future, 1QS VI 4.

24. Similarly 2 Sam 6:13 and 1 Chr 15:26, although the rewriting in this case is more radical.



classical meaning is still found in Second and Third Isaiah (Isa 50:1; 66:1).<sup>25</sup> In LBH, however, **אִי זֶה** always has the meaning “which?” known also from Mishnaic Hebrew.<sup>26</sup>

In light of this distribution, it is interesting to take a close look at the use of the idiomatic **אִי מִזֶּה** “whence.” The phrase is found seven times in the classical corpus,<sup>27</sup> once in Job, and once in Jonah. In Job it functions in the same way as in the classical corpus.

Job 2:2

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן אִי מִזֶּה תָּבֹא

And the LORD said to Satan, “Where do you come from?”

The syntax and the meaning are exactly the same here as in some classical passages:

2 Sam 1:3

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ דָּוִד אִי מִזֶּה תָּבֹא

And David said to him, “Where do you come from?”

In the late book of Jonah, however, the phrase is used with a different meaning much closer to that of **אִי זֶה** in LBH and Mishnaic Hebrew:

Jonah 1:8

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידָה־נָא לָנוּ בְּאִשֶּׁר לְמִי־הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ מִהַמְּלָאכָתָךְ וּמֵאַיִן תָּבֹא מִה אֶרֶצְךָ וְאִי־מִזֶּה עִם אֶתָּה

They said to him, “Tell us, because of whom is it that this disaster has overtaken us? What’s your occupation? Where do you come from? What’s your country? And *from which people* are you?”

Since **אִי מִזֶּה** is not found in LBH or Postbiblical Hebrew, it seems possible that the author of the book of Jonah borrowed the form from classical texts. If he did so, however, the different function shows that he did not

25. And also a few times in the poetry of Job.

26. The only possible exception is 2 Chr 18:23, where the particle has been taken over from the source text (see 1 Kgs 22:24). In Jer 5:7 **אִי לְזֹאת**, “upon what grounds?” may be an early attestation of the later usage, but the phrase is not easy to analyze.

27. See Gen 16:8, Judg 13:6; 1 Sam 25:11; 30:13; 2 Sam 1:3, 13; 15:2.

have an exact understanding of the classical phrase and slightly misinterpreted it under the influence of later Hebrew.

The prose tale of Job belongs with the grammar of classical texts. Although it is not impossible that the expression *אי מזה תבוא* “where are you coming from” was lifted wholesale from earlier texts, the example from Jonah shows how improbable this is.

The three features discussed in the second part of this paper suggest that the author of the prose tale is conversant with Classical Hebrew in a way that none of the LBH writers are. The distribution of the features shows that they are probably not to be attributed to successful archaizing. Rather, the data indicate that the prose tale itself goes back to a period when these usages were still alive. Although the evidence is scarce, it should not for that reason be dismissed. It is remarkable that within such a brief text as the prose tale, several marked classical features could be identified.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

If the prose framework of the book of Job shows both late and early features, this does not make the linguistic approach to the dating of biblical texts impracticable. Although diachronic studies are often restricted to distinguishing only two corpora, “Classical” and “Late” Biblical Hebrew, it is clear to all who work in this field that in reality the texts reflect a continuum stretching over several centuries. The linguistic profile of the prose tale strongly suggests that it belongs neither to the classical corpus nor to LBH, but to somewhere between the two. When the prose tale was given its present literary form, the late features it contains were already coming into use,<sup>28</sup> and the early features had not yet died out.<sup>29</sup> Although the precise bundle of linguistic features found in this corpus is unique, a similar combination of early and late may be found in such books as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Lamentations.<sup>30</sup>

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28. Note that several of the late features in the prose tale find parallels in Haggai or Zechariah (section 1, features a, e, f). The one feature that may pose a problem in this respect is *אחרי זאת* (feature d): if this is indeed a calque from Persian, it can hardly have come into use in the transitional period. As suggested above, however, the similarity to Persian may be due to chance.

29. Note that iterative *weqatal* is found in Jeremiah (section 2, feature a). For *ויהי כן*, see above n. 22.

30. For Jeremiah see now the dissertation of Aaron D. Hornkohl, “The Language

In terms of absolute chronology, the linguistic evidence makes it hard to assign the framework of the book of Job to the Persian period, except perhaps to its very beginning. Although the language of the prose tale does not differ as much from LBH as does the language of, say, the patriarchal narratives or the succession account, it differs sufficiently to preclude that it should come from the period when the late biblical books were created. Rather than the Persian period, linguistic analysis indicates that the prose tale came into being in the Babylonian period.<sup>31</sup>

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of the Book of Jeremiah" [in Hebrew] (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2011); for Ezekiel see Mark Rooker, *Biblical Hebrew in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); for Lamentations see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Lamentations," *JANESCU* 26 (1998): 1–36. The typological similarity of the language of Ezekiel and Job was already perceived by Gesenius, *Geschichte*, 33–37.

31. A similar date could be argued on linguistic grounds for the poetical chapters of Job: "the diction of the tale turns out to be rather close to the poetic style" (Frank Polak, "On Prose and Poetry in the Book of Job," *JANESCU* 24 [1996]: 97). This question must, however, be left for another paper.



## SPEAKER, ADDRESSEE, AND POSITIONING: DIALOGUE STRUCTURE AND PRAGMATICS IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Frank H. Polak

How does the narrator indicate speaker and addressee in the dialogue? This issue may look like a mere technicality, of no interest for exegesis, history of religion, and literary criticism, but actually it is of highest importance, for it relates to the status of the speaking characters. On the face of it, the matter seems rather trivial: when the participants in the dialogue are unknown to the reader, they are to be mentioned by name and/or title, for the sake of clarity; but when it is clear whose move it is, no explicit indication is necessary. But, as indicated at the time by Wellhausen's remarks, and more recently by extensive research of Robert Longacre and Lénart de Regt, in Biblical Hebrew the matter is far more complicated and significant.<sup>1</sup> In the present study I want to show that these indications are related to the pragmatics of the dialogue as a negotiation process, and thereby to positioning.

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1. Julius Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1871), 22–23; Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989); Lénart J. de Regt, *Participants in Old Testament Texts and the Translator: Reference Devices and their Rhetorical Impact* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999). See also Hermann Reckendorf, *Die syntaktischen Verhältnisse des Arabischen* (Leiden: Brill, 1898), 371–72; Steven E. Runge, "Pragmatic Effects of Semantically Redundant Anchoring Expressions in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," *JNSL* 32 (2006): 55–83. Textual aspects of this matter are discussed in my paper, "Whodunit? Implicit Subject, Discourse Structure and Pragmatics in the Hebrew and Greek Bible," to appear in *From Author to Copyist: Composition, Redaction and Transmission of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. C. Werman).

## 1. SUBJECT INDICATION IN THE MT

In the MT the narrator often indicates the subject, when according to the rules of such languages as English, French, Dutch, or German this indication is not only superfluous but even unexpected, for example, “*Jonathan* called David, and *Jonathan* told him all this. Then *Jonathan* brought David to Saul” (1 Sam 19:7 NJPS). The repeated mention of Jonathan’s name highlights his role. In other cases the name of the acting character is not indicated, even where in modern languages it would be necessary for clarity (“underspecification”), for example, “Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said [וַיֹּאמֶר], ‘Neither has YHWH chosen this one’” (16:8).<sup>2</sup> Here the narrator does not indicate that the speaker was Samuel. In the closure of the description of Jonathan’s intervention on behalf of David, the narrative states that “he served him as before” (19:7 NJPS), not noting that “he” refers to David, and “him” to Saul. And, by the same token, “And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armor-bearer” (16:21 ASV).<sup>3</sup>

Wellhausen found here extreme liberty (“Ungebundenheit”), but Robert Longacre and Lénart de Regt are able to point to a number of norms and rules. This change of perspective was made possible by a sea change in modern linguistics, which enables the scholar to see the text as a whole, a discourse in which such features as opening, closure, the use of the tenses and anaphora, the reference to persons or objects mentioned previously, are governed by contextual conditions “beyond the sentence,” that is, discourse structure.<sup>4</sup> In this vein Longacre can show that central characters (“participants”) are introduced by name (and /or title) in the exposition, but following this introduction are referred to obliquely by pronoun (independent or suffixed), or, implicitly, by a verbal form (prefix/affix). Importantly, Longacre links participant tracking to plot structure.

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2. The translations used in this study are mostly taken from NRSV or from NJPS, sometimes with slight changes, notably the use of “YHWH” for the Tetragrammaton.

3. Characteristically NRSV (and similarly NJPS) make the reference to Saul explicit: “Saul loved him greatly”; see Regt, *Participants*, 96–97.

4. Numerous definitions of discourse are discussed by Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 20–43, ultimately adopting its definition as “utterance”; similarly Joseph E. Grimes, *The Thread of Discourse* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 21–25, 30–32. Mey regards discourse as “human-language-in-use,” involving the human act behind the text, in its relation to the social context: Jacob L. Mey, *Pragmatics: An Introduction* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 191.

Reference by name or title is resumed in crucial transitions ("reidentification"), or when the participant stands out by his social rank, such as Pharaoh.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, when a character is dominated by another participant, reference is often by pronoun or suffix. Longacre also notes reidentification for participants of equal status, for a decisive intervention, for a person in control of the situation, or as introduction for the final word. The narrator may forgo participant reference in case of nonaggressive, reassuring utterances, or to introduce a stalemate.<sup>6</sup>

Analysis along these lines is carried further by Lénart de Regt, who views discourse structure from a rhetorical perspective. Full introduction of a participant already mentioned before ("overdetermination") may indicate the opening of a new "paragraph block," but can also serve to focus on that specific participant, or to indicate the importance of his/her words that may be surprising or unexpected.<sup>7</sup> In addition, de Regt highlights the implicit change of subject in the dialogue, as the shift from first to second speaker is not indicated, but is inferred from context ("underdetermination").<sup>8</sup>

Both Longacre and de Regt go beyond discourse structure when they discuss such elements as focus, highlighting, the nature of the utterance, its weight, and the importance of the role of a certain participant. Such considerations pertain to pragmatics, the study of language from the perspective of communication, relating to intended/perceived content of the utterance in its given form and context in the interaction between speaker and addressee, narrator and reader.<sup>9</sup> This field includes such features as reference and anaphora, as they relate to their meaning in the communication process.

In my view, the pragmatic aspects of participant tracking merit further investigation. In particular, a scrutiny of the status of speaker and addressee in the dialogue facilitates more precision in the description of the norms and rules of participant reference.

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5. Longacre, *Joseph*, 144–48, 155–62.

6. *Ibid.*, 165–69, 174–83.

7. De Regt, *Participants*, 43–84.

8. *Ibid.*, 28–32.

9. Mey, *Pragmatics*, 5–8.

## 2. SPEAKER AND ADDRESSEE IN THE DIALOGUE

Formally the dialogue is a spoken interchange that comprises initiative, response, and rejoinder or counterproposal. When we consider the dialogue in biblical narrative, the literary context necessitates a pragmatic perspective, for every speech event is directed toward an addressee, expresses a content, and anticipates a reaction. In this vista, the biblical dialogue leads to a deal, a transaction, and thus embodies a goal-oriented negotiation process.<sup>10</sup> The initiator opens the interchange with a proposal, a statement, a question, or a request, and in any case, a proffer. In response the addressee may express consent (the preferred response), or reject the proffer or refuse the request (a dispreferred response). He may dodge the question, or put a counterproposal on the table. The sequence of proffer and response constitutes a round that consists of two speaking turns, the minimal extent of any dialogue.<sup>11</sup> An exchange may consist of a series of rounds, and can be closed by a concluding statement or a confirmation. A speaking turn represents a move, or a series of moves in the exchange,<sup>12</sup>

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10. See Ervin Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 5–54, 60–72; Willis Edmondson, *Spoken Discourse: A Model for Analysis* (London: Longman, 1981), 66–87; Frank H. Polak, “Forms of Talk in Hebrew Biblical Narrative: Negotiations, Interaction, and Sociocultural Context,” in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World* (ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 167–98 (with references to further literature).

11. On conversation analysis see Mey, *Pragmatics*, 134–63; Anthony J. Liddicoat, *An Introduction to Conversation Analysis* (London: Continuum, 2007); Cynthia L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis* (HSM 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 235–43, 257–61; Raymond F. Person, *In Conversation with Jonah: Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism, and the Book of Jonah* (JSOTSup 220; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Victor H. Matthews, *More Than Meets the Ear: Discovering the Hidden Contexts of Old Testament Conversations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 67–99. In literary context these methods have been anticipated by Eberhart Lämmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1955), 214–33. For literary applications of conversation analysis see Deirdre Burton, *Dialogue and Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Modern Drama Dialogue and Naturally Occurring Conversation* (London: Routledge, 1980); Vimala Herman, *Dramatic Discourse: Dialogue as Interaction in Plays* (London: Routledge, 1995); Michael J. Toolan, *Language in Literature: An Introduction to Stylistics* (London: Arnold, 1998), 194–213.

12. The role of the “move,” “a full stretch of talk or of its substitutes which has a distinctive unitary bearing on some set or other of circumstances in which the partici-



mostly as speech event, but sometimes as silent gesture (a paralinguistic response), or even extralinguistic action. Full recognition of the pragmatic aspects of the dialogue as a goal-oriented exchange enables us to perceive significant norms behind the different modes of reference to initiator and respondent.

Some basic issues of participant tracking in an exchange are demonstrated by, for example, the tale of Laban and Jacob. In the following discussion the notations (1a) and (1b) serve to indicate the turn of the first speaker, the initiator of the exchange (a), and the respondent (b) in the first round, and so on (2a).

(1a) Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" (Gen 29:15).

(1b) Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel" (v. 18).

(2a) Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me" (v. 19).

The opening of the exchange (1a) mentions both speaker and addressee by name, as in verse 15 above ("Then Laban said to Jacob ..."). A sequence of this type is even found after an exposition mentioning both characters: "Once Jacob was cooking a stew, and Esau came in from the open, and he was famished, and Esau said to Jacob ..." (Gen 25:29–30a).<sup>13</sup> When Laban settles the issue of Jacob's remuneration, he is once again mentioned by name (2a, "Laban said ...").

If the dialogue has a continuation, both participants are known and do not have to be mentioned again. Thus the narrator is not obliged to indicate the participants when the speaking turn passes from initiator to respondent (or vice versa; "turn taking"):<sup>14</sup>

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pants find themselves," has been highlighted by Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 24; see also Miller, *Representation*, 241. Goffman views conversation as part of an interpersonal interaction, including also "face work," gestures, and silence.

13. So also, e.g., Gen 16:2; 31:36.

14. See Liddicoat, *Conversation Analysis*, 51–78; de Regt, *Participants*, 23, 28–32; and note, e.g., Gen 3:9–11; 19:1–3, 5–9; 21:29–30; 37:29–30.

Setting: He [i.e., Hazael, v. 13] left Elisha and returned to his overlord (2 Kgs 8:14a).

(1a) And he [i.e., Ben-hadad] asked him, “What did Elisha say to you?” (v. 14a).

(1b) So he [i.e., Hazael] said, “He told me that you would recover” (v. 14b).

In other words, within the dialogue sequence turn taking in itself suffices to indicate the change of speaking subject, even if the preceding turn does not include an explicit mention of the addressee. An interchange of this type, then, is a distinct, almost formal feature of the discourse structure of Biblical Hebrew.

### 3. EXPLICIT MENTION OF THE SPEAKING SUBJECT

If the narrator can regularly skip the explicit reference to the speaking subject, the mention of name or title of the speaker is a significant matter. Longacre states that the narrator may continue to mention both parties by name, when both are on an equal footing:

(1a) Hazael said, “What is your servant, the ‘dog,’<sup>15</sup> that he should do this great thing?” (2 Kgs 8:13a).

(1b) So Elisha said, “YHWH has shown me you as king over Aram” (v. 13b).

In particular, one notes conflict episodes in which the one party does not yield to the other, for example, in the tale of Saul and Jonathan:<sup>16</sup>

(1a) So Saul said to his son Jonathan, “Why didn’t the son of Jesse come to the meal yesterday or today?”

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15. Probably the technical term for the professional soldier at the service of his king, like Old Assyrian *kalbum*.

16. So also, e.g., Gen 20:1–11; 27:6–12; Exod 3:4–4:10; 1 Sam 14:43; 15:11–26; 20:5–10.

(1b) Jonathan said to Saul, “David begged leave of me to go to Bethlehem. ...”

(2a) Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan and shouted: “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!” ...

(2b) But Jonathan spoke up and said to his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?”

In such cases the mention of the speaking party pertains to the role of the participants in the dialogue episode, and thereby to the pragmatics of the narrative.<sup>17</sup>

The pragmatic import is even more clear when only one of the parties is mentioned by name. The party whose name is not mentioned is often the addressee, for example, in the tale of Saul, who is defeated by prophetic authority:<sup>18</sup>

(1a) And Samuel said to him, “YHWH has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you” (1 Sam 15:28).

(1b) Then he said, “I did wrong. Please, honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel, and come back with me that I bow low to YHWH your God” (v. 30).<sup>19</sup>

The prophet, the initiator of the exchange, has the upper hand and is indicated by name, whereas the king has the worst end of it and is not referred to by name or title.

Similarly, Moses has to yield to the unequivocal divine decision:

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17. See Frank Polak, “On Dialogue and Speaker Status in the Scroll of Ruth,” *Beit Mikra* 46 (2001): 193–218 (Hebrew with English summary); idem, “On Dialogue and Speaker Status in Biblical Narrative,” *Beit Mikra* 48 (2002): 1–18, 97–119 (Hebrew with English summary), including a discussion of social drama and the character’s status in the action sequence (115–19).

18. Similarly, e.g., Gen 18:27–28; 25:33–34; 27:13–14, 17–18, 26–27, 32–33; Exod 3:2; 1 Sam 3:8, 18; 2 Sam 13:8–10, 15–16; 1 Kgs 21:4–6.

19. The LXX adds Saul’s name, and is followed by NJPS (bracketed in text) and NRSV (note that Hebrew reads “he”). See also 15:27 MT as against LXX and 4Q51.

(1a) Then YHWH said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, YHWH?" (Exod 4:11).

(1b) But he said, "O my lord, please send someone else" (v. 13).

(2a) Then the anger of YHWH was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak" (v. 11a).

In general, the narrator refrains from explicit reference to the addressee, if the latter complies with the wishes of the initiator, grants his requests, follows his command, or has to yield to him.

In a second constellation, not the initiator but the respondent carries the day and is mentioned by name. This is the way in which the dialogue develops in the tale of Moses' first appearance before Pharaoh:

(1a) Afterward Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness'" (Exod 5:1).

(1b) But Pharaoh said, "Who is YHWH, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know YHWH, and I will not let Israel go" (v. 2).

(2a) So they said, "The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to YHWH our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword" (v. 3).

(2b) But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" (v. 4).

When Moses and Aaron try to explain to Pharaoh the identity and power of the originator of the demand, the narrator refrains from reiterating their name, even though it is the renewal of their petition. This fits the development of the tale, for Pharaoh reiterates his refusal, whereas the two brothers lack the power to stand up to him.

A similar constellation appears in the dialogue between Naomi and her daughters-in-law, opening with the indication of Naomi's name and authority:

(1a) But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me?" (Ruth 1:11, a renewal of Naomi's initiative, v. 8).

(1b) Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her (v. 14, an extralinguistic response).

In the next round not Naomi but Ruth is mentioned by name:

(2a) So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law" (v. 15).

(2b) But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you ..." (vv. 16–18).

(3a) Then she saw that she was determined to go with her, and ceased to argue with her (v. 18).

This time Naomi, the initiator of the exchange and the person with authority, is not mentioned by name. It is Ruth who carries the day and is mentioned explicitly. Ruth is accorded a similar status when she proposes to glean after the harvesters: she is mentioned by name (ותאמר רות), whereas Naomi only utters consent (2:2, ותאמר).

Thus the participant whose role is decisive is mentioned by name, whereas the name of person who follows suit is taken for granted. The play with participant tracking is highly significant!

#### 4. FURTHER ASPECTS OF THE PRAGMATICS OF REFERENCE

The pragmatic import of name mentioning is not limited to the indication of success and authority. In the divine interrogation of the first human couple in Genesis, the respondents are mentioned by name to indicate their responsibility. The opening of the dialogue mentions the divine initiator by name, whereas the human respondent is not referred to explicitly:

(1a) So YHWH God called to the human, and said to him, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9).

(1b) He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (v. 10).

Here the Deity is indicated as dominant initiator, whereas the human addressee has to yield, just as expected. But the logic of participant reference changes in the next round:

(2a) He said (that is, the deity), “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (v. 11).

(2b) The human said: “The woman whom you gave to be beside me, she gave me from the tree, and so I ate.” (v. 12).

What the narrator imputes to the human (and his wife, v. 13) is responsibility, rather than success or authority. In my view, this is why the deity is not mentioned by name in the turn 2a (v. 11).

In other cases the narrator uses the mention of the name in order to indicate the position a person assigns to himself. The narrator refrains from mentioning Ruth by name, when he indicates the extreme humility she is displaying before Boaz (Ruth 2:10, 13). The tale of David and Mephibosheth shows how Saul’s servant, Ziba, keeps his head high in spite of the loss of the plot of which he enjoyed the usufruct:

(1a) The king said, “Is there anyone at all left of the House of Saul with whom I can keep faith as pledged before God?” (2 Sam 9:3a).

(1b) Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan, crippled in his feet” (v. 3b).

(2a) The king said to him, “Where is he?” (v. 4a).

(2b) Ziba said to the king, “Here, he is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar” (v. 4b).

This pattern returns after David’s transfer of the fields to Mephiboshet:

(3a) Then the king summoned Saul’s servant Ziba, and said to him, “All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master’s grandson” (v. 9).<sup>20</sup>

(3b) Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do just as my lord the king has commanded him” (v. 10).

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20. Laban speaks of בְּנֵי and בְּנֵי when referring to his grandchildren (Gen 31:28, 43); see BDB 120.

In spite of the humiliation, Ziba is not keeping a low profile! Eventually, he uses Absalom's rebellion and Mephibosheth's helplessness in order to restore the field to himself (2 Sam 16:1–4; 19:17).

In particular, one notes the subtle mixture of brotherly manners, diplomatic tactics, and hidden/manifest threats that Jacob and Esau demonstrate in their meeting. In the opening of the scene Jacob observes Esau nearing with a large force, and plans how to approach his brother (Gen 33:1–3). At that juncture only Esau is mentioned by name: “But Esau ran to meet him [וירץ עשו לקראתו], and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him,<sup>21</sup> and they wept” (Gen 33:4).<sup>22</sup>

In the ensuing dialogue no names are mentioned:

(1a) Then he [i.e., Esau],<sup>23</sup> looked up [וישא את־עיניו] and saw the women and children, and said [ויאמר], “Who are these with you?” (v. 5a).

(1b) So he [i.e., Jacob] said [ויאמר], “The children whom God has graciously given your servant” (v. 5b).

When all honors are duly performed, Esau asks for an explanation of the entourage that met him earlier:

(2a) So he [i.e., Esau] said [ויאמר], “What do you mean by all this troupe that I met?” (v. 8a).

(2b) and he [i.e., Jacob] said [ויאמר], “To find favor with my lord.”

The narration of this piece of the dialogue does not mention any names. But one could hardly conclude that the event is based on brotherly equality, for Jacob has bowed down seven times (v. 3), and honors Esau with

21. Actually, some of these clauses could be attributed to Jacob, as a response to Esau's gesture. The LXX presents a different word order, καὶ περιλαβὼν αὐτὸν ἐφίλησεν καὶ προσέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ, reflecting וישקרו ויחבקרו in sequence, whereas in the MT they form an inclusio. These verbs form a formulaic pattern (so also Gen 29:10; 48:10), likewise found in the Ugaritic epic (CAT 1.23.51–52). The problem of word order seems related to the dotting of וישקרו in the MT.

22. The LXX has a plus, ἀμφότεροι, “both” (no variants), whereas the Vulgate (*et ... fleuit*) and Targum Onqelos (ובכא according to the Babylonian manuscript Or 2362, but other manuscripts have ובכו) have the singular verb, “and he wept.”

23. Unlike the other ancient versions, the Peshitta has a plus, “Esau.”

the title אֲדֹנִי (“my lord,” v. 8), whereas he refers to himself as עַבְדְּךָ (“your servant,” v. 5). Moreover, the threatening presence of Esau’s four hundred men (v. 1) is never removed. Thus we prick up our ears when the narrator indicates whose turn it is:

(3a) But Esau said [וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂוּ], “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself” (v. 9).

(3b) But Jacob said [וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב], “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand” (vv. 10–11a).

Both Esau’s declining of these gifts and Jacob’s refusal to accept his negative response are marked by the indication of their names. Is the narrator only deferring to the ceremonial formalities of the offering of presents? It seems there is more to it, for in the ensuing dialogue the names are not mentioned again: when Jacob insists (וַיִּפְצַר-בּוֹ, v. 11b), Esau accepts the gift (וַיִּקַּח, v. 11b), and continues:

(4a) Then he [i.e., Esau] said [וַיֹּאמֶר], “Let us break up and go, and I will go alongside you.”

(4b) But he said to him [וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו], “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me ...” (vv. 12–13).

In this entire sequence no names are mentioned. But the narrator alters his technique when Esau finally mentions his forces:

(5a) Then Esau said [וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂוּ], “Let me leave with you some of the force that is with me” (v. 15a).

Jacob courteously but decisively declines this honor:

(5b) But he [i.e., Jacob]<sup>24</sup> said [וַיֹּאמֶר], “Why that? My lord is too kind to me” (v. 15b).

The fact that at this stage Esau’s name is mentioned, whereas Jacob’s name is not, gives away the entire game. The narrator not only reminds us with

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24. Here the Peshitta has a plus, “Jacob.”



whom power really lies, and who is the underdog, but also shows how Jacob keeps his overbearing brother at bay by subtle, steady diplomacy.

Finally, certain ironic effects should not be overlooked. In the tale of Judah and Tamar both are hiding their identity, and thus their names are mentioned only at the beginning of the scene (Gen 38:13–15). The continuation is anonymous: “So he turned aside to her by the road and said ... and she said ... and he said ... and she said” (vv. 16–18). But when Judah returns home he is mentioned by name and gives orders to his Adullamite companion (v. 20). Apparently he is in full control of the situation. When he learns of Tamar’s pregnancy he decides how to punish her: “And Judah said, ‘Bring her out, and let her be burned’” (v. 24). The verdict is marked by the use of Judah’s name. For the description of Tamar’s reaction only the pronoun is used:

“As she was being brought out [הָיָא מוֹצֵאתָ], she sent word [וְהָיָא שְׁלִיחָה] to her father-in-law, ‘It was the owner of these who made me pregnant.’ And she said [וְתִאמַר], “Take note, please, whose these are...” (v. 25)

Judah, then, is giving the commands, but it is his daughter-in-law who is in control, although she is keeping a low profile. The consistent mention of Judah’s name conveys a pretense of the paterfamilias, who bethinks himself to direct the events, when he is actually being manipulated by Tamar.

Thus we see that the pragmatics of the mention/nonmention of the name of the speaker and addressee has many subtle aspects, and maybe even too many. Is it possible to point to an overarching concept that could cover all these aspects, different though they are?

## 5. POSITIONING AND THE PRAGMATICS OF REFERENCE

A concept pertaining to the indication of the status and role of persons in interaction is “positioning,” the construction and assignment of internal “qualities” and “place in society” by or to oneself, by or to others, in interaction.<sup>25</sup> Michael Bamberg and David Herman have introduced this

25. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré, “Positioning: Conversation and the Production of Selves,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 20 (1990): 43–63; Rom Harré and Luc van Langenhove, eds., *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Action* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); John W. Du Bois, “The Stance Triangle,” in *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (ed. R. Englebretson; Amsterdam; Ben-

notion into narrative theory; Victor Matthews uses it in the realm of biblical narrative.<sup>26</sup> Thus the various strategies involved in the mention/non-mention of the speaker's name indicate positioning. First, the narrator positions a person as successful in the negotiations or his undertaking, or constructs his discourse/actions as a failure. Second, positioning enables the narrator to show how a certain character constructs himself/herself and his/her position in its interaction with another character. Third, the narrator builds his/her attitude vis-à-vis a particular character, or places the reader in a certain position by the shaping of a specific perspective, for instance, by irony.

Positioning, then, is an important aspect of the interface between literary theory and the linguistic study of discourse and pragmatics. Although the present essay is limited to the dialogue episode, the study of the action sequence also has much to gain from the application of these concepts. But that is a topic for another study.

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jamins, 2007), 139–81; Rom Harré et al., “Recent Advances in Positioning Theory,” *Theory & Psychology* 19 (2009): 5–31.

26. David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 55–63; Michael Bamberg, “Positioning between Structure and Performance,” *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7 (1997): 335–42; Matthews, *More Than Meets the Ear*, 101–7.

## NOTES ON SOME HEBREW WORDS IN ECCLESIASTES

Stuart Weeks

Biblical scholars in general are well provided with lexicographical resources—not least among them now the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, edited by David Clines. The inclusion by this work of new words and meanings found only in Ben Sira and the Qumran texts has been especially helpful for those of us working on late biblical materials, and students of Ecclesiastes, in particular, have had the benefit also in recent years of Antoon Schoors's magisterial work on the language of Qoheleth, the second volume of which is devoted to a consideration of the book's vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> There are many words in Ecclesiastes, however, that remain problematic for one reason or another, and, by way of tribute to David, I want to explore a few such lexical problems here.

### 1. אִנְסָכָה

This word appears in Eccl 2:1, where Qoheleth tells us: אִמְרָתִי אֲנִי בִלְבִי לֵכֶּה-נָא אִנְסָכָה בְּשִׂמְחָה וּרְאָה בְּטוֹב (as at 2:15; 3:17–18), and the challenge that he proposes is essentially to himself: he is going to do something involving pleasure. The sense of the closing imperative וּרְאָה בְּטוֹב is not entirely certain itself, as we shall see, but it does not raise significant problems. The meaning of אִנְסָכָה, on the other hand, is much more difficult to determine, and has been the focus of considerable discussion. This word is most easily parsed as a cohortative form from נָסַךְ, “pour,” and that understanding underpins both a

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1. Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth*, Part 1: *Grammar* (OLA 41; Leuven: Dept. Oriëntalistiek and Peeters, 1992); Part 2: *Vocabulary* (OLA 143; Leuven: Dept. Oosterse Studies and Peeters, 2004).

certain amount of subsequent Jewish interpretation and Jerome's Vulgate rendering, *affluam*. It is difficult to find a good sense for נסך here, however, especially since there is no direct object for the verb. While it is possible that Qoheleth is declaring his intention to pour libations, or perhaps to mix wine (so Ibn Ezra), it is hard to see how doing so would merit the subsequent dismissal as הבל, or form a basis for his conclusion in the next verse, that fun and pleasure are useless. Some scholars have correspondingly sought to reorganize the text here, linking this expression to Qoheleth's subsequent use of wine in 2:3.<sup>2</sup>

It is probably a perception of that difficulty, rather than a variant text, that led the Greek translator (G) to parse אנסכה instead as a *piel yiqtol* cohortative from נסה "test," with a second person object suffix: πειράσασε "I shall test you." This reading is adopted also in the Peshitta (ܐܢܫܚܐ, which may be derived directly from the Greek)<sup>3</sup> and in Jerome's commentary (*temptabo te*), while the Targum and Midrash both seem to understand here the related אנסנה "I will try it," which BHS actually suggests as an emendation. An interpretation in these terms, however, adds the complication of an unusual form—the plene writing of the suffix -כה, which is quite plausible in itself—without the compensation of a notably better sense: Qoheleth is clearly supposed to be investigating pleasure here, not investigating himself or his heart, and the uncontested reading of שמחה with ב permits us only to take pleasure as the instrument or context of any test, not its object. This is a problem even if we take נסה in the extended sense of "giving experience": it could not mean "give you experience of pleasure" here, but only "make you experienced by means of pleasure."<sup>4</sup>

2. See Naftali Herz Tur-Sinai (= Harry Torczyner), "Dunkle Bibelstellen," in *Vom Alten Testament: Karl Marti zum siebzigsten Geburtstage gewidmet von Freunden, Fachgenossen und Schülern* (ed. K. Budde; BZAW 41; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1925), 279–80; H. Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth* (Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 7–8.

3. So Abraham S. Kamenetzky, "Die P'siṭa zu Koheleth textkritisch und in ihrem Verhältnis zu dem massoretischen Text, der Septuaginta und den andern alten griechischen Versionen," ZAW 24 (1904): 210. The Peshitta of Ecclesiastes seems to be based on both Greek and Hebrew sources, so this dependence is not unusual.

4. The idea that נסה + ב could mean "give experience" was first put forward in Moshe Greenberg, "נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany," JBL 79 (1960): 273–76. His examples include Judg 3:1–3, where the point is that Canaanites were left in the land to give new generations of Israelites experience in

The context suggests that whatever Qoheleth is going to do, either intransitively or to himself, pleasure must play a role in the action of a type that will enable him to pronounce on its value in the next verse. It may be helpful, therefore, to consider a further possibility: that we are dealing with a form neither from נסך nor from נסה, but from אנס, “compel.” In Esth 1:8 this is used specifically of forcing people to drink, and in Sir 31:21 (*sub* 31:22 in MS B) of being filled with (ב) too much food.<sup>5</sup> That verb would give an excellent sense here: Qoheleth is to stuff himself, absolutely to fill himself, with pleasure, so that there can be no question that he has given it an opportunity to display its value. In terms of form, it seems most probable that we should understand אנס(ה): the omission of one א in our text may be an orthographic variant or the result of a copying error in the sequence גא אאנ.<sup>6</sup>

As for the subsequent וראה בטוב, it is interesting to observe that Ginsberg, writing quite separately about לא ראה in 6:6, suggested taking ראה there as a variant form from רוה, a verb used of saturating with liquid, and of drinking beyond the point of satiation or intoxication.<sup>7</sup> Some confusion between the two verbs does indeed seem to be visible elsewhere (cf. Job 10:15; Prov 11:25), and it may be that this is a matter of variant spellings or pronunciations rather than of actual errors in the consonantal text, so Ginsberg’s suggestion is not far-fetched and requires no emendation; it may, however, suit 2:1 better than 6:1. Of course, it is perfectly possible for us to understand וראה בטוב here as a reference to “seeing” benefits (cf. Pss 27:13; 106:5; Jer 29:32), so the clause is a little awkward but not inherently problematic. It must be acknowledged, however, that the application of Ginsberg’s suggestion to this verse would offer an attractive way to read אנסכה בשמחה and ראה בטוב as essentially parallel clauses, based on an image of food and drink: “I shall stuff you with pleasure, and you must drench yourself with what is good.” If that was indeed the original reading, then although the writer may have intended that the combination would

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fighting, not to give them experience of Canaanites. Such a meaning seems appropriate to all the passages cited, and is congruent with other occurrences of the verb meaning “used to (something)” (e.g., 1 Sam 17:39).

5. So *DCH* 1:344.

6. Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (LHBOTS 541; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 58–59 n. 27.

7. H. Louis Ginsberg, קהלת (A New Commentary on the Torah, the Prophets and the Holy Writings; Tel Aviv: M. Newman, 1961), 192.

affirm the proper reading of each clause, it is possible that his reference to liquid influenced the subsequent misreading of the first, less familiar verb as from נסך.

## 2. כשרון

A number of words in Ecclesiastes do not occur elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew, but their meanings can be established beyond reasonable doubt by reference to other words from the same root or to cognate terms in Aramaic: יתרון and its counterpart חסרון are obvious examples. כשרון looks as though it ought to be another such word, but other words from the stem connote ideas of fitness or suitability, as do their equivalents in Aramaic. That meaning does not seem to accord well with the contexts of כשרון in 2:21; 4:4; and 5:10, and is often considered not really to suit the uses of the cognate verb in 11:6. Indeed, the context of 11:6 is usually taken to require the very different sense “succeed” or “prosper”: you are to sow your seed morning and evening, “for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or if both alike will be fine.”<sup>8</sup>

However, despite the fact that the Akkadian *kašāru* can refer to success, and so provide an analogy to such a shift in meaning, that shift is not required. It is quite possible that the issue really is the suitability of the seed, and that יכשר means not “prosper” but “prove fit”: whether the crops do well depends not on some random fate, but on qualities of the seed that cannot be discerned before sowing, and so we must keep sowing in the hope that some of our seed will prove capable of flourishing in the unknown conditions to come. Since 10:10 is obscure, we cannot say much about the other occurrence of the verb in Ecclesiastes (if הכשיר there is even to be construed from the verb), but its sole biblical appearance elsewhere, in Esth 8:5, demands a connotation of fitness or propriety. There is nothing that requires us, therefore, to suppose that כשר must ever have a sense in Ecclesiastes different from its normal sense in later Hebrew and in Aramaic.

Correspondingly, we cannot import the meaning “success” into the noun on the basis of the verb; and since “suitability” or “fitness” seems inappropriate, we are left to understand כשרון almost entirely on the basis of its use in three passages:

8. So, e.g., Schoors, *Vocabulary*, 448.

כי יש אדם שעמלו בחכמה ובדעת ובכשרון

“For there may be a person whose work has been with wisdom and with knowledge and with כשרון” (2:21).

וראיתי אני את כל עמל ואת כל כשרון המעשה כי קנאת איש מרעהו

“Then I observed all work and all כשרון of labor, that it is an ill feeling (separating) a man from his neighbor” (4:4).

ברבות הטובה רבו אוכליה ומה כשרון לבעליה כי אם ראית\ראות עיניו

“As what is good increases, those who consume it increase, and what כשרון is there for its owner, apart from looking on?” (5:10).

Obviously, the first two of these connect כשרון with work and with the process of accomplishment: it stands alongside the mental qualities of wisdom and knowledge in 2:21, and in 4:4 it is the “כשרון of labor” or “of action.” In 5:10, however, it is something of which one may be deprived, and is apparently associated with the rewards of work. This discrepancy has led scholars commonly to assert two meanings: according to Schoors, for instance, it can connote both “skill” (comparable to חכמה and דעת in 2:21) and the “result of using one’s skill”—that is, “success” or “achievement.”<sup>9</sup> In 5:10, indeed, כשרון is usually given a particular nuance not merely of “success” but of “gain” or “profit,” similar to יתרון.

What leads to accomplishment and what flows from accomplishment are surely, however, very different things, and neither sense fits very well in 4:4, where כל עמל and כל כשרון המעשה are identified as, or with, a feeling that separates people from each other (היא קנאת־איש מרעהו). If this verse is about motivation, as is usually assumed, then כשרון המעשה has presumably to be imbued with a further connotation of “exercising skill” or of “achieving success”—it has to relate, in other words, neither to an ability nor to the result of that ability, but to the application of that ability. Particularly in view of the fact that none of them is attested elsewhere, it seems unsatisfactory to grant three effectively distinct meanings to כשרון in the three verses where it appears, and it seems that little constraint is being placed on the interpretation of the verses individually by any attempt to establish a single, common sense for this term.

Indeed, כשרון could be understood in all three verses as a reference to effort, even if something like that sense is only required by 4:4. So in 2:2

9. Ibid., 449.

it would indicate the effort or determination that, alongside wisdom and knowledge, Qoheleth believes to underpin proper work: this is what someone may put into their business, only to see it pass to someone else, who has made no such investment. In 4:4 it is not skill or success that stems from jealousy, but the motivation and effort of workers. In 5:10, finally, when consumers multiply in proportion to goods, we should understand not that the owner has no “profit” beyond looking on, but either that this is all his effort amounts to (“What is [his] effort to their owner ...”) or that this is the only thing he has any reason still to do (“What can their owner find any determination to do, except ...”). It is interesting in this respect to note that on each occasion G renders the noun using *ἀνδρεία* (which is also used to render כושרות in Ps 68:7), while the corresponding adjective *ἀνδρεῖος* is used for הכשיר in 10:10: this is used in Hellenistic Greek of fortitude or determination, rather than simple “manliness.” We may also observe that in Syriac the participle of ܕܥܝܢ is widely attested with the sense “diligent,” “industrious,” often in connection with work. With so little material, it may be impossible for us to catch the precise nuance of כשרון in Qoheleth’s usage, but it is economical to suppose that he employs it with only a single meaning, and there are good reasons to believe that he associates it with the effort and motivation of workers.

### 3. סגלה

In Biblical Hebrew, סגלה is most commonly found in descriptions of Israel’s special relationship with God (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17). Unlike others, Israel has been chosen by him to be his own, and the word is conventionally translated in such terms as “own possession.” In 1 Chr 29:3, however, and in Eccl 2:8, it is more often translated as “treasure,” a sense that BDB describes as “very late.”<sup>10</sup> HALOT and DCH, to be sure, opt respectively for “personal property” and “possession,”<sup>11</sup> but its juxtaposition with silver and gold in both Chronicles and Ecclesiastes has persuaded commentators that סגלה implies a quantity of wealth, not a type.

The point in 1 Chr 29:3, though, is that David is distinguishing his personal fortune from the valuables that he has provided (and previously

10. BDB 688.

11. HALOT 2:742; DCH 6:117.



listed) for the temple, and that were presumably, in some sense, possessions of the state or the royal household. He is now offering his “own possessions” as well, and inviting contributions from others. This nuance of specific private ownership is found in the postbiblical usage also. Most notably, in b. B. Bat. 52a there is a discussion of property that is in the possession of an individual but that does not belong to his estate: in the context of this discussion, the advice is offered that money received for safekeeping on behalf of a minor should be made into a *סגולה*, that is, used to purchase some distinct item of property against which a claim can later be lodged without the need to dismantle other parts of the estate. Similarly, Jastrow lists numerous uses of the verb *סגל* to indicate money set aside for oneself out of an allowance, or put aside as savings, with no implication that this money need be a significant amount.<sup>12</sup> In both Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew, then, the term connotes not high value but distinct or private ownership.

Since Qoheleth is undoubtedly asserting in Eccl 2:8 that he had become wealthy, it may seem mere pedantry to assert the importance of that nuance. Other problems, however, surround the expression *סגלת מלכים והמדינות*, and a proper understanding of the noun affirms both that it stands in a construct relationship only with *מלכים*,<sup>13</sup> since provinces cannot have private property, and that Qoheleth is not asserting here his own kingship: if he were a king anyway, it would not be extraordinary for him to have the personal property of a king (even if that were no more than a few coins to rub together). Since the account in chapter 2 is commonly taken to embrace just such an assertion, then a little precision in the handling of the noun may have many implications for interpretation.

#### 4. עמל

This is a very significant term in Ecclesiastes: Schoors notes 22 occurrences of the noun in the book, and 13 of the cognate verb.<sup>14</sup> Its common connotation is of labor, although the noun is apparently used elsewhere to suggest “trouble,” in the senses both of suffering (e.g., Ps 10:14) and of mischief (e.g., Prov 24:2). The latter usage, in particular, indicates that its

12. Jastrow, 955.

13. Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 25 n. 31. Cf. Gen 40:1, *משקה מלך מצרים והאפה*.

14. Schoors, *Vocabulary*, 139.

scope extends beyond the mere act of working, and Ps 7:14–17 speaks of עִמָּל returning upon the head of a man who has conceived it. It is commonly acknowledged that we find an extended sense of the term in Ecclesiastes also, at least in 2:18, where Qoheleth speaks of his עִמָּל as something that can be left behind for his successor, but there is no consensus about its actual meaning there, or about the significance of this usage for understanding עִמָּל elsewhere in the book.

The עִמָּל that Qoheleth will leave to his successor in 2:18 is described in the next verse as something over which this successor will have legal rights: וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל עִמָּלִי שְׁעִמָּלָתִי. In 2:20, furthermore, Qoheleth describes how he accordingly let go of his concern with that עִמָּל, and this sequence of verses appears to make clear that he is talking about something that will not only persist after his death, but that can exist independently of him while he is alive. Something similar seems to be true in 2:11 also, when Qoheleth speaks of looking around בְּעִמָּל שְׁעִמָּלָתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת: one does not work to achieve work, so עִמָּל is seemingly a product of labor. This leads many commentators to accept that, at least in 2:18–19, עִמָּל can mean “wealth,” “income,” or “gain.”<sup>15</sup> The use of the technical term שֵׁלֶט in 2:19 would be strange, however, if the reference were simply to a bag of gold, and Qoheleth seems to have in mind something that is a specific, durable entity, not something that may be dispersed.<sup>16</sup>

The rabbinic use of עִמָּל for “income” is noted by Jastrow,<sup>17</sup> and picked up by some of the commentators who argue for the sense “wealth,” but it is important to note that this usage actually seems to link the term not to wealth per se but to continuing income or sources of income. Most strikingly, in the discussions about the collection of a daughter’s share from an estate in b. Ketub. 69a (cf. b. B. Bat. 67a), mention is made of the עִמָּל of houses, which is their immovable, and so collectable, capacity to generate rental income. We do not need to look so far afield for other evidence that עִמָּל may refer to a source of income, and although Ps 105:44 is often

15. E.g., Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1968), 223; Schoors, *Vocabulary*, 140. Fabrizio Foresti would extend this sense to about half the occurrences in the book: “*āmāl* in Koheleth: ‘Toil’ or ‘Profit,’” *Ephemerides Carmeliticae* 31 (1980): 415–30.

16. On the use of the cognate Aramaic שְׁלִיט, see Douglas M. Gropp, “The Origin and Development of the Aramaic *šallit* Clause,” *JNES* 52 (1993): 31–36.

17. Jastrow, 1089.

adduced as evidence for עמל meaning simply the product of work,<sup>18</sup> that text also seems to demonstrate that more than just wealth is meant: when God gives Israel the lands of the nations and they thereby “come into possession of the עמל of the peoples,” it surely does not mean simply that they get to take whatever piles of money or crops are lying around. Rather, Israel takes over the fields, vineyards, and all the other mechanisms that have been produced by the work of the peoples, and that will now be worked to create their own produce (cf. Deut 6:10–11; Josh 24:13). The verb used there of acquiring the עמל is ירש, regularly used of “dispossessing” others, as in Deut 2:12 and Jer 8:10 (where the dispossessors take over the fields of wise men, just as “others” take over their wives). Rainey’s suggestion of “trade” may be closer to the mark,<sup>19</sup> but, in the light of such references, is surely too limited: what Qoheleth means by עמל in chapter 2 is apparently the infrastructure or capacity that he has been describing in the previous verses 4–7: the vineyards, orchards, forests, slaves, and flocks associated with his wealth, which will continue to exist (and to generate an income) even after his death.<sup>20</sup>

Arguably, this does not represent the development of a wholly separate sense for עמל, but exemplifies the sort of semantic shift or extension that permits English words like “business” and “industry” to refer both to personal activities and to entities created by such activities. Even if it is only in chapter 2 that we are compelled to understand it as something other than “labor” in Ecclesiastes, there are other places, such as 5:18, where the idea of עמל as “business” would be quite appropriate. Indeed, in the various expressions like עמלו שיעמל in 1:3 that Qoheleth likes to use (cf. 2:11, 18, 19, 20, 22; 5:17; 9:9), it seems quite plausible to suppose that he is always talking about “the business at which one works” rather than just “the labor that one does.” Sometimes the context constrains the sense to “labor,” just as sometimes it excludes that sense, but we should not suppose that Qoheleth always has one specific meaning in mind, any more than we would always require “I am at work” in English to mean either “I am working” or “I am at the office,” but never both.

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18. “Produce” is also, nevertheless, a possible connotation, at least in Aramaic: in 4QEnoch<sup>a</sup> 1 III, 18, the giants consume human עמל until humans can supply them with nothing more, which presumably means that they are eating everything produced.

19. Anson F. Rainey, “A Second Look at Amal in Qoheleth,” *CTM* 36 (1965): 805.

20. Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 64–65.

## קלקל. 5.

We have already noted the difficulty of 10:10 when discussing בשרון. The verse follows an assertion in 10:9 that workers quarrying stones or chopping logs may, or will, be injured by them, and it either explains that claim or uses it as the basis for a further saying. The text itself is difficult: something will happen, we are told, אם קהל הברזל ("if the iron/tool is blunt[?]") and והוא לא פנים קלקל, according to MT (broadly supported by the Targum), but G renders the second clause as καὶ αὐτὸς πρόσωπον ἐτάραξεν, which does not reflect the לא. G is followed by the Peshitta here, and Jerome appears to be aware of both readings in his commentary on Ecclesiastes: his translation reads *et hoc non ut prius sed conturbatum erit*, but in his comments on verse 9 he renders as *et faciem eius turbauerit*. Matters are further complicated both by the fact that a reading לו for לא is found in oriental manuscripts of MT, and by the position of לא, which is strange if it is supposed simply to negate the verb. In the light of all these considerations, some scholars have proposed that לא פנים should be emended, perhaps to לא לפנים.<sup>21</sup>

This is not the place to solve the problem as a whole, but it may be apparent that much depends on the meaning of קלקל here. Those scholars who would follow MT and retain לא in פנים קלקל and והוא לא פנים generally propose that קלקל means "sharpened," so the verse would say, "If the tool is blunt and he has not sharpened the edge." They can point to Ezek 1:7 and Dan 10:6, where a word קלל is used of "burnished" or "polished" bronze, but the relationship of that word to קלקל here is uncertain, and "polished" is not the same as "sharpened." It is also difficult to make פנים mean "edge"—Driver, with some justice, calls that an "impossible suggestion"<sup>22</sup>—and so although quite a good case could be made for supposing that the reference here is to polishing the flat surfaces of a tool, if that fitted the context, "sharpened the edge" involves two speculative leaps. Even if we accept those, the position of לא would also suggest "he has sharpened what is not the edge," rather than "he has not sharpened the edge" (cf. Jer 2:27; 19:17; 32:33).

21. So BHK<sup>3</sup> and, more forcefully, Godfrey R. Driver, "Problems and Solutions," VT 4 (1954): 232.

22. Driver, "Problems and Solutions," 232, pointing out that Ezek 21:21 involves a personification.

Another suggestion, to take קלקל with the next clause and in the sense “shake (the tool),” understood to mean “swing” it, requires לא פנים to carry a sense like “without an edge,” which seems improbable.<sup>23</sup> That proposal does have the merit, however, of taking seriously that we have קלקל here, and not קלל: whether we treat קלקל as the *pilpel* of קלל or as effectively a separate verb, we have to give some priority to קלקל in Ezek 21:26 and התקלקלו in Jer 4:24 when assessing the sense.<sup>24</sup> Both of those passages point to agitation as the basic meaning: in Ezekiel, the reference is to a form of belomancy, perhaps involving the shaking of arrows in a quiver to mix them (cf. Vulgate *commiscens*), while Jer 4:24 is talking about the quaking of mountains (// רעשים). It is difficult to associate that meaning with the long, single movements involved in sharpening or wielding an axe. In connection with פנים, indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that the shaking implied by קלקל is rather the jarring of a blade on a surface, and this is probably what G has understood: *ταράσσω* is used in Jer 4:24 as well, and it commonly refers to physical agitation. Although *πρόσωπον* is not the most obvious choice for “surface” in Greek, it is regularly used for the surface of the ground (e.g., Gen 2:6), so the translator can stay close to the Hebrew here without sacrificing the sense, and G is probably to be understood “he has jarred the surface,” reflecting פנים קלקל. If we are to retain MT, then the reference is perhaps to the blow missing the surface at which it is aimed, while emendation to לא לפנים would allow the possibility that it has not been delivered straight (cf. Jer 7:24).

All this might be simpler if we were certain that קהה in the preceding clause really meant “blunt”<sup>25</sup> and if we knew what הכשיר meant

23. Ferdinand Hitzig, “Der Prediger Salomo’s,” in *Die Sprüche Salomo’s von E. Bertheau und Der Prediger Salomo’s von F. Hitzig* (ed. Wilhelm Nowack; Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament 7; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1883), 287.

24. The context of the very difficult לחם הקלקל in Num 21:5 suggests a sense there closer to the normal connotations of disorder or disgrace in Aramaic and in later Hebrew.

25. The verb is used elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew only of the effect on teeth of sour grapes (Jer 31:29–30; Ezek 18:2), and קהה (also קהי, קהא) is often used with reference to teeth in later texts. It can also imply both weakness and obstinacy, the latter leading some early Jewish interpreters of this passage, including the Targum, to understand the sense “unyielding as iron” here. The most striking later parallel, however, comes in y. Ber. 9:1 63a, when R. Yannai describes how, when Pharaoh had arrested Moses and they tried to cut off his head, משה צוארו של משה וקהת ההרב מעל צוארו של משה, ונשבר (‘the sword bounced off Moses’ neck and was broken’), showing that Moses’

subsequently:<sup>26</sup> the gaps in our knowledge of Qoheleth's vocabulary are made more obvious in this verse, perhaps, than in any other, and we cannot really even state with certainty the relationships of the various clauses to each other or of this verse to the verses that precede and follow it. Despite such ample provision of lexicographical resources, Qoheleth seems determined to defy our best efforts to understand him and to prove that **אם יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא**.

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"neck is like an ivory tower" (Song 7:4). R. Abyatar adds that **נתזו ההרב** ("the sword flew off") the neck of Moses and on to the neck of the executioner instead, killing him. It is clear that **קרה** is to be understood in this passage, at least, in the sense of a blade taking a deflection or bouncing off a hard surface, which would make good sense in Eccl 10:10, and might fit well with the reading of MT; that meaning may also suit Greek *ἐκπέσῃ*, "fails," "falls away," "goes off course." In fact, many of the other passages cited by Jastrow from rabbinic literature suggest an association of **קרה** not with bluntness per se, but with the resistance of a surface to being cut or the difficulty of cutting hard surfaces.

26. Even the reading is uncertain: the Kethib **הכשיר** is pointed as an infinitive construct: the versions have read the consonants of the Qere **הכשר**, but have mostly taken it as an adjective rather than an infinitive absolute. Symmachus, interestingly, renders as *ὁ ὀργευσάμενος* (*εἰς σοφίαν*), "he who has hastened (toward wisdom)," which might tie in with the understanding of **כשרון** advanced above.

# PATTERNS OF LINGUISTIC FORMS IN THE MASORETIC TEXT: THE PREPOSITION מן “FROM”\*

Ian Young

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All scholars agree that there is linguistic variety in the Hebrew Bible. The dominant explanation of the distribution of linguistic forms in the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible in modern scholarship has been in terms of a simple equation between the language of the MT and the language of the “original author” of the text in question. Current scholarship on the textual transmission of the Hebrew Bible, however, makes this explanation only one out of several—and not one of the more likely ones.

In this study I will discuss the patterns of distribution of the preposition מן “from” in different grammatical contexts. On the one hand, there is the case where מן stands before a noun<sup>1</sup> without the definite article. In this context, the normal situation is where the *nun* of מן assimilates to the following word, for example, מִמֶּלֶךְ “from a king.” In modern scholarship on the Hebrew language it is the pattern of distribution of the exceptions to this that have received the bulk of attention. The nonassimilated form (מִן מֶלֶךְ “from a king”) is very rare throughout the Hebrew Bible. Chronicles is the book that stands out from the rest, having by far the most examples of

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\* I am pleased to dedicate this paper to David Clines. I am particularly honored to represent the University of Sydney, where the Clines story began. In 1960 he completed a BA at Sydney University with First Class Honours in Greek, and First Class Honours and the University Medal in Latin, before leaving Australia, initially for Cambridge. David has always kept his link with Australia, which has included an ongoing involvement with the University of Sydney, and I am particularly grateful for his interest, help, and support for my own scholarly efforts.

1. Or other features such as another preposition, e.g., מִלִּפְנֵי “from before.”

unassimilated forms before nouns in the Bible (54), as well as by a significant margin the highest proportion of unassimilated to assimilated forms (16.6 percent).<sup>2</sup> This fact is the reason that scholars have suggested that the unassimilated form of ׀ is a feature of Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH), often suggested to be the Hebrew characteristic of the postexilic era, and hence this linguistic feature is a staple of standard treatments of the language of the Hebrew Bible. Robert Polzin, for instance, who started with the assumption that the language of nonsynoptic Chronicles was the purest example of LBH,<sup>3</sup> naturally concluded that unassimilated ׀ was a key feature of LBH, which he attributed to Aramaic influence.<sup>4</sup> However, outside Chronicles, it is only Daniel among the core LBH books (Esther–Chronicles), or indeed the “late” books in general, that shows the slightest trace of a higher proportion of this form.<sup>5</sup> Remarkably, if this is a key feature of LBH, neither core LBH Esther nor core LBH Ezra has a single example, and core LBH Nehemiah has only one. The LBH status of this feature has therefore been questioned.<sup>6</sup> One alternative explanation is that the unas-

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2. Robert Rezetko, “Dating Biblical Hebrew: Evidence from Samuel–Kings and Chronicles,” in *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology* (ed. Ian Young; JSOTSup 369; London: T&T Clark, 2003), 230–31. Full preliminary data is presented in idem, “Source and Revision in the Narratives of David’s Transfer of the Ark: Text, Language and Story in 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13, 15–16” (Ph.D. diss.; 2 vols.; University of Edinburgh, 2004), 2:420–22; later published with a brief summary in idem, *Source and Revision in the Narratives of David’s Transfer of the Ark: Text, Language and Story in 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13, 15–16* (LHBOTS 470; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 100 n. 69. Given the large number of examples in the Hebrew Bible, it is difficult to arrive at definitive figures, but I have verified that these figures seem to be close to correct.

3. Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (HSM 12; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 1–2.

4. Ibid., 66. See also, e.g., Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HSM 29; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 30–31, 92; Angel Sáenz Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (trans. John Elwolde; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 119, 143.

5. And in Daniel this is only 3 unassimilated as opposed to 28 assimilated forms (9.7 percent).

6. E.g., Rezetko, “Dating Biblical Hebrew,” 230–31; Ian Young, “Late Biblical Hebrew and the Qumran Peshier Habakkuk,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8, article 25 (2008): 9 (online: [http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article\\_102.pdf](http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_102.pdf)); Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensärd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (2 vols.; BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2008), 1:108, 122 (henceforth *LDBT*).



simulated form is a stylistic peculiarity of Chronicles and Daniel, rather than a feature of diachronic linguistic development. But the question that we will return to is: whose style? The original author of Chronicles?

## 2. "FROM" (מִן) BEFORE A NOUN WITH THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

There is, in fact, another category of linguistic variation involving the preposition מִן. This is where מִן stands before a word *with* the definite article. Here the normal situation is for מִן to remain separate from the graphic unit that follows, for example, מִן־הַמֶּלֶךְ "from the king." Interestingly, while the first case has been extensively studied, the second has received relatively little attention.

The following table gives the distribution of מִן before a noun with the definite article, giving the relative proportions of the assimilated to the nonassimilated form.<sup>7</sup>

Book	Unassimilated מִן הַ	Assimilated מִן־הַ	Percentage Assimilated
Genesis	49	1	2.0
Exodus	48	0	0.0
Leviticus	75	0	0.0
Numbers	45	0	0.0
Deuteronomy	27	0	0.0
Joshua	32	5	13.5
Judges	32	6	15.8

7. The figures were generated using Accordance and Bible Works, and then all forms manually checked. This procedure does not guarantee that an occasional form has not somehow been overlooked, but it means that the figures are likely to be close to exhaustive. Note also: (1) The number of unassimilated forms for Samuel includes the Kethib of 1 Sam 24:9; the Qere has the assimilated form (not counted in the "Assimilated" column to the right). (2) The total of assimilated forms includes Gen 6:20; Josh 1:4; 2:23; 3:1; 8:7; 20:4; Judg 1:36; 14:14; 17:8; 20:15, 31, 42; 1 Kgs 7:7; 17:4; 18:5, 26; 20:41; 2 Kgs 4:40; 17:27, 28; Isa 1:29; 19:5; Jer 19:14; 33:5; 52:7; Zeph 1:10; Ps 41:14; Ezra 3:8, 12; 6:21; 8:35; 10:9; 1 Chr 5:22; 2 Chr 2:7; 3:17; 7:1; 20:1; 25:20; 29:34; 34:13. For Samuel and Ezekiel see below, nn. 9 and 10.

Samuel	38	34	47.2
Kings	50	8	13.8
Isaiah	8	2	20.0
Jeremiah	31	3	8.8
Ezekiel	40	20	33.3
Hosea	2	0	0.0
Joel	2	0	0.0
Amos	3	0	0.0
Obadiah	0	0	–
Jonah	2	0	0.0
Micah	2	0	0.0
Nahum	0	0	–
Habakkuk	0	0	–
Zephaniah	2	1	33.3
Haggai	5	0	0.0
Zechariah	4	0	0.0
Malachi	1	0	0.0
<i>Total XII</i>	23	1	4.2
Psalms	9	1	10.0
Job	6	0	0.0
Proverbs	0	0	–
Ruth	6	0	0.0
Song of Songs	8	0	0.0
Qoheleth	9	0	0.0
Lamentations	0	0	–

Esther	1	0	0.0
Daniel	11	0	0.0
Ezra	10	5	33.3
Nehemiah	22	0	0.0
Chronicles	55	8	12.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>12.9</b>

The greatest concentration of the assimilated form (מֶהֱ) falls in the core Early Biblical Hebrew (EBH) book of Samuel, and Samuel certainly stands far above the rest in its proportion of the assimilated form. The core LBH books of Ezra and Chronicles have a number of examples of the assimilated form, but the other core LBH books of Esther, Daniel, and Nehemiah join most of the pentateuchal books in having only examples of separate מֶן הֶ (34 total). There seems no obvious chronological explanation of the distribution, therefore, if one is thinking in terms of the standard chronological model of linguistic change in Biblical Hebrew.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to speculate, however, whether some chronological conclusions would be drawn if it were Chronicles and not Samuel involved. Samuel's preference for this form is very prominent and far greater than Chronicles' preference for unassimilated מֶן before an anarthrous noun. Yet scholars have paid almost no attention to this pattern, presumably because it cannot be fitted into the chronological theory. Quite apart from questions such as whether the chronological theory is right, this example demonstrates that the attempt to view the data of the MT through the lens of a presumed chronology has led to the overlooking of important linguistic phenomena in it.

It is interesting to observe that the distribution of the two forms is uneven throughout the book of Samuel. Up to 2 Sam 3:37 the assimilated form מֶהֱ actually predominates 29–18 (61.7 percent). From the next occurrence in 2 Sam 4:11 to the end of the book, however, the assimilated form is decidedly in the minority, 5–20 (20 percent).<sup>9</sup> There is thus

8. Cf. *LDBT* 2:104.

9. Nonassimilated (מֶן הֶ): 1 Sam 1:1; 2:20; 4:16, 16; 7:11; 9:5; 11:5; 13:15; 14:11; 17:40, 50; 24:9 (K); 28:9, 13; 30:19; 2 Sam 1:2, 4 (bis); 4:11; 5:9; 7:8, 11; 11:17; 12:17; 15:24; 18:13; 19:10, 25, 43; 20:2, 5, 12, 13, 16; 21:10; 23:19, 23; 24:15b. Assimilated

a noticeable increase in the proportion of the standard form as the book progresses and a corresponding decrease in the proportion of the non-standard form. Since this seems to cut across commonly suggested source divisions in the book of Samuel, a scribal explanation seems most likely, such as that a scribe, at some stage in the MT tradition, with lessening or growing efficiency changed forms from one sort to another. Another interesting pattern is observable in Ezekiel, the only other MT book to have more than a single-figure number of the assimilated forms. Here it is noticeable that of Ezekiel's 20 assimilated forms, 16 of these are found in a sequence unbroken by nonassimilated forms stretching from 40:7 through 43:15. Beginning at 43:23, MT Ezekiel then has an unbroken sequence of 14 nonassimilated forms.<sup>10</sup> Again, a scribal explanation of this peculiarity seems likely.

The high proportion of unassimilated מֶה־ is therefore a clear feature of the language of the MT book of Samuel.<sup>11</sup> But where did this pattern come from? The original author of Samuel?

### 3. ASSUMPTIONS BY LANGUAGE SCHOLARS ABOUT THE TEXT OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

The simple equation that the language of the MT represents in detail the language of original authors is evident in almost any sampling of the classic work on the Hebrew language up to the present day. As an illustrative example, note Mark F. Rooker's discussion of the spelling of "David":

In the Book of Ezekiel, while the name דָּוִד occurs only four times, it is significant that one of these spellings is plene, identical to the pattern in the post-exilic works (34:23). Ezek 34:23 provides an early attestation to

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(מֶה־): 1 Sam 4:12; 9:3, 25; 10:5; 14:4 (bis), 28; 15:21; 16:13, 18; 17:34; 18:9; 24:8; 25:14 (bis); 26:22; 28:3, 23; 30:17, 22 (bis), 25, 26; 31:3; 2 Sam 1:15; 2:21, 27; 3:22, 37; 12:20; 16:1; 17:21; 23:13; 24:15a.

10. Before Ezek 40 the figures are 4 assimilated to 26 nonassimilated (13.3 percent). Nonassimilated (מֶה־): Ezek 1:4, 13; 5:6 (bis), 7; 10:19; 11:17 (bis); 16:34; 20:34, 41 (bis); 23:48; 25:7 (bis); 28:25; 29:13, 15; 34:13 (bis), 25; 36:24; 39:10 (bis), 22, 27; 43:23, 25; 44:31 (bis); 45:1, 3, 4, 14, 15 (bis); 47:2, 12, 15, 17. Assimilated (מֶה־): Ezek 1:10; 14:7; 15:7; 25:9; 40:7, 8, 9; 41:20, 25; 42:5 (bis), 6 (tris), 9 (bis), 14; 43:6, 14, 15.

11. And to a lesser extent MT Ezekiel.

this trend, and we conclude that this tendency to write the name of דִּייד as plene was beginning to increase in frequency in the exilic period.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the MT of Ezekiel, even down to details such as the plene and defective spelling of individual words, reflects the exact wording that left the pen of Ezekiel himself.

A more recent example is found in Gary A. Rendsburg's article on the language of the newly discovered *Hazon Gabriel* inscription. Here Rendsburg wonders: "Does the author of Jer 26:18 utilize the 'long' spelling [of 'Jerusalem' ירושלים], since the passage quotes Mic 3:12 with the 'short' spelling [i.e., ירושלם]?"<sup>13</sup> In other words, the MT represents even the spelling choices of preexilic authors.

I have deliberately chosen two examples dealing with spelling, since one can easily infer that if even the orthography of the MT represents the original text that left the author's pen, then obviously the more significant language features would be similarly assumed to do so as well. This assumption is very easy to document. Note how E. Y. Kutscher's seminal study of the language of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> from Qumran takes the MT as simply "the Bible," which may be contrasted with Qumran and other biblical texts.<sup>14</sup> It is clear from his discussion that the language of "the Bible" (MT) is in detail the language of the time of the authors. Hence, for example, Kutscher can tell when the same linguistic form is being used as an archaism or as a late Aramaism because he knows that some compositions like Genesis, Deuteronomy, or Samuel are the oldest biblical writings, while other compositions like Daniel are later, and *in detail* the language of the MT reflects the language of the original forms of these biblical compositions. As one example out of hundreds, note the simple statement: "The words מלה, מלל are native Hebrew—we already find them in Gen. xxi 7 and II Sam. xxiii 2."<sup>15</sup> This statement makes no sense at all except on the assumption that not only are Genesis and Samuel "early" writings that predate the time that

12. Mark F. Rooker, "Dating Isaiah 40–66: What Does the Linguistic Evidence Say?" *WTJ* 58 (1996): 306.

13. Gary A. Rendsburg, "Hazon Gabriel: A Grammatical Sketch," in *Hazon Gabriel: New Readings of the Gabriel Revelation* (ed. Matthias Henze; SBLEJL 29; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 66 n. 23.

14. E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>)* (STDJ 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 50.

15. *Ibid.*, 26.

Kutscher suggests such “Aramaisms” could be ascribed to actual Aramaic influence, but that the specific details of those *written texts* have not been changed since that early time.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. GENERAL TEXT-CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Language scholars, as shown, commonly work from the assumption that the MT provides detailed evidence of the linguistic forms used by the original authors of biblical compositions. This assumption is diametrically opposed to the current consensus of textual critics (and indeed most mainstream biblical scholars) as to the composition history of the Hebrew Bible.

The major experts agree substantially on the main points of a model of the emergence of the Hebrew biblical text, which I shall illustrate from two recent treatments of the question of the “original text” of the Bible.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the linguists’ assumption that the details of the MT reflect the details of the original text composed by an original author at a locatable time, current scholarship views the quest for an original text, even in macrofeatures, never mind small peripheral details such as language, as an impossible task. Thus a recent detailed review of scholarship on the

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16. For further discussion of Kutscher’s text-critical assumptions, see Ian Young, “Loose Language’ in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>,” in *Keter Shem Tov: Collected Essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls in Memory of Alan Crown* (ed. Shani Tzoref and Ian Young; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, forthcoming).

17. Extensive documentation of the scholarly consensus is provided in Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew: Steps Toward an Integrated Approach* (SBLANEM; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, forthcoming). Contrast this with the recent claim that the text-critical consensus we present is our own idiosyncratic view, in Ziony Zevit, “Not-So-Random Thoughts Concerning Linguistic Dating and Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew,” in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew* (ed. Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit; Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 466–73. Zevit provides here his detailed views on the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, which are at odds with the work of text-critical specialists like Ulrich (471 n. 13) and Tov (see n. 19 below), for example, suggesting that the earliest manuscript from Qumran, 4QSam<sup>b</sup>, is a proto-MT text and hence that it “reflect[s] a stable type, the wording and orthography of which were set, for all practical purposes” (470–71, quote from 471). But consultation of the published edition reveals that this view is incorrect: 4QSam<sup>b</sup> has 43 nonorthographic variants from the MT in 293 words, or one every 6.8 words (for these and other figures, see Rezetko and Young, *Historical Linguistics*).

question by Hans Debel concludes: "Textual critics are bereft of all hope to be able to reconstruct an 'original text,'" and "[a]s a consequence, the traditional conception of textual criticism as reconstructing the 'original' text of the Hebrew Bible appears as an ill-fated undertaking—a vain quest for a holy grail which one can never hope to find."<sup>18</sup>

One of the scholars discussed in Debel's review is Emanuel Tov, the third edition of whose authoritative standard handbook on *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* has recently appeared.<sup>19</sup> Tov's book is therefore a particularly important representative of the scholarly consensus that Debel has outlined. Tov writes:

[T]he textual evidence does not point to a single "original" text, but a series of subsequent authoritative texts produced by the same or different authors ... the original text(s) remain(s) an evasive entity that cannot be reconstructed. ... Some biblical books, such as Jeremiah, reached a final state more than once ... the original text is far removed and can never be reconstructed ... the Judean Desert scrolls [our earliest biblical manuscripts] reflect a relatively late stage of the textual development.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the pluriformity of the textual evidence indicates the likelihood that all biblical texts in our possession are the products of previous and currently undocumented stages of literary growth.

It seems evident, therefore, that the Hebrew Bible comes from a world where the precise copying of texts was not the norm.<sup>21</sup> Instead, the text-critical consensus, based on solid evidence of real manuscripts, indicates that whereas some core elements remained the same, the outward textual form of the biblical writings was in constant flux. If biblical books were composed like modern books, at one time, and thereafter remained basi-

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18. Hans Debel, "Rewritten Bible, Variant Literary Editions and Original Text(s): Exploring the Implications of a Pluriform Outlook on the Scriptural Tradition," in *Changes in Scripture: Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period* (ed. Hanne von Weissenberg et al.; BZAW 419; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 83, 84–85.

19. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

20. Ibid., 167–69.

21. For detailed substantiation of this point in regard to the first-millennium B.C.E. Mesopotamian evidence see, e.g., Russell Hobson, *Transforming Literature into Scripture: Texts as Cult Objects at Nineveh and Qumran* (BibleWorld; Sheffield: Equinox, 2012); and see further below, section 6.

cally the same, it is obvious that one might expect to detect a chronology in the way language is used in various books. In the context of the text-critical consensus, where texts were written and rewritten over centuries, the idea that there is a “date” when a biblical book was written is anachronistic. So too, since every biblical text contains within it a chronology of earlier and later composition, the idea that biblical books or chunks thereof represent the language of one particular time (and place) appears to be extremely unlikely. Rather than the default position being the assumption that the language of the texts reflects the language of an original author, the burden of proof is squarely on anyone who would make such a claim.

I have talked so far only about large-scale differences between biblical books. Language is definitely one of the most peripheral and hence most changeable aspects of these texts. Even texts that do not vary greatly in macrostructure from the MT still commonly have a great deal of linguistic variation. The most famous example is 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, the nearly complete Isaiah scroll from cave 1 at Qumran. In my earlier work on textual variation, I made a fairly conservative definition of a linguistic variant, yet even so I discovered that some columns of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> have a linguistic variant on average every seven words (by which I mean Hebrew graphic units).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the Qumran Song of Songs manuscript 4QCant<sup>b23</sup> has a linguistic variant every 7.4 words on average.

In fact, almost any textual variant is a potential linguistic variant. Word order variants relate to syntax, word substitutions and additions potentially involve so-called LBH lexemes, and so on. When viewed in this way, the fluidity of the biblical text on a linguistic level is even more staggering than the previously cited figures would suggest. Parallel texts in the MT itself provide us with valuable extratextual evidence to supplement the important but fragmentary evidence supplied by our non-MT textual witnesses. It is appropriate in this context to mention the important work of David Clines in this area. Clines has undertaken a very sobering investigation of the parallel text 2 Sam 22//Ps 18. Of the 382//394 words in this text, Clines discovers that over a hundred vary between the MT parallel texts. In addition, Clines surveys the evidence for the text from the Qumran fragments and ancient versions like the LXX and comes up with another 73 variants. This leads him to conclude that on average, even

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22. Ian Young, “Biblical Texts Cannot Be Dated Linguistically,” *HS* 46 (2005): 349.

23. Ian Young, “Notes on the Language of 4QCant<sup>b</sup>,” *JJS* 52 (2001): 122–31.



based on our limited textual evidence, nearly one word in two is textually open to question.<sup>24</sup>

That a text which exhibits so much fluidity in its fragmentary, late-attested witnesses (not to mention what went on before this time) could be used as fairly precise evidence of the language of an original author some hundreds of years earlier seems wildly implausible.

## 5. TEXT-CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATING TO “FROM” (מִן)

### 5.1. BEFORE NOUNS WITHOUT THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

The pattern of distribution of the unassimilated form of מִן before a noun without the definite article has been taken as significant for telling us about the Hebrew being used at the time of composition of each of the biblical books. In particular, it is said that Chronicles’ significant minority use of this form gives us important information about the Hebrew of the author of Chronicles, and hence about LBH. What I have said above about the textual history of the Hebrew Bible indicates already that we need to view such claims with a great amount of caution. Because of the very fragmentary nature of our early textual evidence for the books of the Hebrew Bible, we do not have a great amount of data in regard to any one particular linguistic issue. However, there are abundant clues about the fluid nature of the language of the biblical text in transmission.

Some of this evidence relates to מִן. In regard to מִן before a noun without the definite article, there has already been some work on variations in non-MT manuscripts. For example, the MT of Song of Songs presents the EBH assimilated form some 25 times, but the LBH unassimilated form just once (4:15). This is a very distinct preference for the more regular form, which places Song of Songs in line with those EBH books that have unassimilated forms only occasionally. In contrast to this, of the eight certain examples of “from” preserved in 4QCant<sup>b</sup>, seven of these represent the LBH unassimilated form of מִן against just one case of the EBH form with

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24. David J. A. Clines, “What Remains of the Hebrew Bible? Its Text and Language in a Postmodern Age,” *ST* 54 (2001): 76–80; updated with special attention to 4QSam<sup>a</sup> in David J. A. Clines, “What Remains of the Hebrew Bible? The Accuracy of the Text of the Hebrew Bible in the Light of the Qumran Samuel (4QSam<sup>a</sup>),” in *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon* (ed. Geoffrey Khan and Diana Lipton; VTSup 149; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 211–20.

assimilated *nun*.<sup>25</sup> This represents a much higher proportion of unassimilated to assimilated *nun* than any Masoretic biblical text whether EBH or LBH. The MT and Qumran manuscripts present very different linguistic profiles in regard to this feature. Which (if either) pattern of this linguistic form is evidence of the language of an original composition? In any case, with regard to this feature we have evidence of significant change in the linguistic profile of our texts during their transmission.<sup>26</sup>

## 5.2. BEFORE THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

We saw above that the book of Samuel in its MT form stands out from the other books of the Hebrew Bible in the proportion of cases of assimilated “from” before the definite article (מה־). Naturally the question arises whether this feature of MT Samuel stems from the original stage of composition of Samuel, as is commonly assumed by language scholars, or whether it came about during the book’s transmission. The fragments of the Qumran Samuel manuscript 4QSam<sup>a</sup> (henceforth 4Q) provide us with some evidence to consider this question.<sup>27</sup>

Consider the following variants:

- 4Q מהארץ [הא]רץ; MT “from the land” (1 Sam 28:23).
- 4Q [הבקר] אז; MT “until morning” (2 Sam 2:27).
- 4Q מן הערים; MT minus (2 Sam 10:6). Although not paralleled in the MT, the plus in 4Q exhibits the form מן ה־.
- 4Q ויבקש דוד את האלהים [דוי]ד מן האלהים; MT “and David sought (from) God” (2 Sam 12:16). As part of the larger issue of the coordination of the verb בקש with prepositions, the 4Q variant exhibits the form מן ה־.
- 4Q מן האהבה; MT מאהבה “than (the) love” (2 Sam 13:15). Both texts have the regular Biblical Hebrew form, but the

25. Young, “4QCant<sup>b</sup>,” 122–23.

26. For evidence regarding variations between the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) and MT Pentateuch in this feature, see *LDBT* 1:349.

27. Note that the SP has the standard, nonassimilated form in Gen 6:20, the MT Pentateuch’s only case of מה־.

important point is that 4Q does not have the assimilated form with the definite article.

It is noteworthy that in each of these variants 4QSam<sup>a</sup> presents the standard MT Bible form מן ה־ with unassimilated *nun*, even in those cases where MT Samuel has the assimilated form. In addition, note the following cases where 4Q and MT agree on their readings, all of which are cases of מן ה־: 1 Sam 2:20; 2 Sam 1:4; 4:11; 5:9; 12:17; 19:10. It is an indication of how fragmentary 4Q is that these eleven are the only preserved cases of מן followed by a definite article.<sup>28</sup> It is striking, however, that contrary to the distinctive feature of MT Samuel, where there is an even mix of assimilated with nonassimilated forms, 4Q has an 11–0 preference for the non-assimilated form, even where the MT parallel has the assimilated form. Although fragmentary, the data suggests that 4Q had a radically different linguistic profile in this feature to the MT.

An additional line of argument might strengthen this suggestion. Samuel shares common (synoptic) material with Chronicles. This common material is shared either because Samuel and Chronicles were based on a common source or because Chronicles was based on a form of Samuel.<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note therefore that in the common material where Samuel and Chronicles share a form with מן plus definite article, Chronicles each time has the form מן ה־ (6–0), even when MT Samuel has the assimilated form מֵה־.<sup>30</sup> One possible way of interpreting this data is that Chronicles attests a form of Samuel that did not exhibit the high proportion of assimilated מֵה־ so distinctive of MT Samuel.<sup>31</sup>

28. It is an indication of how extremely fragmentary the other Qumran Samuel manuscripts (1QSam, 4QSam<sup>b</sup>, 4QSam<sup>c</sup>) are that they do not preserve a single verse in which מן plus definite article is attested.

29. Rodney K. Duke, "Recent Research in Chronicles," *CBR* 8 (2009): 23–25. The form of Samuel used in this theory is understood to be an earlier form of Samuel than is found in the MT, that is, a *Vorlage* that was closer to the Old Greek and 4QSam<sup>a</sup> than to the MT of Samuel.

30. The verses are: 1 Sam 31:3 (מֵהַמְּוֹרִים) // 1 Chr 10:3 (מִן הַיּוֹרִים); 2 Sam 5:9 // 1 Chr 11:8; 2 Sam 7:8 // 1 Chr 17:7; 2 Sam 23:3 (מֵהַשְּׁלֹשִׁים) // 1 Chr 11:15 (מִן הַשְּׁלֹשִׁים); 2 Sam 23:19 // 1 Chr 11:21; 2 Sam 23:23 // 1 Chr 11:25.

31. However, we must also consider that MT Chronicles similarly had a long process of transmission from this hypothetical earlier text.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Scholars have considered it important that Chronicles has a significant minority of cases of unassimilated *nun* of ן with an anarthrous noun. Less has been made of Samuel's even more significant proportion of assimilated *nun* of ן with the definite article. Do we have evidence of a distinctive linguistic practice by the "original authors" of Chronicles and Samuel? It may be possible that the tendency to use the forms less well attested in the MT Bible was a feature stretching back to the composition of the texts. However, the examples of variation involving these features in non-MT texts would indicate that it would be prudent not to base any conclusions about historical linguistics on this assumption. The tendency to use the less usual forms, or at least to use them in the proportions currently found in MT Samuel and Chronicles, could just as easily be a feature of the later scribal transmission of the texts.

How could we decide between these options? One weighty argument relates to the general considerations about the fluidity of the biblical text in the B.C.E. period. This fact makes it very unlikely that any of the texts in our possession provides access to one particular stage of the development of the Hebrew language. Much more likely is the suggestion that all of our texts are made up of linguistic features introduced at various times in their textual history. If they entered at various times, it is therefore quite likely that on occasion they reflect the historical development of the Hebrew language. But how could we tell what is early and what is late in these composite texts?

Investigation of other languages where a linguistic chronology can be reconstructed with some success, ranging from Akkadian to English, reveals that what is required is a large corpus of nonliterary texts that are securely localized in time and place. In regard to the size of the corpus, Akkadian is attested in literally hundreds of thousands of documents, spanning more than two millennia, a great many of them being precisely datable.<sup>32</sup> Our

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32. Guy Deutscher, *Syntactic Change in Akkadian: The Evolution of Sentential Complementation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18. See also, e.g., N. J. C. Kouwenberg, "Diachrony in Akkadian and the Dating of Literary Texts," in Miller-Naudé and Zevit, *Diachrony*, 433–51; along with Michael Sokoloff, "Outline of Aramaic Diachrony," in Miller-Naudé and Zevit, *Diachrony*, 379–405; and Joseph Lam and Dennis Pardee, "Diachrony in Ugaritic," in Miller-Naudé and Zevit, *Diachrony*, 407–31.

comparable material for ancient Hebrew is tiny by any measure. According to the most recent suggestion of David Clines, the corpus of Hebrew inscriptions is only equivalent to about 2 percent of the Hebrew Bible in size.<sup>33</sup> The need to use nonliterary texts for linguistic chronology is also stressed in study of these other languages. The downfalls of literary texts are that the language “is highly stylised and at a remove from the spoken language,”<sup>34</sup> and as I have sketched in this article, the language of literary texts has usually been subject to change during scribal transmission.<sup>35</sup>

In the case of the Hebrew Bible, however, we are largely dependent on late, scribal copies of literary texts. It is primarily working with these that scholars have attempted to construct a chronology of ancient Hebrew. Investigation of the extrabiblical sources is hardly encouraging for current theories on linguistic chronology of Hebrew. For example, the preexilic Arad ostraca evidence a significant accumulation of supposedly postexilic LBH linguistic forms, a greater accumulation, in fact, than led some scholars to date certain biblical texts to the postexilic period.<sup>36</sup> Or, some texts from Qumran, in the postbiblical period, exhibit a very low accumulation of LBH linguistic features, much less than the preexilic inscriptions, for example.<sup>37</sup> Examples from other languages such as Akkadian illustrate ways it might be possible to talk about linguistic chronology on the basis of ancient texts, and demonstrate clearly why the Hebrew evidence thus far has proved completely inadequate for the task.<sup>38</sup>

In regard to the specific forms of the preposition ׀, the inscriptions seem to back up the suggestion that the overall statistics of the MT reflect older stages of Hebrew. The assimilated form of ׀ without the definite

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33. *DCH* 8:9–10.

34. Deutscher, *Syntactic Change*, 23.

35. Note, e.g., the relatively high incidence of linguistic variation even in the “textually stable” first-millennium B.C.E. Akkadian Gilgamesh text documented in Ian Young, “Textual Stability in Gilgamesh and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Gilgamesh and the World of Assyria: Proceedings of the Conference Held at Mandelbaum House, The University of Sydney, 21–23 July 2004* (ed. Joseph Azize and Noel Weeks; Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 21; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 173–82.

36. *LDBT* 1:163–71.

37. *LDBT* 1:250–79; 2:89; Young, “Peshar Habakkuk.” The Qumran scrolls themselves are of course scribal copies of literary texts.

38. For the contrast between the way historical linguistics is conducted in other fields of study, e.g., English, with current methodologies in Biblical Hebrew, see the discussion in Rezetko and Young, *Historical Linguistics*.

article (ממלך) is very common, and yet the unassimilated, supposedly LBH form (מן מלך) is also attested.<sup>39</sup> So too the regular MT form with the definite article (מן המלך) is the most commonly attested, but there is also evidence for the assimilated form (מהמלך).<sup>40</sup> However, while this perhaps indicates the general plausibility that the MT's sort of Hebrew represents ancient forms of Hebrew (which was hardly in doubt), the evidence is insufficient for us to say anything about the significance of the unusual patterns in MT Samuel and Chronicles.

Comparison with other languages shows us how far we are from being able to unravel the complex mixture of different linguistic strata in the Hebrew Bible. One day, with further discoveries, we hope to be able to say more, but in the light of our current evidence that day is far away.

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39. Using the concordance of F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), as an indication of current scholarly readings, I found over eighty examples of assimilated, and one of unassimilated: Arad 26:2, on which see *LDBT* 1:166–67.

40. Again according to Dobbs Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, the form מן ה־ is found in Arad 3:2; 8:2; and Siloam Tunnel 5, while the usual reading of Ketef Hinnom 1:10 is מהרע “from the evil.”

PART 4  
RECEPTION HISTORY





## THE BIBLE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY—WHERE AND HOW?

Athalya Brenner

David Clines has been an original interpreter of things biblical for decades. His brands of interpretation have always been interesting, original, and erudite, combining the old and the new “on the way to the [post]modern.” His love of the Hebrew bible,<sup>1</sup> unromantic and nonromanticizing, critical yet steadfast, shines through his oeuvre: a veritable Torah scholar. He read and still reads in context and out of context, from various perspectives and directions: so to speak from left-to-right, his own idiom,<sup>2</sup> and also from right-to-left.<sup>3</sup> In his work as a scholar, publisher, teacher, and administrator, he made a profoundly serious difference to the field and guild of biblical studies from the 1970s on. For me he was and is a generous mentor, publisher, and friend. This essay, revised and enlarged from a talk at the International SBL meeting in Amsterdam (2012), is offered to you, David, as a small tribute; and in the hope that the left-right, right-left admixture in it will appeal to you somewhat.

Biblical studies and its practitioners are not popular nowadays. Just about everybody one speaks with lately is bemoaning the drastically diminished and diminishing status of biblical studies, even the death of bibli-

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1. Diverging from the general rule, the editors here follow the author’s request to spell *bible* with a lowercase *b*.

2. See, e.g., David J. A. Clines, “The Ten Commandments, Reading from Left to Right,” in *Interested Parties: The Ideologies of Readers and Writers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26–45.

3. Which is, deliberately, the title chosen for the book published in his honor on his 65th birthday: H. G. M. Williamson and J. Cheryl Exum, eds., *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines* (JSOTSup 373; London: T&T Clark, 2003).

cal studies as a discipline, at schools as well as in higher education. For instance, in Israel, where I returned after completing my tour of duty as professor of Hebrew bible in Amsterdam, the following situation obtains. In state (secular) education, beyond the required minimum for high school matriculation, the bible is not a fashionable subject. Neither is it popular at secular universities. (In contrast, at the religious Bar Ilan University an obligatory program for all students in Jewish studies includes a bible section.) University students have two main complaints: one, the subject is boring yet difficult, with all that text criticism and those ancient languages; and two, practically speaking, what shall we do with it when we graduate?

No demand, no supply. Or no supply, no demand? Some of the former bible departments in Israel—apart from those at the Hebrew University and at Bar Ilan—have become sections within larger departments of Jewish studies or branches thereof, of ancient history departments, and the like. The still existing departments keep dwindling, and the same applies to secular colleges, although the situation in confessional colleges is per structure and mission better. In the Netherlands the state of affairs is similar to that in Israel. When I came to Amsterdam in 1997 biblical studies was a department within a faculty of theology and religious studies. When the churches withdrew from the Amsterdam program, and because of a general institutional reorganization, the former faculty became a department within a faculty of the humanities, and the former department became a section in it. Soon theology and religious studies became a section of the department of art, religion, and culture, and biblical studies became a subsection; the Hebrew bible/Old Testament chair was discontinued, and what remain in the faculty are chairs in New Testament as well as Hebrew language and culture, including Yiddish. This is also happening at other Dutch universities, as the various churches have withdrawn their support from some places in favor of others, and universities reorganize their structures and try not to compete with one another for the dwindling numbers of those still interested in making the bible their vocation and career, on any level, outside confessional institutions. The latest examples are the dismantling of theology and religious studies in Kampen and in Utrecht; and the diminishing of those fields in Leiden, a former bastion of Hebrew, Semitic languages, and biblical studies.

This is the situation, I believe, also outside the two countries I know well. This is the outcome of market forces on the macro- and microlevel, of the economy, of growing materialism; and other reasons external to biblical studies can be named as well. But it is also the result of the growing

calcification and conservative attitudes, from the nineteenth century up to the mid-twentieth century, which are cultivated by so-called classical biblical studies. It is the result of its Euro-American, white, male centrism, or hegemony, with its emphasis on formal rites of passage that are simply far from appealing to most people under fifty, and its insistence on niceties and quibbling that most intelligent people would find irrelevant. Shall we discuss the implied author of some half a chapter of Hosea, for instance? Or split hairs over "his" (certainly his) time and place? A rewarding task certainly, intellectual gymnastics of the sharper kind; nevertheless, it is a thankless search for elusive answers that is of little consequence, and captivating for fewer and fewer people.

Does this mean that biblical studies, as a discipline, is dead? Yes and no. Yes, since the old world of painstaking philological work, the kind of work my generation studied with diligence then commenced to practice, will probably remain. However, it will remain only for the few: the waiver of the ancient languages in most universities, at least up to the Ph.D. level, insures this in one fell swoop. Ancient languages and cultures are of the utmost significance, but seldom generously financed.

What have we got to offer to an audience that is not fundamentalist, does not see classical bible study as a worthwhile adventure, and the bible as a teacher for life, an inspiration and a therapeutic agent for every and any societal ill? Here comes the "No, the bible is not dead" part. We cannot change the present economic climate and the polarization between vested religious interest on the one hand and the indifference or recoil on the other hand. What we can do is to surrender some or most of the authority of the guild, and of our subject matter, treating our subject matter not as a privileged holy scripture, be our personal beliefs what they may, but as a cultural artifact, a library that has had and still has enormous influence on/in the world. In that sense, getting biblical studies out of the domain and control of religious studies or ancient history departments and into departments of cultural history, or cultural criticism, or cultural analysis, is a blessing rather than a curse. This releases biblical studies, and the bible itself, from the ghettos they have proudly inhabited so far. In other words, if we wish to preserve biblical studies for the twenty-first century, out of confessional institutions, let us embrace the change rather than object to it. Nobody needs to worry about the status of the bible in seminaries and other religious institutions; everybody should be worried about the awareness and scholarly knowledge of the bible in secular society, where it exists and operates but is often unacknowledged or uncelebrated. To be

sure, nobody is totally secular: most people are post- some confessional, or tribal, or traditional state, by birth or education or other circumstances. But even those who have distanced themselves from confessional attitudes nonetheless remain influenced in their daily life and culture by the bible, and it would not be a bad role for academic biblical studies practitioners to concentrate on methodically focusing on foregrounding just that.

Many scholars have already started to take advantage of the new coupling of bible and cultural studies, the new possibilities of cooperation and the widening of horizons, as a byline to “more serious” (read: philological, classical) scholarly research. This is, *inter alia*, evidence of widening the biblical net according to the *Zeitgeist*. New projects are afoot, such as the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*.<sup>4</sup> The general direction I am suggesting here is neither original nor new; but it should be an opportunity, in self-defense but also as survival ideology. Our task at this time, broadly speaking, is or should be the exposure of how consciously or unconsciously consumers use the bible to shape their culture and other contemporary cultures; this seems to me as urgent a task now as arguing about how bible readers and owners used to go about their task in the past, as enjoyable an occupation as that may be.

In particular, let me map those tracks that seem to me the most adapted to and rewarding for the present and the near future, again not all or most of them totally novel. What I mean is not necessarily creating new areas of research, although this is always good, but demarginalizing emerging areas that are still frowned upon by “purists,” and positing them center stage as not only legitimate but also essential pursuits for bible scholars who can work on them. Some of the matters I shall mention are content matters, others more technical in nature. Not incidentally, some of these content matters we have tried to implement in our faculty made department then made section then made subsection in Amsterdam, from the mid-2000s onward:

- Politization of bibles and biblization of politics is a much beloved praxis: from health issues and especially contraception for women, in the United States last election and beyond to India to African countries; gay marriage anywhere in the

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4. Dale C. Allison Jr. et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–). Online: <http://www.degruyter.com/view/db/ebr>.

Western world; claims for territories in the Middle East; and much in between. (Please do add items to this list, as per your personal convictions!) The bible is quoted as authority for justified or aberrant practices, more often than not erroneously: for or against slavery, or corporal punishment, are pertinent examples. It seems to me a pressing task to expose this praxis of treating the Hebrew bible uncritically as a cookbook for the daily bread, as a therapeutic agent, as strongly as possible, wherever and whenever this occurs, and tirelessly so.

- Areas such as past and contemporary popular media, film, book, music, and other cultural studies have much to contribute to biblical studies; biblical studies has much to contribute to the understanding of these and similar cultural phenomena. The trend within the guild of studying such topics is growing and we hope it will continue to do so. The problems of relevance, and the capturing of imagination, that prevent a new generation from choosing our field as their own is partly answered by this quest—as is the practical question of what to “do” with biblical studies after graduation. To be truly part of the humanities, biblical studies must thus offer training that would suit cultural critics as well as other practitioners advancing the transmission of contemporary culture, not only past cultures, as important as those past cultures may be.

Understanding current culture fully, or more deeply, often depends upon understanding its biblical roots. On the flip side, using contemporary culture to understand biblical texts may be enlightening, if not without risks of anachronism and/or eisegesis. In spite of such risks, certainly not to be minimized, relevance will surely be enhanced!

One example that springs to mind is a series of photographs from the 1990s titled “Bible Stories,” by the Israeli photographer Adi Nes (born in Israel, 1966). In this series, which in essence depicts biblical figures rather than direct “stories,” Nes photographed ordinary Israelis, including homeless people, in their daily life, as biblical figures.<sup>5</sup> His photographs are deliberately staged and as such constitute a visualized interpretation

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5. The following images (figs. 1–6) are reproduced with the artist’s permission; courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Heartfelt thanks to Mr. Nes for his gracious permission and for supplying the images. The full-color images can be seen in

of texts that, for Israelis, are a very real and often bothersome heritage.<sup>6</sup> In a short discussion that will accompany some images of this series I will report briefly some comments by graduate students of biblical studies at Tel Aviv University, to whom the photographs were shown, along the lines of readerly response. For the intentions of the author—in this case, Nes—his website can be consulted.<sup>7</sup> For our purpose here it is enough to state that Nes's staging of his frames often corresponds with well-known classical paintings in a way that is neither coy nor copyist. By so doing he, in fact, combines the (post)modern with the classical—which is what I suggest that we do in biblical studies at this time.

So here, first, is Nes's contemporaneous visualization of Abraham and Isaac in Gen 22, the Aqedah (fig. 1). In this photograph, as is immedi-



Figure 1. Adi Nes: *Untitled (Abraham and Isaac)*, 2004.

ately noticed, Abraham is middle aged rather than old; and Isaac is a teenage boy, barefoot, sleeping on top of heaped debris that fills a supermarket cart. While the homelessness aroma of the staged scene is quite strong, the suggested interpretive elements relevant to the biblical story are even stronger. Isaac's age is not specified in the biblical text and is a subject of debate by commentators, since it is highly relevant to the questions: Is Isaac

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their original form, rather than in the printed grayscale, at [http://www.adines.com/content/biblical/biblical\\_stories.htm](http://www.adines.com/content/biblical/biblical_stories.htm).

6. Israeli children study the bible or about the bible from kindergarten onward. Even if they refuse to be impressed by it in later years, characterizing it as boring and irrelevant to secular life, they have to study it at least up to grade 10 (out of 12) of high school. And this is before we even contemplate the adoption of the bible by Zionism.

7. Cf. online: [adines.com](http://adines.com). Review materials are to be found at <http://adines.com/content/formoreinfo.htm>. On that page an interview of Nes with Jess Dugan (2008) is helpful for understanding Nes's thinking and methodology in general. Two more pieces are especially instructive for understanding the bible series: those by Horrigan and Sheffi (both 2007, when the series was first exhibited in museums and galleries).

aware of what is going to happen? Does he cooperate with his father in this horror story, against himself? Is this the trial of Abraham, of Isaac, or of both? Commentators differ on these questions. But the relatively young age of the boy, and his closed eyes, preclude collaboration with his father, while not saving him from cooperating by being passive. Israeli culture glorified the Akedah of the young by the old as a political myth necessary for national survival, much as Josephus's story of Masada was glorified. However, the young begun to rebel against their forced martyrdom, increasingly so after the Six-Day War (1967). Students were quick to perceive this image both as gap-filling commentary on the biblical text and as a political and socioeconomic commentary on their here and now.

And here is a Joseph (fig. 2). He is wearing a skullcap and a striped shirt, the latter being the popular rendering for Joseph's biblical *kētōnet passīm* (Gen 37:3, 23, 31), which makes him special among his brothers. But this child, this striped shirt, do not look at all special in today's terms!



Figure 2. Adi Nes: Untitled (Joseph), 2004.

Or a Hagar (fig. 3). She is young, good looking in a nonsensational way, seems to be of oriental descent, and looks worried and lost. Where is Ishmael? Is this the Hagar of Gen 16, before Ishmael's birth; or of Gen 21, after or during her exile with her son from Abraham's household? We can hardly guess which Hagar is represented from looking at the image as it is. But this reminds us that the scholarly discussion about Gen 16 and 21—are they two versions of the one story? are they two separate or inter-dependent stories?—is far from resolved.

Or we may look at Job and his friends (fig. 4). The scene of attempt at consolation is moved to the public square. All four men are not young,



Figure 3. Adi Nes: *Untitled (Hagar)*, 2005.

seem to be of modest means, and look like any older men one can watch at small coffeehouses all over lower-income areas in Israel. None of the figures looks happy. Yet there seems to be a bond of empathy between the sitting, grieving “Job” on the one hand, and the friends arguing among themselves—not with “Job”—on the other hand. On the issue of the attitudes that Job’s friends employ toward him in the biblical text, a choice seems to be made here.

They have come to console and empathize, as in Job 2:11–13, not to argue back and forth with Job (chs. 4–31).

Finally, here are Ruth and Naomi gleaning (fig. 5). In this photograph, one of his two images of Ruth and Naomi, Nes sends both woman figures to “glean” in the “field,” although in Ruth 2 only Ruth does that. The “gleaning” consists of collecting garbage and the fallout of a market day in, yet again, a public square. This is a painful double reminder, for today as well as for the biblical past and text. Scenes like this one, of poor people, especially women, collecting others’ food rejects for their own meager subsistence, inhabit—often without much visibility—our Western lands, especially cities and towns. Furthermore, it is easy to



Figure 4. Adi Nes: *Untitled (Job and friends)*, 2004.

romanticize the biblical attitudes toward the gathering (*leqet*) of harvest scraps by the poor, as for instance prescribed in Lev 19:9–10 and 23:22,



and with another term ( *škh*, “overlook,” NJPS; or “forget”) in Deut 24:19. Indeed, the root *lqt* occurs twelve times in Ruth 2, depicting Ruth’s activities of obtaining food. Allowing the poor to do the gathering seems to be a custom motivated by social responsibility toward the unfortunate. However, we are dealing with leftovers here. By posing his fictional Ruth and Naomi in a garbage field, Nes reminds us that this is hardly enough, then and now. And we get a new insight into Ruth



Figure 5. Adi Nes: Untitled (Ruth and Naomi gleaning), 2006.

2:15–16: “When she [Ruth] got up again to glean, Boaz gave orders to his workers, ‘You are not only to let her glean among the sheaves, without interference, but you must also pull some [stalks] out of the heaps and leave them for her to glean, and not scold her’” (NJPS). The biblical Boaz seems to be well aware, in this text, that a regular gathering would not be enough for subsistence, much like looking for remnants in a contemporary after-market, end-of-the-day gathering situation. His special favor to Ruth is that she and her mother-in-law would have enough to eat. No more. No romantics and no idealization of reality.

These examples are not simply a plug for Adi Nes’s work, although I like it very much; they are an extended illustration, one of many possible, of how biblical studies can advance its mission through popular culture. And



Figure 6. Adi Nes: Untitled (Last Supper), 1999.

this is of course not new: have not Dutch artists of the Golden Century (seventeenth century) done exactly the same, that is, painted people around them as biblical figures? And is Nes’s Last Supper (fig. 6) not consciously staged after Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper*? We are prepared

to study the masters' oeuvre as art and interpretation, within the reception history paradigm; let us be prepared to focus not only on those venerated works but also on their modern counterparts, seriously, as an alternative or at least addition to in-depth expert criticism. Let us mix classical and popular media, as a choice; let us be less obscure and less elitist! Both art criticism and biblical studies will benefit.

One of the ways to upset the older hegemony in biblical studies is to engage in feminist, queer, and postcolonial criticisms, which has been done now for two decades or so. Another is to follow to the logical conclusion: to bring in bible interpretation from far and varied geographical, cultural, personal, and religious contexts. This is already done, in series—one of them published by the SBL,<sup>8</sup> another by Fortress Press<sup>9</sup>—as well as in single volumes. Colleagues often complain that the contributions in such collections may be uneven in quality. This may be the case and an admitted shortcoming. But the value of such collections is in opening up horizons and forming a grid of new equations, stressing both differences and similarities across cultures in a global age. Those who work on such topics, including me, believe in the project as a scholarly and social necessity. I wish, I wish that others will soon recognize their importance and join in as contributors and readers.

Finally, on technical matters: speaking personally, one of the places where I have learned the most in the last few years is online. From digitally published books (I have made a decision not to hoard paper volumes anymore; good for the environment, good for my personal space!) to info sources to data banks to blogs to Facebook, this for me has been a real not just a virtual space. The Net is now used by all, more or less and in various ways, for distance teaching/learning. But discussions such as “are blogs a legitimate and worthwhile professional pursuit?” (remember the session in 2011 at the SBL annual meeting) are anachronistic. Here is an obvious observation: we must strive to conduct or back up most if not all our activities on the Net, in any form we can use or devise, in teaching and in research. This is part and parcel of democratizing our little acre, regrettably at the price of possibly losing quality: true, but unavoidable.

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8. The *International Cooperation Initiative*, online: <http://www.sbl-site.org/InternationalCoopInitiative.aspx>, and open-access books in it.

9. The *Texts@Contexts* series, online: <http://store.fortresspress.com/store/productfamily/118/Text-Contexts-series>.

To conclude, I am suggesting a program of conscious and deliberate decentering of issues and concerns: to go popular; to employ—using Mieke Bal's term—"preposterous history," that is, to allow chronologically later texts of any kind to influence our mind on the predecessors from which the later texts and representations derive;<sup>10</sup> to create, in Homi Bhabha's words,<sup>11</sup> a new, hybrid, and multicultural "third space"—neither exclusively confessional nor exclusively scholarly—for biblical studies now, a new community that will become less hermetically sealed and less exclusive in its tastes.

Many of my colleagues, when they hear such blasphemy, mutter darkly that this amounts to prostituting our subject matter and venerable object of study and ourselves. To which one may respond: even if this is so, let us prostitute ourselves with good cheer. This is a matter of survival—for critical bible study if not necessarily for the bible itself, and for the guild that practices such study. Let us agree with the ancient preacher who said, so long ago, "Even a live dog is better than a dead lion" (Qoh 9:4, NJPS).

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10. In *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Mieke Bal explores the back and forth, rather than linear, impact of cultural production on its consumers. This is not without expected methodological pitfalls. However, I suggest a flexible, careful adoption/addition of her method concerning classical art to the existing arsenal of scholarly bible interpretation.

11. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. the introduction and 212–35.



## NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH *JOB* ORATORIOS

Katharine J. Dell

### THE ORATORIO “CRAZE”

In this paper I am interested in the way Job is treated in the nineteenth-century oratorio tradition in Britain. Sacred oratorio<sup>1</sup> took off in the nineteenth century and had two primary forms—one of a more meditative nature (e.g., Handel’s *Messiah*) and the other of a more dramatic character (e.g., Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*).<sup>2</sup> Old Testament narratives were particularly suited to the dramatic variety, although the book of Job, unusually, provided both—action from the dramatic events recounted in the prologue and epilogue, and meditation from the dialogue, notably Job’s own speeches and God’s reply. Three oratorios based on Job represent well the span of the nineteenth century—those by William Russell (1814), Edmund T. Chipp (1875), and C. Hubert H. Parry (1892).<sup>3</sup> In this context I am concerned with the libretti of these scores,<sup>4</sup> all composed by the composers

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1. An oratorio is defined as, “An extended musical setting of a sacred text made up of dramatic, narrative and contemplative elements”; see Howard E. Smither, “Oratorio,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. Stanley Sadie; 2nd ed.; 29 vols.; London: Grove, 2001), 18:503.

2. Oratorio could be presented in public concert halls in a secular context or in churches in a sacred context, which would also include prayers and biblical readings.

3. These are all mentioned in the impressive bibliography in the third volume of David Clines’s commentary on Job (D. J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42* [WBC 18B; Nashville: Nelson, 2011], 1443–50). It is a pleasure to offer this paper in honor of a “like-minded” Job scholar.

4. Helen Leneman (*The Performed Bible* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2007]) has done a full analysis of musical settings of biblical texts, with an emphasis on the interplay of music and libretto. Libretti generally serve three purposes. The first is character depiction and development. The second is focalization, i.e., “The focalizer

themselves,<sup>5</sup> and in how they compare to the book of Job in relation to three main issues: choice of characters, presentation of the story, and relationship to the biblical text. There is also extra material, sometimes from other biblical texts, or composed by the librettist, or occasionally taken from other literature.<sup>6</sup> Two hundred and sixteen oratorios were written in Britain alone between 1800 and 1915, over half of which were based on Old Testament subjects.<sup>7</sup> Large numbers of choral societies were formed (for example, the Bach choir of London in 1876<sup>8</sup>), and singing such material was considered, in Victorian times, good for the formation of one's moral character and a good way of keeping people out of the pubs!

### JOB AS A SUBJECT FOR ORATORIO

#### RUSSELL'S *JOB*

The earliest oratorio based on Job was that of William Russell, organist of the foundling chapel in London. Russell's *Job: A Sacred Oratorio in Three Parts* was written in 1814 and received its first performance at the foundling hospital. In many respects, it provides the most interesting example of the three Job oratorios in the way in which it deviates quite a bit from the Job text, using primarily the prose story as its framework but containing so many extras that it is almost unrecognizable in sentiment from

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in these musical works is the combination of the librettist and composer, working together to create a re-imagined scroll" (229). The third is gap filling, e.g., age indicated by voice type; motives, such as romantic interest, ascribed to characters. She writes, "While librettos fill in various gaps from the original story, the music continually, but wordlessly, fills in the gaps of how people are feeling and reacting" (32).

5. I say this with the caveat that Russell's composition was incomplete at his death and so was actually completed by a group of his associates.

6. See Wendy Porter, "The Composer of Sacred Music as an Interpreter of the Bible," in *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible* (ed. Martin O'Kane; JSOTSup 313; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 126–53.

7. Handel is thought to have created the form of the English oratorio, which was used as a model for later oratorio composers throughout Europe and provided the primary criteria for establishing the character of the genre. Most nineteenth-century oratorios, especially after 1830, reflect Handel's influence, even though styles change over time.

8. Of which I have had the privilege of being a member for over twenty years.

the original story.<sup>9</sup> A striking element is that there was clearly a desire on Russell's part to include more women in the lineup of characters, possibly reflecting a greater openness to women as intellectuals at the time. So not only is Job's wife more prominent,<sup>10</sup> there is also a female friend character, Elika (replacing Elihu), and another, Dela, who has a chorus-like role. This oratorio contains the main elements of the Job plot, but departs considerably from the Job text itself. No doubt the biblical story was widely known, yet departing from it in relation to both *dramatis personae* and message does not seem to have posed a problem. Rather than being based on any version of the biblical text, it is a poetic paraphrase in biblical-sounding verse. God is replaced by a female angel (and hence female voice) who, in an intermediary role, is in dialogue with a Demon, who replaces the Satan of the book of Job.<sup>11</sup>

A dramatic story is required by the oratorio medium, and so economies and adaptations were made in that service. In Russell's oratorio Job and his wife, here named Salmina (but in the biblical book unnamed) develop a love theme. She is tragically killed along with the children, which is not explicitly stated in the biblical story. Although Job's wife does not reappear in the biblical Job, one assumes that she is still alive, and indeed that she bears the new brood of children in the epilogue.<sup>12</sup> Job in this oratorio, although occasionally grief-stricken and doubting, is predominantly portrayed positively, living in the hope of God's ultimate good purposes for him. Moments of doubt are quickly rebuked by the male and female "friend" characters, and hope and blessing are the predominant emotions of the piece. In the background is the Angel/Demon confrontation that mirrors the heavenly scenes of the prologue of Job and gives the context for the whole drama.

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9. This kind of poetical and metrical paraphrase was popular during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and so, in this approach, Russell was not atypical of his time.

10. The increasing prominence of Job's wife is noticeable in Job tradition first in the Septuagint and then in the Testament of Job, where both wife and daughters are given significant speaking roles. It is interesting that William Blake in his etchings of Job, completed a decade after Russell's work, also gave Job's wife an enhanced role.

11. In oratorio generally, there was a problem about how to present the God-head—no human representation ever seemed quite adequate. In the other two Job oratorios, representing the Satan is less problematic and God is "played" by a chorus.

12. The idea that there was a second wife at the end of the book does, however, feature in some Jewish exegesis.

Scene 1 opens in heaven. The Angel first comes, sent from heaven to chastise the Demon's rebellion and "To bid thee mark his upright servant Job. Reflect—take good example—and repent." So it is, ironically, the Demon figure who is called upon to repent of his rebellion against God in the light of the pious man, Job. The Angel then sings a hymn to God's wondrous works and describes the praise offered to him by human beings, repeated by the chorus—in heaven the sound of mortal praise echoes loudly. The Demon then responds that Job is motivated by his possessions alone and that, once robbed of them, "thou wilt find he serves not God for nought," picking up closely on the Satan's question "Does Job serve God for nought?" (Job 1:9 KJV). The Demon has a matching air to that of the Angel in which he affirms God's punishment of human beings and Job in particular. He uses the language of "He'll curse him to his face" of God with the idea that when God discovers Job's true motivation a divine curse will follow. This is an ironic antithesis of what Job's wife says to Job: "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9).

This heavenly scene continues (and, unlike the book, there has been no corresponding earthly one as yet) with the Angel giving the Demon the power to rob Job of his offspring and possessions, but not to touch his "sacred person." This echoes the first heavenly interchange between God and the Satan in the biblical book. The Angel's air describes the "fire of its Maker," clearly the fire of God's judgment (Job 1:16), that will consume Job's "domains" and that anticipates Job's response of submission. The Demon responds with glee that now he is free to "send a messenger" (cf. the messengers of 1:13–19), who reports Job's losses culminating in that of his children, to "wring his inmost Soul." Here it is not a cold and factual deprivation of possessions and children; rather it is a deed calculated to upset Job to the utmost. The Demon's air reveals his motives—"We'll harass and vex him, Distract and perplex him, Till no peace on earth shall he find; Make him curse God and die, Then to us for aid fly, Nor longer integrity mind." Once again, Job's wife's words echo in those of the Demon in a deliberate melding of their roles.

The scene now changes to earth and a similar "air and recitative" pattern occurs with Job and his wife, Salmina. Job's opening words thank God for the blessing of his "beloved" wife, his love for whom comes across (an aspect totally missing from the biblical tale). Job then goes on to mention his wealth and offspring. This time, the air after the recitative is taken up by Salmina, who echoes the gratitude of the pair to God. She mentions "these courts we trod," suggesting a sumptuous living area, later called "our



blest abode.” Thanks to God is at the forefront here, a sentiment taken up by the chorus, who, in the role of moral commentator, adds the note of providential recompense for righteous behavior. Salmina now has the recitative and praises the gift of children and a duet of praise to God follows in very elaborate language—“And, adoring, rapt, exploring Regions far beyond the sky.”

A new character is now introduced—Elphizar, the equivalent of Eliphaz, Job’s first friend. In the biblical Job, the friends are not introduced until after the prologue, but here they acquire the “messenger” role, which gives them a part in the drama. A short dialogue within a recitative ensues in which Elphizar tells Job that the Sabeans killed the servants who were tending the cattle and took them away. This closely matches the first calamity to fall upon the biblical Job, but after that the three subsequent disasters are elided into two to match the other two friends, omitting the Chaldean raid on the camels. Job immediately empathizes with the servants, little minding about his goods. Then another friend, Zaphnus, announces the demise of Job’s flocks and corn. Again, though, Job’s concern is for his servants over his goods.

A third “friend,” Alcides, now brings the third piece of news, the demise of Job’s offspring. This is agonizing for Job—he says, “Then every blessing round me is destroyed, And my heart dead to every hope of joy!” An air by Job follows in which he bewails his lack of hope and recalls his former joy—will he ever regain it? Although bewailing, there is a strong note of hope that this “dismal night” will be short, and “I to prospects far more bright With love return again.” This is followed by a recitative in which Job wonders how he will tell Salmina the news and is told by Elphizar of her death. This is a final blow for Job, but again he is accepting, echoing Job 1:21—the gifts of God must return to God. Then another dimension—of eschatological hope—is added, foreign to the biblical account, “That all shall meet unchanged again in Heaven.” An air follows in which Job continues to echo Job 1:21 “Though helpless I came from the womb / And soon must return to the tomb, / I bend to the mighty All-wise. ... / In heaven more rich to arise” —and again espouses eschatological hope. This leads the chorus to a note of praise to God that ends part 1.

Part 2 takes us back to heaven and the Angel makes the point that the Demon’s trial of Job has failed due to Job’s “unexampled rectitude and patience and resignation to the sov’reign will.” The Angel’s subsequent air calls on a “consoling delegate of virtue” (presumably God) to give Job the fortitude to bear his misfortunes. The Demon’s response is that Job is

calmer than he had expected. Now comes the second test, echoing that of the prologue, “smite his body, / And all his patience will at once depart.” The proviso from the Angel, as by God in the biblical book, is to “Spare his life.” The Demon responds vindictively, “And it shall be a life so full of torment / That death upon the rack, or in the fire, / Compared with it were bliss.” The Demon’s air describes his plan to anguish Job further, and the chorus cuts in to plead for God to hear Job’s prayer. Job appears and utters some of the biblical chapter 3 that curses the day of his birth in a desperate plea to God—“Perish the day on which my mother said (with all the exultation of fond love) / Join in rejoicing, partner, for a son.” His following air recalls the language of day and night and the elements, characteristic of chapter 3. Here he calls upon the natural order to fall into chaos, which echoes the state of his soul.

At this point Elikā—a female equivalent of Elihu, the fourth friend—appears with the role of rebuking Job. She says, “Blaspheme no more. The Lord thy God is just.” She then expresses the difficulty of knowing God, in the same way that Elihu does. Zaphnus, one of three male friends, then reappears and urges Job to “be steadfast.” Zaphnus sings an air expressing the ultimate triumph of the righteous. Job responds in agreement—should he be afraid of his Maker who gave him life? Surely not! His following air expresses the brevity of his sorrow in the recognition of God’s enduring mercy. Again the chorus ends the part on a note of praise to God. Job’s second response in the biblical prologue is missing here and replaced with a more positive expression of God’s enduring mercies.

Part 3 opens with a recitative by another female character, Dela. Hers is a narrative role, with comment on the state of Job’s soul “absorb’d in stupor.” She calls on singers (“fond warblers, with your notes”) not to disturb him since, as the following air expresses, even music gives Job no comfort; rather it heightens his anguish. This is followed by a more plaintive recitative by Job, which, nonetheless, ends on a note of confidence in God in the midst of affliction. This is a mere echo of the more rebellious Job of the biblical dialogue. Job’s following air indicates that although he is in anguish he “scorns to complain” and still trusts in God, his Maker. The “personal Maker” side of God is emphasized. Elikā’s following recitative talks of intercession with the “angel of God” on Job’s behalf, probably a reference to the angel of Job 33:23, and a plea to “Spare him.” This is the first indication that the earthly group is ignorant of the outcome of these trials. Elikā’s air asks for “sweet consolation” for Job before “he fly never more to return.” This expresses Job’s fear that he might die before completing his

argument with God. The chorus now proclaims God's salvation—they hint that they know of a happy outcome. Again, their words have a moral element: "His blessing he extends to all / That on his power depend."

Dela now reappears offering comfort and recalling Job's former good deeds, expressing one of Job's own sentiments in the dialogue. Such transference of sentiments is done partly for dramatic effect and variety, but also so that others justify Job rather than he himself. This has the effect of taking the "bite" out of his own character. The greater role of females in uttering Job's words is also interesting. Dela's following air calls for Job to put his trust in God and expresses hope in immortality. Job's recitative response then muses on death with a moment of gloom: "O that the grave were my abiding place, / For there alone is peace—Presumptuous wish! Submit to God's decrees." This thought is quickly dismissed in favor of more pious ones. The chorus now enters to justify Job and his openness before God and express further adoration to God. Job responds with self-chastisement that he might have even thought of accusing God of injustice—"The thought is impious! Tempt me not!" Enter the Demon, annoyed at Job's piety, realizing that God still protects him. This ironically leads the Demon to proclaim God's honor and victory over his foes! The Angel now proclaims the end of Job's sufferings and a fresh round of blessing "ten times told" (echoing Job 19:3). Her air expresses that all nations will proclaim Job's worth when he dies and rises "richer in fame." Job's response is to reaffirm his trust in God and his bounty. God's role as creator is again confirmed in his air. The final word is left to the chorus, that of praise to God, in holy city and mountain: "Blessed be thy name for ever and ever." Thus a hopeful, pious Job who ultimately praises God is revealed—a far cry from the biblical figure as portrayed in the Job dialogue.

### CHIPP'S *JOB*

Edmund Chipp's oratorio on Job from 1875 is a very different work and is entirely based on biblical texts, although with some modified wording to the KJV in places. Chipp chose not to base his oratorio solely on texts from Job but to employ the technique of adding in parts of Psalms<sup>13</sup> to bolster

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13. A source particularly influential on Christian interpretation was *Le Petit Job*, a mixture of Job and the Psalms, which was popular in the High Middle Ages and on which Chipp's selection of psalms is largely based. See the discussion in Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (BZAW 197; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), ch. 1.

the moral commentary of the chorus.<sup>14</sup> There is a musical overture of a suitable *andante religioso* feel, but then the voices take over in a mixture of recitatives, solos, arias, and four-part chorus sections.

The work begins with Job 1:1 in a soprano recitative, then the chorus comes in with an appropriate sentiment from Ps 1:2–4 but omitting any reference to the law of the Lord (v. 2b) and simply focusing on “the man whose delight is in the Lord.” The context is thus set of the reward of the righteous/punishment of the wicked issue that is mainly aired in the Job dialogue, bringing it forward to the very opening of the book. The work then features the heavenly scene of Job 1:6–12, with only very small cuts (e.g., some of the detail of v. 10). This consists of recitatives by soprano and bass in turn. Following this is an aria by soprano and chorus called the “Lament of the Angels,” describing the hubris of Satan that led to his downfall. This is a rendition of Isa 14:12–14 and refers to Satan as Lucifer: “How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the morning! how art thou cast down to the ground! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will be like the Most High.” This is fascinating commentary upon the heavenly situation, notably on Satan’s misguidedness, done so as to assure the listener of Satan’s bad character. Turning to Job himself (tenor), he sings Ps 23:1, 2, 4 rather than his own sentiments. The soprano recitative then returns us to the main story in representing the first messenger, as in Job 1:14, omitting verse 13 about the feasting sons and daughters. This anticipates the intriguing omission of the calamity of the death of Job’s children. Only the Sabeans’ slaughter of oxen and asses and their servants and then the “fire of God” burning up sheep and servants are mentioned. Then Job replies, without his submissive mourning, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). This is followed by two psalmic verses from the chorus—Pss 145:17 and 128:1—extolling God’s righteousness and holiness and the need to fear Him. This is the point at which the interval is placed.

Part 2 opens with a continuation of the heavenly scene with Satan presenting himself a second time and the discussion over smiting Job’s body as related in Job 2:1–7. The chorus comes in with a recitative of Ps 89:41–42,

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14. The chorus can fulfill many roles. It can, like a Greek chorus, simply comment on the action, offering reflective thoughts or moral advice (as here), or it can fill in as narrator or either replace (as in the case of God) or be involved as a character in the story.

taken in this new context to refer to Job's situation, "All they that go by spoil him; and he is become a reproach to his neighbours. All his enemies rejoice over him." Then the words of Job's wife, as in Job 2:9, are put into the mouth of a chorus of evil angels (an interesting identity!). Then Job is able to reply indignantly "What? Shall we receive good and the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" The chorus now becomes narrator relating that his friends came to mourn with Job and comfort him. Job's response here is an aria based on Ps 25:16, 20, a plea to God for mercy in his misery. The chorus of evil angels resumes with a quotation of Ps 22:8 "let us see if the man who trusts in God will be delivered." They end with the words, "Call now, if there be any that will answer thee" (echoing the words of Eliphaz in Job 5:1). A recitative from Job follows which is a mixture of quotations from his speeches (in the order, Job 10:1–3; 29:2, 11–14; 31:6; 19:7; 3:20–22, 17).

A responding angel takes up some of the God's words but in the third person, mixed, ironically, with some words from the friends' speeches and even from Job's too—40:2 (God); 22:3–4 (Eliphaz); 21:22 (Job); 11:7 (Zophar). A final soprano aria uses Isa 26:4, "Trust thou in the Lord," as a closing sentiment. The chorus then joins in with sentiments from the friends: "Behold, happy is the man whom the Lord correcteth, therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (5:17 [Eliphaz]). Job's responding prayer is an admission of sin, much more clearly so than in the biblical tale itself. His words are taken from the apocryphal Prayer of Manasseh (vv. 12a, 10a, and parts of 13 and 14). A quartet of angels in four parts (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) now sing Ps 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a troubled spirit, a broken and a contrite heart God will not despise." The chorus takes up the end of the tale—the Lord is said to have heard this prayer and healed Job (an addition to the biblical text where the Lord "turned the captivity of Job") and then, as in Job 42:12, the Lord "blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." Job's response is found in the words of Ps 118:15, 17, 18, and 20, an acknowledgment of correction, but also with an endnote of ultimate praise. The last chorus uses four psalmic citations—Pss 68:4; 66:4; 148:11, 12, 13; and 150:6 to round off the piece on an upbeat note of praise: "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

It is clear that the story has been reduced to a minimum here, without many of the characters, including Job's wife and children, and with only passing reference to the friends. The whole has become an opportunity for moral formation, based on the exemplary story of Job, who was tested by

God and Satan. It is reliant on the prose story for its narrative with just a very few sentiments sprinkled in from the rest of the book. Job emerges as a rather bland character, a pawn in the game of the heavenly beings. The juxtaposition of psalmic verses shows the closeness of Job to the psalms—one wonders if those listening would really have noticed the replacement.

#### PARRY'S *JOB*

Perhaps the best known of the three oratorios I have considered here is that of C. Hubert Parry. His *Job* took the choral world by storm; and after its first performance at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester in 1892, it was so well received that that chorus performed it in the following two years, unheard of except for the most popular pieces of the time.<sup>15</sup> The only dissenter from this good reception was George Bernard Shaw, who called it “the most utter failure ever achieved by a thoroughly respectable musician” in a review for *The World* (May 3, 1893).<sup>16</sup> But then he was not an admirer of oratorio in general, nor of Parry's other oratorio, *Judith*.<sup>17</sup>

Parry's oratorio uses texts predominantly from Job, although not surprisingly he focuses on the prologue/epilogue, the narrative parts of the book, and gives the speeches relatively little airing. Those of Job are often elided together; those of the friends are totally absent.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in this

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15. One Harry Plunkett Greene played Job and “Sang his part amazingly well, and sent people into floods right and left” (letter from Parry to Dannreuther, September 16, 1892, Bodleian Library, Oxford: Eng. Letters e.117, f. 198); cited by Michael Allis, *Parry's Creative Process* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2003), 154.

16. Cited in Dan H. Laurence, ed., *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism of George Bernard Shaw* (3 vols.; London: Bodley Head, 1981), 2:872. It was not Parry's musical workmanship that Shaw criticized but his treatment of the great story of Job, which Shaw deemed inadequate, describing it as a “dreary ramble through the wastes of artistic error” (Laurence, *Shaw's Music*, 2:875).

17. Shaw suggested in the same review that Parry should “burn the score [of Job], and throw Judith in when the blaze begins to flag”; see George B. Shaw, *The World* (May 3, 1893), cited in Laurence, *Shaw's Music*, 2:876.

18. In July 1894, Sedley Taylor wrote to Parry that the allusion to Job's “friends” (or “comforters”) had been omitted to the detriment of the work. Parry defended his original scheme, writing in a letter to Taylor on July 20, 1894, “I altogether failed to see how to make the friends musical. No doubt there is much beautiful literature, grand phrases which would adapt themselves splendidly to musical declamation which occur in connection with them; but in such matters the grand scheme has to be considered; and ... moments that in themselves seem most interesting and attractive have

case, Job provides sufficient lament or other emotions that the librettist does not need to go elsewhere, such as the psalms, to find suitable words. The version used is the King James, which he follows verbatim. Parry's oratorio introduces a "shepherd boy" who fulfills the function of the messengers in the Job prologue. The chorus sings for God, thus avoiding the difficulties of having that figure as a character. The piece starts in scene 1 with a narrator (baritone), Job, Satan, and a chorus of male voices representing God, and follows Job 1:1–15 closely. Verse 2, referring to Job's seven sons and three daughters, is omitted, although verse 4 is not, which refers to those same children. Verse 5b is also cut and the narrator presents the heavenly scene of verses 6–12, this time with the characters speaking their own words, the chorus of tenors and basses for God and a tenor for Satan. There is only the one God/Satan encounter here, as opposed to the two of the biblical tale.

Scene 2 opens with a new character, a shepherd boy, and this is where Parry departs considerably from the text, introducing a pastoral theme. This boy represents the messengers of the Job text, and yet there is much embellishment in the opening sentiments about tender lambs that are protected by God. There is an overtone of God's speeches in Job 38–41 in the sentiment that "They wander on the mountains where no man's feet have trod," and yet these are domesticated animals rather than wild ones. Even the weather is kind, and the shepherd boy has no cares, protected by the "folds of my master." There follows a description of the wealth of "his master" (Job) and God's protection. Just as the listener has been lulled into a false sense of security, however, the Satan figure appears in dramatic fashion calling on the "Sabeian horde" to destroy said flocks and herds. The chorus then confirms the event in a lively description of the Sabeian ravagers on horseback, armed and dangerous, killing herds and shepherds in their wake, so that "the song of the shepherd has ceased in the land" and the land itself is "black and bare."

The narrator announces the arrival of a messenger, a shepherd sung by a soprano (if not the boy, then one of his elders) who relates Job 1:14–15. Here only the one calamity of the four related in the biblical text is featured. Job's first response, 1:20, follows with Job himself uttering his pious words, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, ..." omitting verse

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often to be abandoned because they cannot be brought into the scope of the whole" (letter cited in Jeremy C. Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry: His Life and Music* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1992], 299).

21a. The narrator then speaks the words of verse 22, which is followed by another dramatic ad lib piece of writing describing Satan calling up the elements to wreak further destruction.<sup>19</sup> There are echoes of both Job 28 and the divine speeches here. The chorus joins in to describe the clouds, roaring wind, shaking trees, and darkened sun. This is all a prelude to the slaying of Job's children and is an embellishment of the "great wind" of Job 1:19. The musical relationship is drawn out in the description of the "noise of the song ceaseth, the sound of the harp is no more heard," a citation from the book of Isaiah (24:8). "The walls are broken down, destroyed are the pleasant houses" recalls Ezek 26:12 and, if not the event of exile, the force of its destruction.

Scene 3 introduces Job's friends. The second encounter of God and Satan and the infliction of a disease on Job are all omitted. The scene moves now to the end of chapter 2, that is, verse 11 with the narrator. The reference to "three" friends is omitted, as are the names. Parts of verses 12–13 follow. The narrator introduces Job again (3:1–2), and then follows "The Lamentation of Job," a long section, again a selection from his speeches. He begins with Job 3:4–5, 9, 11a, 13, 17, 18a, 19–22; then continues with selections from 9:2–8, 10–11; 10:1–3, 8, 20–22; 14:1–2, 11–12; 29:2–3, 5, 14, 21–22, 25; 30:16–17, 19–21, 23.

Scene 4 opens with the chorus uttering the words of God in 38:1ff., portrayed as a direct response to Job's lament (unlike in the book, where Elihu interrupts the plot). The only change is that the third person is used so that God is not directly speaking, for example, "Where was thou when God laid the foundations of the earth?" (v. 4a). Most of 38:1–30 is cited (notably vv. 2–13, 16–18, 25–30), and then 39:19, 21–25, the description of the horse, follows. The text then cuts to 40:7–14, again with small omissions. This is the end of the depiction of God and so the epilogue, notably 42:1–6, now appears. The rest of the epilogue is omitted until the last verses are reached—verses 10a, 12a, and 17 sung by the narrator: "And it was so, that the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed; And he blessed the end of Job more than his beginning. And Job died, being old and full of years."

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19. Dibble comments somewhat negatively that Parry's Satan "gives the impression of a flamboyant, mischievous rogue in a melodrama with whom it is almost impossible to equate the scale of cruelty and tragedy inflicted. . . . Such dramatic polarities and their successful depiction appear to have been beyond the musical imagination of Parry" (*Parry*, 300).



Clearly, the Job text is much abridged here, but mainly adhered to in the KJV. The two new extended passages—the words of the shepherd boy and of Satan—were written by Parry himself, dramatic effect being at the forefront of their composition.<sup>20</sup> Different leitmotifs were associated with different characters, woven together so as to unify the piece—a new style for oratorio. Parry's work is seen as having developed the oratorio genre in musical terms, conversationally described by Sir Adrian Boult as “a work of the future” and by another reviewer as “quite unconventional ... daringly so.”<sup>21</sup> A reviewer for the *Athenaeum* wrote, after the first performance, “That Dr Parry had written nothing finer than *Job* is generally admitted, and his boldness in dispensing with set airs, fugal choruses, and an elaborate *finale* is abundantly justified by the results; indeed he might say with Haydn, that the rules are all my obedient, humble servants.”<sup>22</sup>

This oratorio is unusual for being short, only lasting one hour, and for each scene being continuous, scenes 2-4 continuing without pause. It is also strikingly dramatic, with the orchestra as a more significant vehicle of expression than simply in an accompanying role. In contrast to Shaw's scathing critique, another reviewer wrote, “Dr Parry has written nothing finer than this Oratorio, and as a remarkable exhibition of sustained power it has been surpassed by few composers of any period.”<sup>23</sup>

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is remarkable that these three oratorios are all from one genre of musical expression and yet they differ so much. There is no evidence that any of these composers knew the work of the others, although that is entirely possible as the century progresses. Clearly, oratorio is a genre that developed and changed over time as it interacted with different composers and

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20. Allis (*Parry's Creative Process*, 190–91) notes that in Parry's extra “Satan” composition the three stanzas of the piece all contain identical constructions—at the beginning is the call to “Arise” repeated three times; in the middle “From/where ...”; and at the end “Hasten and come,” the use of such phrasing and repetition (as particularly in the calls to “See/Hear”) being particularly effective in portraying the dramatic events described.

21. *Musical Times* 33 (1892): 599.

22. Cited by Charles L. Graves, *Hubert Parry: His Life and Works* (2 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1926), 1:350–51; he gives no issue number of the *Athenaeum*. The performance was on September 8, 1892, at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester.

23. *Musical Times* 36 (1895): 471.

cultures. In relation to the libretti, there are changing concerns in three areas: characters, story, and relationship to the biblical text. First, all three composers are not afraid to alter the characterization of the book. Russell adds new characters—notably women—to broaden the scope of the piece and heighten its conversational character. However, the central character, Job, is much changed, and Russell also takes some substantial liberties with the original story, the most surprising being the killing off of Job's wife. Chipp is simply not interested in any characters other than God, Satan, and Job, and omits all the others. He reduces the character of Job to a rather pious one-dimensional figure with none of the bite of his biblical counterpart. Parry too reduces his characters to the basic three, with merely passing reference to the friends, but he adds his character of a shepherd boy to fill a narrative gap that the messenger figure alone could not satisfy.

Second, in relation to telling the story, all three give us the main elements of Job's trial at the hands of God and Satan, although the down-playing of negative sentiments in Russell's piece and the addition of praise and afterlife references contrast sharply with the other two more realistic presentations. Chipp's addition of psalmic verses, and indeed the replacement of Job's own words with them, tends to detract from the more negative aspects of Job's protest. Chipp also plays up the moral admonition aspect, largely in his use of psalms, a feature that is only faint in Russell's chorus lines. Chipp's addition of psalmic verses suggests that his audience had some familiarity with the Psalms and that their use, particularly in the service of moral exhortation (as featured in the chorus), was considered important. Perhaps it is only Parry who manages to convey the full reality of Job's less-than-pious reaction to his plight by citing large chunks of the biblical Job speeches, although he is very selective. Parry's free rendering of passages to pad out the story shows less slavish adherence to the biblical tale, and he has little interest in too much moralizing. One wonders if the effects of critical scholarship of the Bible from continental Europe, as they were beginning to influence British scholarship and wider educated circles, were being felt in the change toward a less pious, more text-based, less moralizing piece.

Third, in relation to citation of the biblical text of Job, of the three Parry keeps closely to the KJV. Chipp's is a biblically based version but he uses considerable poetic freedom in his exact phrasing. Russell simply uses a rather flowery, biblical-sounding paraphrase, which has no more than a tendentious link to the original text. Again, a more text-based

literary-historical approach as was emerging in biblical criticism in the late nineteenth century might account for this change. Given that the popular medium of music would be one of the chief ways in which audiences acquired familiarity with biblical texts, it is fascinating to analyze the intellectual and theological interplay between librettist and biblical text and to rejoice in the rich cultural experience that results from a composer adapting and recreating Job for performance. The text is “reread” in new contexts, and aspects of the biblical counterpart are brought to our attention in ever new ways. The interaction between composer, librettist, and original text or inspiration are emergent concerns in the growing field of musical interpretation of the Bible. As these examples from the nineteenth century have indicated, the cultural transmission of music in its many different genres is of key interest, as is the wider language of music, its profundity, its effect upon the listener, and its richness for use as analogy.<sup>24</sup>

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24. See Katharine J. Dell, “The Bible and Music: Hearing *Elijah* through the Oratorio Tradition,” in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of Professor John Barton* (ed. Katharine J. Dell and Paul M. Joyce; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 285–96.



## JUDGING JUDGES SCHOLARSHIP

Alan J. Hauser

This essay is dedicated to David Clines, whose commitment to the reassessment, reconfiguration, and advancement of biblical scholarship has been a hallmark of his career and whose breadth of scholarly interests serves as a model to us all. David's accomplishments in a variety of venues of biblical scholarship have truly been remarkable, as has been his assistance to other scholars in getting their works disseminated, both through the press he founded, and through the numerous journals he launched. David is a remarkable scholar and friend.

### INTRODUCTION

How things have changed! The time from the middle of the twentieth century to the second decade of the twenty-first has witnessed a major transformation in biblical studies. This includes an abundance of new approaches, accompanied by a dramatic reprocessing and reformulation of previous methodologies and assumptions. The positivistic attitude about scholars' ability to reconstruct ancient Israelite history, as well as scholarly confidence in separating biblical literature into discrete, historically associated sources, have diminished due to our growing understanding of the complex processes that created the biblical literature as received. Much remains to be accomplished as we seek to understand better the literature of the Tanak, as well as the social and historical circumstances of its ancient context. While numerous new approaches have arisen to take up the challenge, many are still in their early stages of gestation, often with basic, fundamental methodological issues still to be resolved. Furthermore, at the most foundational level, there has not been sufficient dialogue across the spectrum of these new approaches, each often operating essentially within its own particular parameters and issues.

A scan of scholarship on the book of Judges during the past half century exemplifies these trends. A thorough analysis of Judges scholarship during this period would take far more space than I have available.<sup>1</sup> Here I can pick only a very few samples of important trends and works. My apologies for the many fine works I have thereby omitted.

### “LITERARY” CRITICISM OF JUDGES

Martin Noth exemplifies mid-twentieth-century literary critical scholarship on Judges. Noth employed his own literary studies, attempting to reconstruct Israelite history prior to the monarchy. According to Noth, Israel during this period was united by the centripetal force of a twelve-tribe league or “amphictyony,” focused around a fluctuating central sanctuary where the twelve tribes gathered annually.<sup>2</sup> At these assemblies, the “true” judges of Israel, the so-called minor judges, adjudicated particularly difficult cases concerning the interpretation of the law of the Lord.<sup>3</sup> Noth based this position on what he argued was an early, distinct literary source in Judg 10:1–5 and 12:7–15, which allows us to peek back into this period of Israelite history and recover Israel’s early form. The link between literary-critical studies (really source-critical studies) and the attempt to reconstruct ancient Israelite history is strong. Furthermore, while Noth may be commended for his desire to find links between the amphictyony, a sociopolitical phenomenon from ancient Greece, and the life of early Israel, his transplanting this Greek structure into premonarchial Israel was taken seriously by scholars for only a very few years, with several raising methodological concerns.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Noth’s main contribution was

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1. For a more detailed discussion of scholarship up to approximately 2003, see Kenneth M. Craig, “Judges in Recent Research,” *CBR* 1 (2003): 159–85.

2. Martin Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930).

3. Martin Noth, “Das Amt des ‘Richters Israel,’” in *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet* (ed. Walter Baumgartner et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1950), 404–17; idem, *The History of Israel* (trans. Stanley Godman; New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 85–109, esp. 101–7; idem, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967).

4. Harry M. Orlinsky, “The Tribal System of Israel and Related Groups in the Period of the Judges,” in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (ed. Meir Ben-Horin, Bernard D. Weinryb, and Solomon Zeitlin; Leiden: Brill, 1962), 375–87; George W. Anderson, “Israel: Amphictyony: ‘AM; KĀHĀL; ‘ĒDĀH,” in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May* (ed.

to highlight the dangers of such a cross-cultural enterprise undertaken without careful methodologies for assessing the validity of such links. In fairness to Noth, social-scientific criticism as applied to biblical studies was virtually unknown in Noth's era.

Noth's identification of the two-part list of judges as a distinct literary piece was reasonable. The difficulty came when Noth moved beyond this literary observation to establish this piece as earlier, and therefore more useful for reconstructing the premonarchial era, tying it to his amphictyonic model. Here Noth was on very thin ice, as subsequent research and methodological considerations have shown. Indeed, such use of literarily discerned sources as a basis for historical reconstruction can be quite tenuous, even though much scholarship since the time of Wellhausen (note the title of Wellhausen's book)<sup>5</sup> has been comfortable with such an approach, which is still widely used.

My purpose is not to issue a broad disclaimer against following in Wellhausen and Noth's footsteps. Such efforts have yielded some useful fruit, as in the study of the Deuteronomist's relationship to Josiah's reform. One must, however, be cautious about what this methodology can accomplish and what it cannot, and be vigorous about employing other useful methodologies in tandem with source criticism. This is certainly true in the study of the book of Judges. History as Noth and his contemporaries understood it is not so easily extracted from the complex and variegated web of literary materials presented to us in the book of Judges. Indeed, in the postmodern era of biblical scholarship, many will wonder whether this use of "literary-critical" analysis to reconstruct history is the most productive use of our time and energy as we engage this body of literature. This methodology tried to do too much, seeking too much precision and articulation from its methodology, while simultaneously doing too little, ignoring issues and approaches that in more recent times have proven to be useful for furthering our understanding of the book of Judges.

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Harry Thomas Frank and William L. Reed; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 135–51; Alan J. Hauser, "The 'Minor Judges'—A Re-evaluation," *JBL* 94 (1975): 190–200.

5. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies; Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885).

## THE BOOK OF JUDGES AS LITERATURE

Given the emphasis of scholars such as Noth on “literary criticism,” understood narrowly as source criticism, it was only a matter of time before scholars would develop an interest in the truly literary characteristics of the book of Judges. Subjects such as plot, characterization, intertextuality, satire, irony, and repetition were bound to come to the forefront, and a methodology that had focused on discerning and unraveling the intertwined sources was clearly in need of a balanced refocusing on the synchronic, rather than the diachronic, aspects of the biblical text.

We can provide only a few examples of this shift. In “A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges,” J. P. U. Lilley, reacting to “an inherent bias toward fragmentation” on the part of his fellow scholars, called for “a fresh appraisal of Judges as a literary work starting from the assumptions of authorship rather than redaction.”<sup>6</sup> Lilley argued that one can discern an overall design to the book, which makes literary analysis not only viable but also necessary. Such study will uncover many rich aspects of the texts missed by diachronic analysis.

Kenneth Gros Louis also argued that, while previous studies had occasionally paid some attention to the literary artistry of individual stories, the book of Judges needed to be analyzed as a whole, giving attention to “its own themes and structure.”<sup>7</sup> Gros Louis saw in Judges an intricate configuration of motifs and themes, which give “a remarkable coherence to these narratives, [wherein] incidents and elements of each [narrative] re-echo in all of the others.”<sup>8</sup> While Gros Louis did not present his own detailed analysis of the literary structure of Judges, he maintained that the stories of the major figures from Ehud to Samson together present a unified whole. Thus there is literary coherence both in Judges’ overall structure and in the texture of the themes and subthemes of the individual narratives, all artfully woven together.

Robert Alter, in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), applies the tools of a literary scholar to a few selections in Judges, although he does not

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6. J. P. U. Lilley, “A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges,” *TynBul* 18 (1967): 95–96.

7. Kenneth Gros Louis, “The Book of Judges,” in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis; 2 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1974–1982), 1:141.

8. *Ibid.*, 157.



present an analysis of the literary structure of the book. A professor of Hebrew and comparative literature, Alter had already published numerous books on the novel, on literary imagination, and on modern Hebrew literature. Turning to ancient Hebrew literature in the Tanak, Alter delineated what he considered a truly literary approach to the Bible, and looked at the Bible through categories such as prose fiction, type scenes, the uses of convention, the interplay of narration and dialogue, characterization, deliberate artistry and playfulness, and narrative perspective.

The samples Alter picks from Judges are revealing. In the story of Ehud killing the obese Moabite overlord Eglon, Alter emphasizes the implicit features of the story,<sup>9</sup> especially as denoted by the Hebrew text. Eglon's name resembles the Hebrew word for "calf," thereby implying Eglon is a calf ready for slaughter, just as the epithet *bārī* "stout" (3:17) resembling *mēri* "fatling" also implies that Eglon is ready for slaughter. His fat suggests he is ponderous and vulnerable. Another feature Alter sees as delightful to an ancient Israelite audience is the twofold use of the verb *tq'*, which first indicates the thrust of Ehud's dagger into Eglon's belly (v. 21), while later indicating the blasting of the ram's horn, which thrusts itself into the ears of the Israelites, calling them to defeat the Moabites (v. 27).

In treating the Samson stories, Alter suggests that Samson's impetuosity in picking a Philistine wife (14:1–3) anticipates his subsequent, consistently impulsive profile, which resonates throughout all the Samson stories, and eventually leads to his death.<sup>10</sup> Alter also highlights the fire motif. The cords that fail to bind him are like flax dissolving in fire (15:14). The Philistine men threatened Samson's first wife with fire if she did not provide them the answer to Samson's riddle (14:15). Samson lights fire to the fox's tails, thereby setting the Philistine's fields on fire; in response, the Philistines set fire to Samson's wife and her father (15:6). Fire becomes a metonymic image for Samson's uncontrolled, destructive force, which wreaks havoc among the Philistines, and eventually consumes Samson himself.

The attention to the details of the biblical narratives evidenced by Lilley, Gros Louis, and Alter signaled a new direction in the study of Judges. While none presented an extensive, detailed study of the book as a literary whole, their work whetted the appetite of biblical scholars, hinting at the treasures to be uncovered through careful study of the Judges

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9. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 38–41.

10. *Ibid.*, 61–62, 94–95.

narratives. I also mention here Cheryl Exum's dissertation treating literary patterns in the Samson saga, as well as article on Judges; and D. F. Murray's article on the Deborah-Barak story.<sup>11</sup> Both scholars present detailed literary analyses of specific portions of Judges.

Barry G. Webb, a student of David Clines, in 1987 published *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, based upon his 1985 Ph.D. thesis at the University of Sheffield.<sup>12</sup> As the book's cover notes, it presented "the first full-length literary study of the book of Judges in its finished form as a narrative work with its own distinctive structure and themes." The work examines the narrative world of the text "through analysis of plot structure, formal structure, character presentation, tone, [and] point of view," among other items.

Webb argued that "the book of Judges in its finished form is far more coherent and meaningful than had hitherto been recognized."<sup>13</sup> He was guided by two basic questions: "How precisely is the text structured? And what does it mean as a complex whole?"<sup>14</sup> Noting that in 1975 Robert Boling made "a serious case ... for the redactional unity of the book in its finished form," Webb argued that "the book possesses a deeper coherence than has been recognized by most historical-critical scholars."<sup>15</sup> Thus "the theme of the book cannot be read off from the redactional framework ... alone. An integrated reading of the text is necessary if an adequate statement of theme is to be achieved."<sup>16</sup> Webb takes serious issue with Alter, who, surprisingly, had referred to the core stories of Judges as "that long catalogue of military uprisings ... where no serious claims

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11. J. Cheryl Exum, "Literary Patterns in the Samson Saga: An Investigation of Rhetorical Style in Biblical Prose" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976); idem, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 410–31; D. F. Murray, "Narrative Structure and Technique in the Deborah-Barak Story, Judges iv 4–22," in *Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 30; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 155–89.

12. Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987).

13. Ibid., 207.

14. Ibid., 208.

15. Ibid., 207, referring to Robert Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB 6A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975).

16. Webb, *Book of Judges*, 209.

could be made for complexity of characterization or for subtlety of thematic development.”<sup>17</sup> Obviously, literary critics will not always agree.<sup>18</sup>

Since Webb’s volume, other works on the literary features of the book of Judges have appeared. Lillian Klein focuses on the use of irony throughout the book of Judges.<sup>19</sup> Robert O’Connell’s subsequent *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* focuses especially on the development of plot and character throughout the book.<sup>20</sup>

### A CORNUCOPIA OF NEW APPROACHES TO JUDGES

While literary analysis was playing an increasing role in the interpretation of Judges, a panoply of new interpretive approaches appeared, within both biblical scholarship in general and the interpretation of the Judges. *Judges and Method*, edited by Gale Yee, presents a number of these new approaches, applied by different scholars to specific passages in Judges.<sup>21</sup> I will discuss several as examples of the way Judges scholarship has diversified in a number of productive directions.

Social scientific criticism emphasizes collective, group organization, rather than the individual point of view. For the Old Testament, it treats the dynamics of social structure in ancient Israel, and how that is reflected in Old Testament literature. Careful study of ancient Israelite social dynamics often helps us understand passages that are obscure if viewed from the perspective of our modern world. Naomi Steinberg applies social scientific criticism to the story of Abimelech (Judg 9). Viewing this passage through

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17. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 37.

18. See the discussions in Greger Andersson, *The Book and Its Narratives: A Critical Examination of Some Synchronic Studies of the Book of Judges* (Örebro, Sweden: Örebro University, 2001); Serge Frolov, “Rethinking Judges,” *CBQ* 71 (2009): 24–41; Joel Kaminsky, “Reflections on Associative Word Links in Judges,” *JSOT* 36 (2012): 411–34.

19. Lillian Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (JSOTSup 68; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988).

20. Robert O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (VTSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1996). See also Andersson, *Book and Its Narratives*; and Mark A. O’Brien, “Judges and the Deuteronomistic History,” in *The History of Israel’s Traditions: The Heritage of Martin Noth* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham; JSOTSup 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 235–59.

21. Gale A. Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

the lens of kinship, Steinberg notes that patrilineal, rather than matrilineal, kinship had priority in ancient Israel. Therefore, “the central problem plaguing Abimelech lies less in the realm of divine versus human leadership [cf. Judg 9:22–25, 56–57] and more in his attempt to undermine the legitimate ancient Israelite social norms of patrilineal kinship.”<sup>22</sup> By founding his kingship on his matrilineal kinship with Shechem, and by decimating his patrilineal kinship by killing the sons of Gideon, Abimelech violates the accepted social norms of ancient Israel.<sup>23</sup>

Deconstructive criticism presumes that no text, however seemingly simple or straightforward, has only one clear, authoritative meaning. Precisely when you feel the text’s meaning is firmly in hand, it slips away, like a silken mist, and other textual features come forward to challenge that meaning. Likewise, a text cannot present one consistent, uncontested meaning, simply because different readers, reading in different contexts with different knowledge and expectations, see different things in the text. Indeed, a reader aged 60 may see very different things in a text than the same reader did at 30. Furthermore, the brilliance of biblical texts lies in their multivalent characteristics: there is always something new, something different, something “Other” to be uncovered, whether from a minute detail, or from a sudden, encompassing realization, either of which destabilizes our previous understanding of a text.

Danna Fewell examines the story of Achsah (Judg 1:11–15) from a deconstructive perspective. Anyone interpreting a passage seeks center(s) of meaning, focal point(s) giving shape and substance to interpretation. There are numerous potential focal points in the Achsah passage. For example, Achsah’s name can be translated “bangle” or “trinket.”<sup>24</sup> So, Fewell asks, is Achsah merely an ornament in the story, a prize given by her father Caleb to whoever captures Kiriath-sepher? Achsah appears to submit obediently to her father’s offering her as bait to a would-be conqueror of the city, so “trinket” seems an appropriate designator. Yet she appears quite feisty in insisting that, since her father has placed her in the Negev, she also receive the upper pool and the lower pool, crucial to survival in the

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22. Naomi Steinberg, “Social-Scientific Criticism,” in Yee, *Judges and Method*, 57–58.

23. For more on social scientific criticism, see David Chalcraft, *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2006).

24. Danna N. Fewell, “Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing,” in Yee, *Judges and Method*, 127.

Negev (vv. 14–15). Here she is presented as if she were an insistent land-owner, determined to upgrade the value of her property, whereas earlier she had appeared to be a submissive daughter and spouse. Furthermore, scholars disagree on how to interpret the second verb in verse 14. Fewell further asks whether Achsah's husband, Othniel, prompted her to ask for the land, as the Septuagint and Vulgate suggest, or whether she prompted him, as the Masoretic Text suggests? If she prompted him, why does she subsequently do the asking? If he prompted her to ask, what does his reticence to ask Caleb imply about his being a heroic figure? If she prompted him, but he let her do the asking, what does that suggest about Othniel? Is Achsah really a trinket? Fewell thus presents numerous vantage points through which this story may be deconstructed.

So what is the center (centers) of meaning for this brief passage? A deconstructionist perspective reminds us that, once we have established an interpretation, other factors emerge to challenge it. Answers are not simple, and centers of interpretation are only brief resting points on an exegetical quest that must continually reassess itself, asking what has yet to be uncovered.<sup>25</sup>

Uriah Kim employs postcolonial criticism to address numerous passages scattered throughout Judges.<sup>26</sup> He discusses the colonialism of the Western world and the way the mind-set of this colonialism was not only interwoven into the fabric of Western culture, thought, and scholarship, but also the way it has tended to marginalize the non-Western (oriental) world, which is seen as Other, and therefore somehow flawed. Interpreters have identified their own Western perspective with ancient Israel, while equating the rest of the world with the Other in Judges and elsewhere, those who are apart from Israel and are often identified as Israel's enemies. For example, Kim cites the following passage from J. Clinton McCann: "Puritan preachers in colonial North America suggested that the indigenous peoples were to be viewed as Canaanites while the Christian English settlers were the successors of the Israelites—God's New Israel."<sup>27</sup> In discussing the book of Judges, Kim draws contrasts between Israel (the

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25. For more on deconstructionist criticism, see David Jobling, Tina Pippin, and Ronald Schleifer, eds., *The Postmodern Bible Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

26. Uriah Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism: Who Is the Other in the Book of Judges?" in Yee, *Judges and Method*, 161–82.

27. J. Clinton McCann, *Judges* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 17, cited by Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism," 171.

chosen people) and all the others, as in the women of the land, with whom Israelites are not to intermarry lest they come to worship foreign gods.<sup>28</sup> Kim also raises the key question of perspective concerning modern biblical scholarship: “Whose history, experience, and interests are being inscribed in the scholarship? From whose perspective or context is the text being interpreted? ... Who see themselves as Israelites in our time and why? Who are designated as non-Israelites in our time and why?”<sup>29</sup>

In looking at the last century of biblical interpretation, during which the “West versus the Rest” mentality has infiltrated Western biblical scholarship, Kim notes that “the habit of equating the Rest with Israel’s opposition, and thereby vindicating the taking and exploiting of the land and its resources and the acts of hostility against the Rest, needs to be stopped.”<sup>30</sup> While humans have a tendency to define themselves in terms of the Other, those they are not, there is also a tendency to erase the memory of the Other, as if they previously were not. “In its effort to write a national history, colonial discourse erases the prior history of the territory and sees it as an empty space for its own history to unfold in time.”<sup>31</sup> One might cite here the phrase often used in modern Zionist statements: “A land without people for a people without land.” But in ancient Israel was the land really without a people with their own history? Kim points out that the boundary between Israelite and non-Israelite was not as easily discerned in the book of Judges as one might suppose.<sup>32</sup> Caution must be exercised in defining the Other.

Kim urges the reader to ask what Western perceptions of the Other lie behind one’s own understanding of Judges, and how those perceptions may place the Other in a negative light: “Unless we see ourselves in the Other and see the Other in ourselves, we are in danger of repeating the habit of making enemies of our neighbors, representing the Other negatively in order to sanction our use of violence against them.”<sup>33</sup>

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28. Kim, “Postcolonial Criticism,” 178.

29. *Ibid.*, 168.

30. *Ibid.*, 173.

31. *Ibid.*, 176.

32. See Kim’s discussion of Machir, Meroz, the man of Luz, Heber the Kenite, and the men of Gibeah in *ibid.*, 177–78.

33. *Ibid.*, 180. For additional discussion of postcolonial criticism, see Bradley Crowell, “Postcolonial Studies and the Hebrew Bible,” *CBR* 7 (2009): 217–44.

Other methods of interpretation, which we do not have space to discuss here, are presented in Yee's volume: narrative criticism, feminist criticism, structuralist criticism, ideological criticism, gender criticism, and cultural criticism. These, as well as others, such as reader response criticism, intertextuality, minority criticism, and global criticism, all show promise of contributing significantly to the interpretation of Judges.

Another relatively new approach is reception history. In his 2005 work, *Judges through the Centuries*, David Gunn focuses on the ways in which, throughout the centuries, particular passages from Judges have been understood.<sup>34</sup> Reception history probes the riches of both popular and scholarly interpretations of biblical passages, from ancient to modern times, including media such as drama, music, and the visual arts, inclusive of both Christian and Jewish understandings. Leaving other subdisciplines in biblical studies to deal with questions of authorship, date, and sources, reception history adds depth to these discussions by uncovering a variety of interpretations and perspectives from various individuals and communities. Reception history also treats the influence of the Bible on Western culture.

Gunn's is the first Old Testament volume published in the Blackwell Bible Commentaries Series, which will provide a reception-historical treatment of all biblical books. Gunn admits to focusing primarily on modern times, and especially on the post-Enlightenment English-speaking world.<sup>35</sup> Still, Gunn includes numerous examples from early and medieval Christian interpretation, as well as from the Jewish community. Even with this narrowing of focus, Gunn's work runs beyond three hundred pages. Thus a massive amount of material is available to scholars interested in the reception history of Judges. Gunn passes on to others the exploration of understandings of Judges in the modern non-English-speaking European world, or in the former European colonies to which the Bible has been transported.

Judges 4–5 provides an example of Gunn's analysis, which focuses on the vivid depictions of Deborah, Sisera, Jael, and Sisera's mother throughout the ages. Some interpreters compare Deborah to Moses, since both celebrated in song God's deliverance of Israel from an enemy (see, e.g., Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Shirata 1, treating Exod 15:1). Deborah's strength, how-

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34. David Gunn, *Judges* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

35. Ibid., 1–2.

ever, bothered some rabbinic interpreters, who said that “haughtiness does not befit women” (b. Meg. 14b).<sup>36</sup> Others claimed that Deborah alluded to herself so much in song that the spirit of prophecy temporarily departed from her (b. Pesah. 66b).<sup>37</sup> Some Christian interpreters were also troubled by Deborah’s assertiveness. Others, such as Peter Vermigli (1499–1562), advised newly crowned Queen Elizabeth I in 1558 to “play the role of holy Deborah for our times. Join yourself to some godly Barak.”<sup>38</sup> William Gurnell (1617–1679) sees Elizabeth as “our English Deborah,” bringing Christian liberty to England. The more irascible John Knox, who had written *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in 1588 against Mary Tudor and Mary Queen of Scots, took a dim view of women in authority, for “their sight in civile regiment is but blindness; their strength, weakness; their counsel, foolishness; and judgment, phrensie [frenzy].”<sup>39</sup> Knox’s timing was hardly impeccable, and Queen Elizabeth, not surprisingly, failed to seek his counsel.

These samples give a taste of the richness and variety Gunn presents in his discussion. While some interpretations may elicit a smile at their quaintness, others have a way of turning us back into the text to examine again its richness. For example, the Anglican Thomas Scott (1747–1821), treating Sisera’s mother (Judg 5:28–30), scolds incredulously, “How shameful are these wishes of an aged mother for a beloved son..., that a woman of honor and virtue ... could delight her fancy with conceiving the Israelitish virgins divided among the conquerors, as their property, to be exposed to their unbridled domineer lust.”<sup>40</sup> This point, often ignored, is nevertheless a powerful nuance in Deborah’s song, brilliantly expressing the Israelite hatred for their previously successful Canaanite foes who had plundered them repeatedly.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the eight-volume Hebrew lexicon published by David Clines (1993–2011) is of enormous benefit to biblical scholars. Even though it does not focus specifically on the book of Judges, it is very useful to those studying the nuances and subtleties of the Hebrew text of Judges. As noted

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36. Ibid., 55.

37. Ibid., 55–56.

38. Ibid., 60.

39. Ibid., 60–61.

40. Ibid., 70.

41. See Alan J. Hauser, “Judges 5: Parataxis in Hebrew Poetry,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 38–40.



in its title, this is a dictionary of Classical Hebrew, based on all available texts in Hebrew up to approximately 200 C.E. This means that texts other than the Hebrew Bible, including the Qumran manuscripts, inscriptions and occasional texts, as well as Ben Sira, have been included in the composition of the lexicon. Furthermore, the emphasis is on the meaning of the words in their context, rather than on generic meanings or translation equivalents. Since I began this article by recognizing David's many contributions across the spectrum of biblical scholarship, it is only fitting that I conclude by thanking David for this monumental contribution he has made to both the study of Judges and to the study of the Tanak.

#### OBSERVATIONS

Deconstructive criticism teaches us that we must always be open to and challenged by new "centers" of meaning. Consequently, the many new approaches to Judges scholarship, some of which we have reviewed here, need to be in regular dialogue with one another. Each needs to provide new centers of interpretation *to*, and to be challenged *by*, other approaches. To date, there has not been sufficient dialogue, and that is to the detriment of all. These new approaches cannot be their best in an environment lacking sufficient cross-fertilization. The bloodline of biblical interpretation needs to diversify itself across a wide range of interpretive methods. An additional benefit of such dialogue would be to point out concerns that may arise when sufficient dialogue among scholars is lacking. Let me provide one example. Serge Frolov indicates that the scholarly implanting of sexual allusions and innuendos in Judges passages where they had not heretofore been seen has in recent times become a virtual cottage industry.<sup>42</sup> While affirming feminist criticism as a methodology, Frolov speaks a word of caution lest scholars be unduly inclined to find sexual imagery and suggestiveness where the context, linguistic structure, and lexicography of a particular passage do not warrant it.

Scholarship on the book of Judges is alive and well, but scholars need to engage in more active dialogue with one another.

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42. Serge Frolov, "Sleeping with the Enemy: Recent Scholarship on Sexuality in the Book of Judges," *CBR* 11 (2013): 308–27.



BOAZ REAWAKENED:  
MODELING MASCULINITY IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

Hugh S. Pyper

Among his other signal contributions to the development of biblical studies, David Clines has been a pioneering voice in the study of masculinity in biblical texts. It is a mark of his importance in this field that he contributes some “final reflections” to Ovidiu Creangă’s edited volume on *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, in addition to contributing a chapter himself.<sup>1</sup> In these reflections, while acknowledging that the volume marks a coming of age for such studies, he makes a threefold plea for further work. First, he calls for a broadening of the theoretical base of masculinity studies; second, he urges those who work in this field to demonstrate a commitment to a critique of “the kinds of unthinking masculinity that are spread all over the Hebrew Bible.”<sup>2</sup> Finally, he calls for Yahweh as the quintessence of masculinity to be subjected to a particular examination.

Clines’s significance for this field is affirmed by Deryn Guest in her consideration of the present and future state of the critical study of masculinities and the Hebrew Bible. She echoes Stephen Moore’s view that Clines has not only been one of the first but remains one of the most productive voices in such studies.<sup>3</sup> She offers an overview of his contribution, which traces the sometimes troubled boundary between feminist criticism and

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1. David J. A. Clines, “Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32–34”; and “Final Reflections on Biblical Masculinity,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (ed. Ovidiu Creangă; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 54–63 and 234–39.

2. Clines, “Final Reflections,” 239.

3. Deryn Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies* (BMW 47; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 121.

the study of masculinities and cites Clines as someone who, with clear feminist sympathies, moves into masculinity studies as a way of respecting the claim of women to their own experience. While sympathizing with this move, Guest sees in practice that this has meant that masculinity studies has tended to become equated with the study of male characters and characteristics in the text. This can reinforce an equation of gender and sexuality and makes it hard to examine the question of “masculine” characteristics displayed by women.

Guest argues that a wider category of “genderqueer” studies may be the way forward as there are genuine risks that the distinctive experiences of both women and men may be overlooked if masculinity studies are viewed as an augmentation of feminist studies. At the same time, the importance of allowing LGBT voices to be heard cannot be ignored. What both of these positions may do, however, is to reinforce the idea that gender studies are not the concern of straight heterosexual men. Guest advocates a shift to a perception that genderqueer analysis is about what one does with texts, rather than who one is.

In this paper, I want to take up at least part of this challenge and to argue that at least one biblical character who has at times been held up as a model of masculinity in the biblical text is a site where the tensions of the biblical model of masculinity can be explored and where the relationship between studies of masculinity and other theoretical frameworks, in particular queer studies, can be examined. The character in question is Boaz in the book of Ruth.

Boaz has often been regarded as exemplary in his masculinity. The first mention of him, indeed, describes him in a phrase that can be translated as “a man of power and substance,” but that is almost the Hebrew equivalent of “a real man” (Ruth 2:1). An intriguing contemporary manifestation of Boaz’s status as a masculine ideal is to be found in the world of Christian online dating. As an example, the singles site [www.adammeeteve.com](http://www.adammeeteve.com) has a page that offers a “Women’s Christian Dating Guide to Finding a Boaz Husband,” clearly assuming that Boaz represents an ideal in this regard. As the site explains, a Boaz man combines loyalty and generosity. He has good moral friends and is not afraid to pray with his wife.<sup>4</sup> Such a use of Boaz as a model of what a Christian woman should be looking for is widespread in magazines and books offering advice to Christian teenagers.

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4. See [http://www.adammeeteve.com/pages/christian-women\\_dating.html](http://www.adammeeteve.com/pages/christian-women_dating.html).

In contemporary biblical studies, by contrast, Boaz has been comparatively neglected. Partly as a backlash against a tradition of reading Ruth that saw the women as at best the agents through which Boaz achieved the patriarchal aim of ensuring his progeny, most feminist readings of Ruth have focused, understandably, on the relationship between Ruth and Naomi and have latched onto the book as allowing a positive role for relationships between women and nonpatriarchal relationships in a broader sense. There is, however, one significant genealogy of literary and gender-related readings of Boaz in his biblical context; it stems from Mieke Bal's study of Ruth in her *Lethal Love*.<sup>5</sup>

In her discussion, Bal refers to Victor Hugo's poem celebrated poem "Boöz endormi" from his collection *La légende des siècles*, published in 1859, itself probably the single most influential meditation on Boaz in Western literature. In the poem, Hugo describes the dream of the sleeping Boaz in which he sees a great tree sprouting from his belly with a singing king at the foot and a crucified god at the apex. At the feet of the unconscious Boaz, unknown to him, is Ruth, lying awake and gazing at the stars, unaware of her coming part in this dream. The concentration on Boaz, the barely concealed phallic imagery, and the allusion to the tree of Jesse with its hope of progeny might seem to epitomize an interpretation of Boaz as the patriarch and a reading of the book of Ruth that consigns women to the role of mere instruments of male procreation. Naomi is absent, and Ruth waits attendance on her sleeping lord. Yet even within Hugo's verse, things are not so simple. The patriarch is asleep, and dreaming. It is Ruth who is awake.

There is much to be said about this poem; indeed, it is obliquely the source of the title of this paper. Bal's interest turns out to be primarily in Jacques Lacan's comments on it. These are characteristically casual and oblique, but recur in various interconnected places in his work. In this particular instance, Bal is alluding to his discussion of one line of the poem in particular in his essay "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious": "Sa

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5. Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), esp. 68–88.

gerbe n' était point avare ni haineuse."<sup>6</sup> Bal furnishes an English version of this: "his sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful."<sup>7</sup>

Lacan's point is that "miserly" is a description that properly belongs to Boaz, not the sheaf. He then goes on to claim that the sheaf has now usurped the praise for generosity that belonged to Boaz and that is one of the characteristics of the masculinity he embodies. Despite this usurpation, Boaz himself returns later to the poem in the form of an unexpected promise of fertility, which is now focused on his paternity, not on his harvest. Lacan here echoes Hugo's depiction of a Boaz who is elderly and widowed and conscious of his own lost potency. Even in his sleep, Boaz questions how he, an old man, could father children. It is Lacan's insistence on the centrality of impotence rather than fertility in the poem that Bal appreciates.

Bal's ultimate conclusion as to Boaz's role comes out of these inversions. Boaz becomes a hero because "he dares to assume the point of view of the woman."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, he "accepts being reflected, by the *mise en abyme*, in a female role."<sup>9</sup> In chapter 4, she argues, he acts to subvert the law in an analogy to Tamar in Gen 38. He thus represents a particular version of the "fearful father" found throughout Genesis who overcomes his fear by accepting a feminine role. What we have here is a feminized Boaz, or at least one who acknowledges his feminine role. That is intriguing in our context, and certainly complicates any simple reading of Boaz as the patriarch or the ideal of manhood.

This, however, is not the only allusion to "Booz endormi" in Lacan's writings. It figures in his seminars of 1957 and particularly in the seminar for June 19 entitled "Essai d'une logique en caoutchouc," which forms part of a larger interpretation of Freud's case study on little Hans. Once again, Lacan turns to Hugo's poem as he seeks to understand the nature of paternity. In this case, however, his attention is caught by the final stanza

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6. Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," in *Écrits: A Selection* (trans. Alan Sheridan; London: Routledge, 1989). The essay was originally published in 1957 at the same time as Lacan was delivering the seminars collected in *Séminaire IV* in which the poem is also quoted. Lacan also seems to be quoting from memory as he substitutes the "point" of Hugo's line, correctly quoted by Bal, with "pas."

7. Bal, *Lethal Love*, 69.

8. *Ibid.*, 87.

9. *Ibid.*

of the poem where Ruth is gazing at the crescent moon through her veils and wondering,

what stray god, as he cropped  
The timeless summer, had so idly dropped  
That golden sickle in the starry field.<sup>10</sup>

Lacan seizes on the reference to the sickle. In a context where Boaz has been metaphorically and metonymically linked to the sheaf and the sheaf to the phallus, the “idly dropped sickle” invites a link to ideas of castration. In her explanation of this passage, Shuli Barzilai relates this to Lacan’s fascination with Hesiod’s story of the revenge of the earth goddess Gaea (Gaia) against Ouranos, the sky or heavens, who is both her son and her husband. She creates a great sickle, which their son Cronos then uses to castrate his father, flinging his genitals and the sickle aside.<sup>11</sup> This imports a rather more troubling note into the idyllic picture of the young girl lying at the feet of the unconscious older man under the crescent moon.<sup>12</sup> As Lacan comments,

It is a question, in effect, of the fine and clear crescent of the moon. But it cannot escape you that, if the thing is pertinent, if it is something other than a very pretty painterly stroke, a touch of yellow on the blue sky, it is insofar as the sickle in the sky is the eternal sickle of maternity, that which has already played her small role between Cronos and Uranos, between Zeus and Cronos.<sup>13</sup>

Lacan, then, sees a story of castration and the anxiety over paternity in this text. Masculinity is shown here to be a very unstable and indeed threatened condition. I have explored this dimension of Ruth elsewhere,

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10. Jacques Lacan, “Essai d’une logique en caoutchouc,” in *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, livre IV: La relation d’objet* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 378.

11. Shuli Barzilai, *Lacan and the Matter of Origins* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 220–23. The passage in question is from Hesiod, *Theogony* 154–182. Whether such an analogy was in Hugo’s mind is not clear, but one should certainly not dismiss it as a possibility.

12. The resonances with this story continue in the depiction of the scene where Gaea entices her husband to sleep with her: “And great Sky came, bringing night with him; and spreading himself out around Earth in his desire for love he lay outstretched in all directions” (ll. 176–178).

13. Lacan, *Séminaire IV*, 378–79; translation provided by Barzilai, *Lacan*, 221.

in company with Julia Kristeva, coming to the conclusion that Boaz's masculinity is undermined by the text's refusal to speak of the maternal, which means that Boaz is drawn inexorably into the vacant maternal role and ultimately suffers in turn his own form of silencing by the text.<sup>14</sup>

Here, however, I want to adopt a rather different tack and explore a more positive reading of Boaz as a model not just of the fragility of patriarchy but of a different understanding of masculinity, which has implications for our reading of the book of Ruth. I take a cue once again from Cheryl Exum's sophisticated treatment of the way in which readers have understood the gender relationships and roles in Ruth.<sup>15</sup> She cites Bal's study in support of her contention that "all three main characters [Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz] in the book of Ruth participate in the symbolic transgression of secular boundaries" and invites us to approach the relationships in the book in "a way that destabilizes our familiar gender categories."<sup>16</sup> Her discussion is based on questioning the need to choose, as most commentators do, between the Ruth-Naomi and Ruth-Boaz dyad. My question is whether we can go further. I want to suggest that there is another set of relationships that has been overlooked in discussions of Ruth: the relationships between men. It is not only Ruth and Naomi who are involved in both heterosocial and homosocial relationships; so too is Boaz.

In what follows, I am not claiming to be uncovering secrets of the social structure of ancient Israel or a hidden agenda in the book of Ruth. The aim is to offer a counterreading that might illuminate the assumptions about masculinity that underlie contemporary readings of the text by both feminist and traditional readers. Bal's remarkable reading at least puts in question the function of Boaz's character in the dynamics of the book of Ruth. I want to put this to the test by attempting a reading of the text that substitutes the usual unspoken assumptions that the characters are driven by heterosexual desire with an assumption that homosexual desire may be at work in the text. As an experiment, why not read Boaz from what might be called a homonormative rather than heteronormative perspective?

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14. See Hugh S. Pyper, "Other Mothers: Maternity and Masculinity in the Book of Ruth," in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum* (ed. David J. A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 309–32.

15. J. Cheryl Exum, "Is This Naomi?" in *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 129–74.

16. *Ibid.*, 172.



The point here is to show that there are assumptions at work in all readings. What is intriguing, however, is that this alternative provides a reading that can account for some otherwise puzzling aspects of the story. That does not necessarily say anything about the intentions and assumptions of the author of the story and the social mores within which it is set, I concede, but once again the point needs to be made that the same is also true of a reading that assumes that heterosexuality is normative.

In the spirit of Cheryl Exum's use (in "Is This Naomi?") of the ambiguous gender roles in Philip Calderon's painting of Ruth and Naomi to unsettle assumptions about the reading of the relationships between Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, I too will turn to a painting. Now in the National Gallery in London, it was painted by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeldt (1794–1872), a German artist best known for his widely reproduced series of woodcuts illustrating the Bible.<sup>17</sup> It is entitled *Ruth in Boaz's Field*.

A young woman stands to the right of the picture, her bosom full of stalks of ripe grain; a few spare stalks drooping languidly from her right hand. To her right, two men and a woman are hard at work reaping with their backs to us. In the distance, four of the workers seem to be resting. One young woman sits facing away from us and from the other three figures. These are all young men, two of whom are sitting chatting while a third is drinking from a pitcher of some kind.

A commanding middle-aged man, in a rich cloak and a bowl-shaped hat, stands to the left of the painting, attended by a young man who keeps close to him. Indeed, the lad leans in toward him and eyes the strange woman guardedly. Behind her, a female reaper looks up rather mournfully and apprehensively from applying her sickle to the corn and gazes at the two men.

The two male figures are clearly presented as a pair and cut off from the other characters by the diagonal line formed by the staff of the younger man, which contrasts in its rigidity with the soft curve of the woman's sheaf. The older man's left arm, gesturing toward Ruth, protects the youth from our gaze. It is clear, too, from their stances that the young man is placed in solidarity with Boaz as against Ruth, whose isolation is palpable.

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17. These were published in Germany in batches of thirty between 1852 and 1860 when the complete series of 240 were collected and published as *Die Bibel in Bildern* (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1860). The picture in the National Gallery dates from 1828. It is clearly the template for one of the two illustrations of the book of Ruth in the later work.

Who are these men and what is their relationship? I contend that, in the absence of any textual clue, our first assumption would be that the pair are father and son.

Once the picture is identified as marking the encounter with Ruth in Boaz's field, however, we have to revise that assumption. No son of Boaz is mentioned at this point in the text. The only candidate for the role of the younger man is "the young man who was in charge of the reapers." Paradoxically, this painting emphasizes Boaz's lack of offspring in the text. Within the Hebrew Bible, he is an anomalous character; apparently wealthy and mature, he appears to be without a wife and children. Boaz's unmarried status was something that the Talmud (b. B. Bat. 91a) felt the need to explain by asserting that his wife died on the day that Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem. There is no biblical support for this, but that such an explanation was offered shows that the absence of a wife had to be accounted for. Even the rabbis, however, do not attempt to gainsay the fact of his childlessness at this point in the text. Boaz already occupies a somewhat queer role in relation to the social norms of the text.

This picture might further lead us to reexamine the passages where Boaz and this young man have dealings with each other. What happens to these if we consciously decline to adopt heteronormative assumptions and instead attempt what we might call a homonormative reading? Boaz interrogates the young man about Ruth in Ruth 2:5–7. In a homonormative context, does his question about "who the woman belongs to" and the young man's lengthy explanation of how she came to be in the field simply reflect Boaz's interest in Ruth, or is his question prompted by his concern that the young man himself is taking an interest in her that the young man at some length tries to explain away? Is the young man's explanation of Ruth's conduct and his emphasis that she has been working without ceasing simply a generous defense of the young woman, or are there other possible readings? The biblical tradition is clear that Moabite women above all are a source of temptation to Israelite men. Why would such a woman appear in a field with the young reapers? What else might she have been doing with her time rather than gleaning after them?

The meaning of 2:7 is somewhat obscure, perhaps reflecting that the young man is rather flustered as he provides his explanation. His remarks about Ruth "resting" are unclear. Could it be that Ruth is resting at the moment when Boaz comes into the field, and is this something that the young man feels under pressure to excuse and indeed to play down? Why would a young woman come into the field simply to lounge around? If we

follow the implications here, does Boaz's question, "Whose is this young woman?" raise the possibility that Ruth could be in some sense the possession of one of the young men in the field? Might money have changed hands? Is this a possibility that Boaz is aware of and is his reaction fueled by a perceived threat to the relationships between the men in the story? The relative prolixity of the young man's answer might suggest that he is aware of possible readings of the situation that he is anxious to disavow. Is he, in short, denying to Boaz that Ruth is any threat to the relationship between them?

In the light of all this, is Boaz's assurance to Ruth in 2:11 that he has warned the young men not to "trouble" her a reflection of his concern over her welfare as the potential object of their youthful lust, or is he more worried by his own potential loss of their affections? Even more radically, rather than seeking to forestall their erotic interest in Ruth, does his instruction seek to forestall the possibility that the young men's jealousy might be directed at this potential interloper into his affection for them? Is the point to avoid the possibility that Ruth's presence might further disrupt the homosocial relations between Boaz and his reapers? It may be that Boaz acts generously as her protector by instructing the young men not to touch her and by telling her to stay with the young women, but the effect is to remove her from the company of the young men. Is his concern her safety or the maintenance of the all-male community he shares with the young men?

Now, these suggestions could add up to a reading that sits uneasily with the cultural and other presumptions that are quite justifiably applied to the text of Ruth. But there are, I submit, other lines of evidence that Boaz queers the jealously guarded boundaries of the patriarchal role in the book.

Chief among these is the incident on the threshing floor in 3:6–12. As it progresses, it definitely casts Boaz in a rather queer light. As I have discussed elsewhere, it plays with a number of conventions in biblical scenes of courting.<sup>18</sup> Typically, it is the man, or his proxy, who seeks out the woman. In the classic type-scene of "the woman at the well," not only does the man wait for the woman at a meeting place where he is sure that women will gather, but the woman offers to draw water for him. Here there

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18. See Pyper, "Other Mothers," 326–28.

is a reversal: it is Ruth who travels alone at night to await Boaz, and Boaz who offers her food.

Other aspects of this scene are also clear reversals of gender roles as outlined in other biblical texts. When Ruth “uncovers” Boaz’s feet, she is the only woman in the Hebrew Bible to be the subject of this verb. In Lev 18 and 20, the many repetitions of the forbidden act of “uncovering the nakedness” of another are always undertaken by a man. Boaz is, therefore, the only man in the Hebrew Bible who is the object of a woman’s “uncovering.” Once more, conventional gender roles are reversed.<sup>19</sup>

But perhaps we can go even further with queering this incident. Was Boaz simply looking forward to a lonely night sleeping on the threshing floor, or was he planning to meet someone there? It does seem a bit odd that he, who has all the servants we have met in chapter 2, would undertake the threshing on his own.<sup>20</sup> Does the narrator’s account of Boaz’s surprise when he wakes to find a woman at his feet—“behold; a woman!”—simply reflect that Boaz does not expect that anyone will be there, or is the shock that it is—a woman? The wording of the verse brings to mind the famous and unintentionally funny moment in Wagner’s *Siegfried* when Siegfried stumbles upon the unconscious Brunnhilde and exclaims, “Das ist kein Mann!” Who else might Boaz have been expecting? What about the person who had the most likely excuse to be on the threshing floor: the young man in charge of the reapers? That Boaz is aware of the potential attractiveness of young men is revealed in his subsequent conversation with Ruth, where he praises Ruth for her loyalty in not going after “young men, whether poor or rich” (3:10). It is intriguing how Boaz here articulates the potential temptation she has resisted. Ruth, after all, might be forgiven for going after a rich man in her distressed circumstances, but that is not Boaz’s presumption. The temptation he can empathize with is the temptation to go after a man because of his youth, whether he is rich or not. We should note too that Boaz does not explicitly make the connection to himself that is often read into this verse. It

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19. Other women do undress men, but in situations where the man is either unconscious or actively resisting any sexual advance. Lot’s daughters are the seducers of their father, and Potiphar’s wife removes Joseph’s cloak.

20. Boaz is the only person mentioned as being at the threshing floor. It is possible to speculate that there are other people sleeping there that evening, but they are never mentioned. The possibility that he has gone alone in expectation of an assignation is open within the text.

is a heteronormative assumption that supplies the thought that Boaz is contrasting himself with the young men as the object of Ruth's attentions. He praises her for her loyalty, without specifying the object of that loyalty. The reference could easily be to Naomi, especially in the light of Boaz's praise of Ruth's behavior toward her mother-in-law in 2:11.

It is possible to read his subsequent treatment of her on the threshing floor in a way consonant with such a homonormative reading. Although Boaz promises to perform the duty of the next of kin, he could quite simply be referring to the transaction over the land, which ensues in chapter 4. Boaz seems to be in full possession of the legal facts of the case in chapter 4 without any intervening explanation being necessary. We may assume that he was equally aware of this in chapter 3 and that his concerns are with Ruth and Naomi's economic welfare.

The point is that readings that proceed on the basis that he is sexually attracted to Ruth at this point are themselves based on an assumption. If we decline to follow this assumption, his subsequent permission for her to lie down at his feet could be interpreted as his indication that their relationship is companionable, not sexual. After all, he has just made the rather tactless statement that there is another with the rights of next of kin and that if this other person chooses to exercise those rights that would be "good" (2:13). That is hard to square with a reading of this episode that sees it as a paradigm of romantic attachment. Boaz seems to be entirely pragmatic in his handling of this encounter with Ruth.

The upshot of all this is that Boaz does gain Ruth as his wife. The people at the gate congratulate him and evoke two previous stories from Boaz's ancestry: the story of Rachel and Leah, and that of Tamar. The queer thing is that these are stories of women who had to get around the problem of what we might term "the reluctant patriarch." As I have outlined elsewhere, Leah and her father overcome the obstacle of Jacob's preference for her younger sister by the trick of substituting Leah for Rachel in the dark so that he sleeps with her and thereby is obliged to accept her for his wife.<sup>21</sup> Rachel in her turn has to resort to the use of substitute mothers and mandrakes before she finally gives birth to Joseph. Leah's deception is ultimately responsible for the birth of Judah, who, in his turn, has to be tricked by Tamar into fathering Perez, the son who will be Boaz's ancestor. Boaz's very existence depends on the determined intervention of women in order

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21. See Pyper, "Other Mothers," 327–28.

to overcome a patriarchal reluctance to procreate. Jacob was seemingly prepared to wait fourteen years for Rachel, revealing little sense of urgency over fathering a son by her, and Judah was more concerned to save the life of his son Shelah than to ensure the continuity of his own family line. In their blessing, the people of Bethlehem seem to enroll Boaz in turn in the line of reluctant patriarchs who have to be cajoled into fulfilling what in other terms is his “natural” destiny of fatherhood.

Might the implication be that the people of Bethlehem are aware that Boaz would rather spend his time with the young man in charge of the reapers and that Ruth will have her work cut out in fulfilling her role as mother? Is it indeed only a Moabite woman, with her sinister allure, who could extract a baby from Boaz, who is otherwise content to live a life surrounded by the men of his household? Without her, would Boaz’s wealth and possessions have passed in course of time to the chief of his reapers?

The experiment of a homonormative reading may leave more questions than answers, but it does suggest some new answers to old questions. As James Harding has argued in his comprehensive study of the reception of the story of David and Jonathan, the point is not to propose an anachronistic rereading of the gender roles prevalent in Israel at a particular period in ancient history.<sup>22</sup> Rather, what such a reading points to is the way in which the text is open to different readings. As Harding says, “the reception history of the David and Jonathan narrative is an illustration not of the lengths to which wilful readers will go to pervert the plain meaning of a text, but of the way the potential openness of a given work may be unfolded and reactivated by later generations of readers.”<sup>23</sup> Yet he also points out that asking the question of whether the relationship between David and Jonathan is “homosexual” is “to mistake the effect for the cause.”<sup>24</sup> The story itself is inseparable from the history of discourse on same-sex relationships.

My point here is a similar one, if with slightly different nuances. The story of Ruth and Naomi has had a comparable role to that of David and Jonathan in the history of the discussion of the validity of same-sex relationships, particularly but not solely between women. Harding’s caveats apply in this case also, as they do to any attempt to apply contemporary

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22. James E. Harding, *The Love of David and Jonathan: Ideology, Text, Reception* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013).

23. *Ibid.*, 365.

24. *Ibid.*

categories of gender and relationship to the ancient world and to literary characters. However, the concentration on one set of relationships in Ruth because of their value in opposing the use of the Bible as an authoritative bulwark for heteronormativity has oddly had the effect of deflecting attention from a particularly “queer” character who can be read in a way that unsettles heteronormativity less obviously but perhaps more subversively from the point of view of studies of masculinity.

Boaz, the model husband for the young Christian woman addressed by *adammeetseve.com* and the archetypal patriarch in many other readings, can be read as the model of a very different sort of masculinity that is constituted by a different set of relationships and could be characterized as a benign homosociality. Read in this way, Boaz can become one of the resources that the biblical scholar can turn to in forwarding Clines’s project of undermining the “unthinking masculinity” of the Hebrew Bible. The models of masculinity in the Bible are more diverse and queerer than might at first appear.





## FROM LONDON TO AMSTERDAM: HANDEL'S *ESTHER* REINCARNATED

Deborah W. Rooke

G. F. Handel's oratorios were a development of the later years of his career, being written during the period 1732–1752. Most of the oratorios were “sacred dramas,” that is, operatic versions of Old Testament narratives, and they often had political as well as theological resonances. The oratorios were a chance development, having their origin in a piece written initially by Handel in 1718 or thereabouts for private performance at Cannons, the country seat of James Brydges (later duke of Chandos). The piece in question was *Esther*, a short, three-act musical drama, which tells a much-truncated version of the story of Esther in an operatic style with soloists and chorus. It seems that *Esther* was performed a couple of times at Cannons,<sup>1</sup> but then lay untouched until February 1732, when it was put on as a private performance for Handel's forty-seventh birthday by his friend Bernard Gates and then pirated for public performance by an unknown party. This prompted Handel himself to expand the original work and stage it commercially, with the result that in May 1732 Handelian Israelite oratorio was born.

Handel continued to write oratorios for the remaining twenty years of his compositional career, producing a total of fourteen works in the new genre. But it is the first oratorio that is perhaps the most interesting, because of its afterlife: it underwent a fascinating series of eighteenth-century incarnations that extended even beyond Handel's lifetime and location. It is one of these later incarnations that will form the focus of this short study; but in order to appreciate the particular characteristics of that

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1. For details, see John H. Roberts, “The Composition of Handel's *Esther*, 1718–1720,” *Händel-Jahrbuch* 55 (2009): 353–68.

incarnation it is first necessary to examine briefly the oratorio's development during Handel's lifetime.

In plot and structure the Handelian *Esther* libretto of 1718 was based on a neo-classical tragedy called *Esther* written in 1688 by the French playwright Jean Racine. Following the LXX and contemporary scholarly opinion, Racine had treated the narrative as the account of a crisis that threatened the exiled Jews toward the end of the sixth century B.C.E. He had thus interpreted the events in terms of "exilic theology," according to which exile and its sufferings (including Haman's pogrom) are punishment for sin, and the Jews, though longing to return to their native land, are trapped in exile until God relents from his anger against them. In this schema Esther's thwarting of Haman's evil plan indicates that God has relented, and the outcome of the play is therefore that Ahasuerus ends the Jews' exile, allowing them to return home and rebuild the temple. There is consequently no reciprocal slaughter of Persians by Jews, and no institution of a festival to commemorate the slaughter, a much more satisfactory outcome to the story from a Christian perspective.

Racine's piously historical approach and exilic setting, together with the general shape of his play, were adopted for the 1718 Handelian libretto, with a couple of modifications: the libretto's overall tone is much more positive than that of Racine's play, and it has a particularly significant role for the chorus. Whereas in Racine's play a chorus of young Jewish girls comments on the action at various points, the Handelian chorus of Israelites is a character in itself, and is even more important than Esther. This can be seen particularly in the final chorus, in which the Israelites celebrate God overcoming their enemies and anticipate returning from exile, but unlike the equivalent Racinian chorus there is no mention of Esther, who was the means by which their enemy was overcome. This communal emphasis, together with the upbeat tone of the libretto, accords well with the British mind-set that saw (Protestant) Britain as the eighteenth-century Israel, sometimes beset by (often Catholic) enemies but always the object of the Deity's special care—as long as they remained faithful to him.<sup>2</sup>

However, the expanded version of the libretto that Handel staged in London in 1732 has a different emphasis. The libretto is still initially set in exile, but exile is not mentioned after the first act, and the story ends with

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2. For discussion of the "British Israel" paradigm in relation to Handel's oratorios, see Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 213–29.

Mordecai promoted to second-in-command of the Persian Empire and a much shorter final triumphal chorus that makes no mention of the Israelites returning home and rebuilding the temple. In addition, both Esther's and Ahasuerus's characters are significantly enhanced and elaborated in comparison to the 1718 libretto, and both characters have anthems sung about them that are versions of those written by Handel for the coronation of George II and his queen Caroline in 1727. This suggests that the libretto is intended to compliment the reigning monarchs George II and Caroline as God's chosen instruments for protecting his people against their enemies, and explains why the exilic setting is downplayed: the association of Esther and Ahasuerus with the Hanoverian monarchs implies that the people of God are already being ruled by those whom God has put in place for their protection, so there is no reason for them to want to go elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

*Esther* proved to be one of Handel's most popular oratorios during his lifetime, being revived over fifty times,<sup>4</sup> and each time undergoing some sort of alteration in order to suit it to the particular circumstances of performance. However, perhaps its most interesting and unexpected reincarnation, and the one with which this study is particularly concerned, was among the eighteenth-century Jews of Europe, when sometime in the mid-1700s the Venetian-born rabbi Jacob Saraval (1708–1782) produced a Hebrew version of the *Esther* libretto. Saraval was a member of an illustrious family that had originated from Germany and settled in Venice in the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> He himself was an accomplished preacher, poet, and philosopher. He was invited to become rabbi in Mantua in 1752,<sup>6</sup> and remained in the position until his death. It was probably during this period of his life that he produced his version of *Esther*, although there is

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3. A full treatment of these issues in relation to Racine's play and the two Handelian versions of *Esther* can be found in Deborah W. Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti: Sacred Drama and Biblical Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–31.

4. Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (1959; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 640.

5. For brief biographical details on Saraval, see Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews in Venice* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1930), 341–43; Abraham David, "Saraval, Jacob Raphael ben Simḥah Judah," *EncJud* 14:874.

6. S. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Publications of the Diaspora Research Institute 17; Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1977), 734.

no information about what prompted him to do so, or whether, where, and under what circumstances it was ever performed.<sup>7</sup>

Saraval's version is preserved among the papers of David Franco Mendes (1713–1792), a poet who was a member of the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam.<sup>8</sup> Franco Mendes was apparently in the habit of collecting Jewish literature, and he seems to have had a particular predilection for the work of contemporary Italian poets who wrote in Hebrew, which would account for him copying Saraval's libretto. One of Franco Mendes's copies of the libretto indicates that it is to be sung "to music by Mr Handel," but in 1998 a musical setting composed for the libretto by Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti (1730–ca. 1793) came to light, in a manuscript dated to 1774.<sup>9</sup> Lidarti, of Italian descent, was born in Vienna but moved to Italy in his early twenties and spent the rest of his life there. It is not clear how he came to be associated with the Jews in Amsterdam, but the community's archive contains manuscript copies of a number of Hebrew liturgical pieces set to music by Lidarti, indicating that in the late 1700s the community felt a great affinity for his compositions.<sup>10</sup>

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7. Moshe Gorali ("A Hebrew Translation of the Oratorio 'Esther' by G. F. Handel" [in Hebrew], *Tazlil* 2 [1961]: 73–84) follows the suggestion made by Hayim Shirmon in 1943 that the translation was intended for performance at Purim (75), that is, as a *Purimspiel*. A *Purimspiel* (or *Purimshpil*) is a dramatic, often humorous, presentation that is performed as part of the Purim celebrations; it may be a reenactment of the story of Esther, or have some other subject. For details see Chone Shmeruk, "Purimshpil," *EncJud* 13:1396–1404. J. Shirmann, however, also drawing on Hayim Shirmon, suggests that Saraval's translation may have been prepared for an ordinary concert performance, possibly for the Jews of Holland or England, where Saraval travelled in the 1760s and 1770s. See Shirmann, "Theater and Music in the Italian Ghetti Between the Sixteenth and the Eighteenth Centuries" [in Hebrew], *Zion* 29 (1964): 78–79.

8. The standard biography of Franco Mendes is J. Melkman (Michman), *David Franco Mendes* (Amsterdam: Joachimsthals Boekhandel, 1951).

9. See Richard Andrewes, "On the Discovery of the Manuscript," in the booklet accompanying the 2003 Accord recording of Lidarti's setting (2CD 476 1255): 27–29. The manuscript is now in Cambridge University Library.

10. For a short biography of Lidarti, and a discussion of some of his other compositions for the Amsterdam Jews, see Israel Adler, *Musical Life and Traditions of the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam in the XVIIIth Century* (Yuval Monograph Series 1; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974), 84–89. Adler also gives a preliminary catalogue of the community's music manuscripts (31–70), which are preserved in the library of the community's seminary Ets Haim and in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.

The version of Handel's oratorio to which Saraval's Hebrew libretto corresponds most closely is found in an undated English libretto that was probably produced around 1765, and a copy of this English libretto has been preserved in which Saraval's Hebrew text is interleaved with the English text on separate facing pages.<sup>11</sup> Although the content of the two versions does not correspond exactly, there is only one four-line aria in the Hebrew that is not represented at all in the English, while a two-line chorus and two anthems that appear in the English version are omitted from the Hebrew.<sup>12</sup> The English version is partway between the 1718 and the 1732 versions, being longer than the former but somewhat shorter than the latter, and containing several elements that appear in neither.

Saraval's translation is quite closely aligned with its English *Vorlage*. However, like the Handelian versions of 1718 and 1732, it shows some distinctive characteristics that can be related to the context for which it was prepared. Three such characteristics will be considered here.

The first characteristic, which appears very early in the translation, is a downplaying of the status of earthly monarchs. The translation's opening items—a Hebrew woman praying for Esther in a recitative and aria, and then Esther praising God in a recitative—closely reproduce the sentiments of their equivalents in the English libretto. However, the next element of Saraval's translation departs from his model. The English version ends the scene with a choral "Hallelujah" after Esther's recitative; but in place of the

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11. This dating means that, contrary to the assumption made on p. 22 of the 2003 Accord CD booklet, the translation cannot be identified with the opera on a biblical theme that Saraval requested permission from Mantua's Jewish council to stage for Purim in 1757 (see Simonsohn, *History*, 669). Going by the information provided by Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios*, appendix G, the features of the English libretto that is bound with the Hebrew translation correspond to no known libretto that predates Handel's death in 1759.

12. In the hybrid English-Hebrew libretto there are spaces on the Hebrew side where the English material has not been rendered. Interestingly, in the manuscript copies from Ets Haim, one copy, in Franco Mendes's Sephardic cursive handwriting, has no such spaces, whereas the other copy (catalogue no. EH 47 A29), in square script, is paginated from left to right, and has gaps where anthems in the English have been omitted from the Hebrew translation (see figs. 1 and 2 below). This is despite the fact that this manuscript contains no English version against which to align the Hebrew. The layout of the manuscript suggests very strongly that it is based on the 1765 English version.

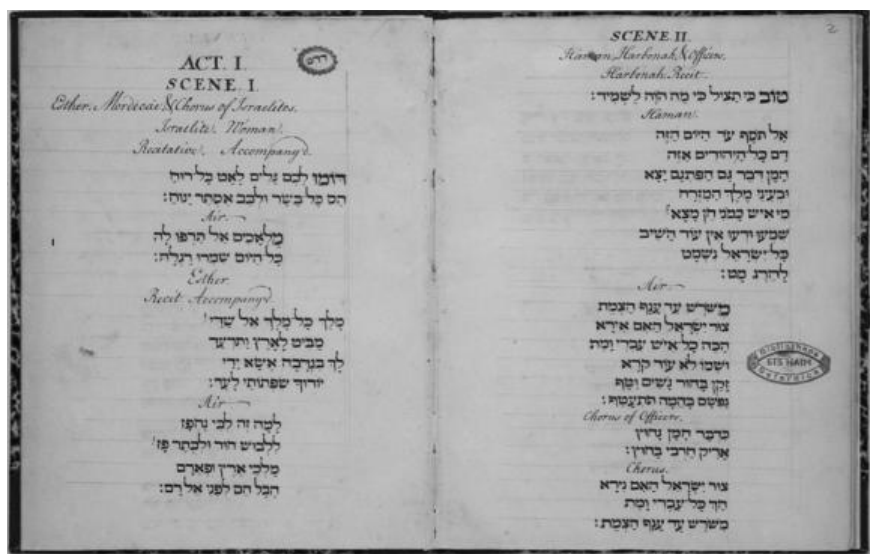


Figure 1. Folios 1v and 2r of Manuscript EH 47 A29, Ets Haim Library, Amsterdam, showing act I, scenes 1 and 2, of Saraval's translation. Note how the pagination runs from left to right. © Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos, Amsterdam (Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama, Ra'anana, Israel).

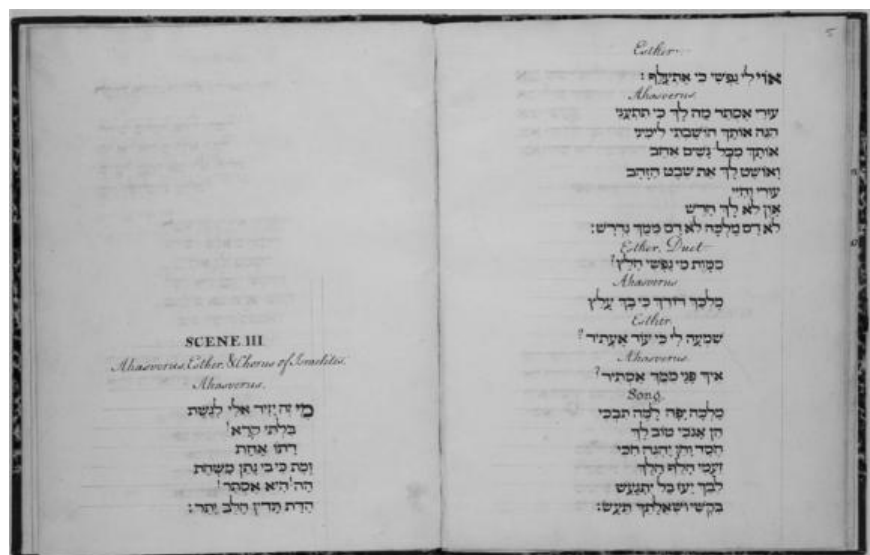


Figure 2. Folios 4v and 5r, Manuscript EH 47 A29, Ets Haim Library, Amsterdam, showing a blank page at the end of act 2, scene 2, where an anthem in the English version has been omitted from the Hebrew translation. © Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos, Amsterdam (Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama, Ra'anana, Israel).

“Hallelujah” Saraval gives Esther an aria that stresses the vanity of earthly royal status in the light of God’s power:<sup>13</sup>

Why then was my heart afraid	לָמָּה זֶה לִבִּי נִחַפָּז
Of a garment of white linen and a crown of pure gold?	לְלָבוֹשׁ חוּר וּלְכֶתֶר פָּז!
Kings of earth and their crowns	מִלְכֵי אֶרֶץ וּפְאָרִם
Are a puff of wind before the exalted God [cf. Ps 2].	הֶבֶל הֵם לִפְנֵי אֵל רִם:

This is a natural move for the libretto’s new context, in which there is no Jewish king and where a history strewn with the experience of intolerance has taught that earthly potentates in general are to be feared for their capriciousness rather than celebrated for their goodness. Handel’s 1732 *Esther* aligned itself with the contemporary king and queen, and supported their reign; Saraval’s *Esther* by contrast asserts Jewish independence and integrity, through the power of God, over against any contemporary monarch—a highly appropriate sentiment for Saraval’s presumed Jewish audience.

A similar modification occurs at the end of act 2, after Esther has visited Ahasuerus and persuaded him to arrange a banquet for her, himself, and Haman. In the Handelian versions the act ends with a scene in which the Israelites comment that Esther’s beauty has charmed the king and she will be successful in her appeal to him; and in the 1732 and the 1765 versions a coronation anthem<sup>14</sup> is included as a prayer for the king to round off the act. Saraval’s version of the scene, however, contains instead a recitative commenting on how easily Esther has won over the king, and then the act ends with a chorus describing how heavenly grace and Esther’s own kindness has enabled her to prevail over him. Saraval has therefore omitted the coronation anthem that prays for the king, presumably because it has no significance—or at least, no positive significance—in the context for which he is writing.

13. Pointing in the Hebrew text reflects that in manuscript EH 47 A29. All translations of Saraval’s Hebrew libretto are my own.

14. “The king shall rejoice in thy strength, O Lord.”

A second characteristic of Saraval's translation is that it magnifies the tendency begun in the 1732 libretto and maintained in the 1765 version toward downplaying the story's exilic setting. The first reference to an exilic setting in the 1765 version comes in act 1, scene 3, where the Jews confidently declare that God will end their captivity:

*Jerusalem* no more shall mourn,  
In sad Captivity forlorn:  
The righteous God, in whom we trust,  
Will be propitious to the Just.  
To rapture then your Voices raise,  
And change your Sighs to Songs of Praise.<sup>15</sup>

However, Saraval's translation of these lines reduces the sense of a setting in exile by omitting the reference to captivity:

Rejoice, Zion, as in the days of old.	גִּילִי צִיּוֹן כִּי־מִי עוֹלָם
Sons will return to their territory.	בָּנִים יָשׁוּבוּ לְגִבּוֹלָם
Out of distress we called on Yah,	מִן הַמַּצָּר קָרָאנוּ יָהּ
He refreshed our spirits in a wide place [cf. Ps 118:5].	נִפְשָׁנוּ בַּמֶּרְחֵב חִיָּה
Why should we be downcast, or why sigh?	מָה נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אוֹ מָה נָּהִים
Better that we wait for God [cf. Ps 42:6 (Eng. 5)].	טוֹב כִּי נִוָּחֶלֶה לְאֱלֹהִים:

Following this recitative, in the English version the scene continues with an Israelite woman singing two arias of praise, and then ends with a short chorus speaking of the Jews' captive situation:

Shall we of Servitude complain,  
The heavy Yoke and galling Chain?

This once again emphasizes the exilic setting that is characteristic of all the English versions to a greater or lesser extent. Saraval, however, completes the scene by rendering the Israelite woman's second aria as a

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15. Formatting of quotations from the English version reflects that in the 1765 libretto.



chorus praising God for his steadfast love, and omitting the short two-line chorus about chains and servitude, thereby removing from the scene all the explicit references to exile. In Saraval's eyes, the Jews in *Esther* are in Diaspora, as indeed they are in his presumed audience.

The de-emphasizing of exile continues in act 1, scene 4. Here the Handelian versions open with either an Israelite priest (1718) or Mordecai (1732/1765) entering and exclaiming, "How have our sins provoked the Lord! Wild persecution hath unleash'd the sword." Saraval, however, begins the scene with Mordecai saying:

Over the destruction of the daughter of my  
people I shall pant,

עַל שְׁבֶר בֵּת עַמִּי אֶשְׁאָף

And I am greatly afraid before the anger.

וּמֵאֵד יִגְרָתִי מִלִּפְנֵי הָאֵף

In other words, this calamity has nothing to do with the people's sin, but everything to do with other evil machinations, a point made clear by Saraval's next line explaining that "Haman the enemy has gnashed his teeth," indicating that the "anger" before which Mordecai is afraid is Haman's and not God's. This again points to a setting in Diaspora rather than in exile. If the people are in exile, viewed as captivity by the ideology of the Old Testament and in the literalistic interpretations on which Racine's and Handel's presentations were built, they are in a state of sin; they are undergoing punishment by God, and until such time as their captivity is reversed they are by definition liable to further punishment for the sins that originally provoked the captivity. In the Diaspora, however, there is no sense of the illegitimacy of their status; they are there because they are there (!), not because they have sinned and are undergoing punishment while waiting for their sentence to be over. Saraval's interpretation of the crisis as something other than punishment for the people's own sin, therefore, indicates once again that he is thinking of the people as in Diaspora rather than in exile.

The final reference in the 1765 libretto that could be construed as indicating an exilic setting comes at the end of act 1, scene 4. Following Mordecai's declaration (noted above) and an aria, the scene ends with the chorus singing,

Ye Sons of *Israel* mourn,  
Ye never to your Country shall return.

This clearly pictures an exilic setting. Saraval, however, renders these lines more ambiguously:

Mourn, house of Israel;

בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל סָפְדוּ

Over your land strangers have cast the lot!

עַל אֲדָמַתְכֶם נִכְרִים גִּזְלוּ יְדוּ:

[cf. Obad 11]

There are certainly potentially exilic overtones in Saraval's use of phraseology from Obadiah, a book that talks about strangers taking possession of Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion. But the book of Esther also speaks of lots being cast by Haman, a non-Jew, in order to ascertain an auspicious time to annihilate the Jews (Esth 3:7), and so it is quite possible to understand the reference here in those terms: Haman the foreigner has cast the lot over the Jews' territory, that is, he has claimed the right to destroy them wherever they are situated. The net effect of such a reading is that, unlike the English libretto from which Saraval was working, there are no definite references in Saraval's translation to an exilic setting; rather, for him, the Esther story is set in the Diaspora, which is where Saraval's own audience would have been.

The third characteristic of Saraval's translation that reflects its implied Jewish audience is its use of biblical allusion. Given that it is based on the biblical language, this is hardly a surprising characteristic, and several allusions have already been noted in passing, but here Saraval's use of material from the book of Esther in particular, as well as from other parts of the text, will be considered in more detail.

Act 1, scene 2, in which Haman is shown setting up his decree against the Jews, contains several interesting textual allusions. In his recitative Haman uses a Persian loanword occurring in Esth 1:20 as he declares that the edict (הַפְּתָגִים) has gone out; and then in a defiant aria he boasts,

Shall I fear the Rock of Israel?

צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל הָאֵם אֵי־רָא

This renders the English "Shall I the God of *Israel* fear?" while at the same time having an intriguing biblical allusion. The phrase "Rock of Israel" in reference to God occurs in the Hebrew Bible at 2 Sam 23:3 and Isa 30:29. The former is the more interesting in this context: "The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over

people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land" (2 Sam 23:3–4 NRSV). Haman's refusal to fear the Rock of Israel can thus be seen as a scornful rejection of the demand to rule justly, because it rejects the God with whom that demand originates, underlining Haman's wickedness and his complete contempt for the foundations upon which Jewish life is built.

The remaining four lines of Haman's aria show significant differences between the English and Hebrew versions. The English reads:

Let Jewish Blood dye ev'ry Hand,  
Nor Age, nor Sex I'll spare.  
Raze, raze, their Temples to the Ground,  
And let their Place no more be found.

Saraval's version, however, reads:

Strike every Hebrew man dead,  
And his [i.e., God's] name will no longer be  
uttered.  
Old men, young men, women and children  
[cf. Esth 3:13],  
Their life within them shall languish.

הַכָּה כָּל־אִישׁ עִבְרִי וָמֵת  
וְשְׁמוֹ לֹא עוֹד קָרָא  
זָקֵן בְּחֹר וְנָשִׁים וְטַף  
נַפְשָׁם בְּהִמָּה תִּתְעַטֵּף:

There are several observations to be made here. First, Saraval has altered the content of the aria, so that Haman contemplates only killing the Jews rather than killing them and destroying their places of worship. This indicates that for Saraval's Jewish audience, as opposed to the English "metaphorical Israelites" for whom the Handelian libretto was produced, the main issue at stake was their very existence rather than their religious identity. To that extent, Saraval's version is closer to the biblical (Hebrew) text, since there is no mention there of destroying Jewish places of worship, only of eliminating the people. Indeed, the dependence upon the biblical text is illustrated by Saraval's use of vocabulary recalling that of Haman's decree in Esth 3:13 to emphasize the totality of the destruction commanded.

Nevertheless, there clearly is a religious element to the crisis as portrayed in both the English and the Hebrew libretti, although Saraval

expresses it here in a different way from his English *Vorlage*. Instead of talking about destroying Jewish “temples,” Saraval’s libretto speaks of ending all mention of Israel’s God by doing away with God’s worshippers. This reflects a sentiment that occurs in biblical Esther not in the MT but in the LXX, in the prayer of Esther before she goes to the king to plead for the Jews. In her prayer, Esther complains to God that the heathen have conspired with their idols “to destroy your inheritance and to stop up the mouths that praise you” (Esth 4:17 [15]). The underlying idea here that Israel’s praise is somehow necessary to God also appears in the Hebrew Bible: according to Isa 43:21 the people Israel was created to sing God’s praises, and several times the psalmist appeals to God for healing on the basis that the dead do not praise God (Pss 6:5–6 [Eng. 4–5]; 30:10 [Eng. 9]; 88:10–11 [Eng. 9–10]; 115:17–18), as well as declaring that God is enthroned on the praises of Israel (Ps 22:4 [Eng. 3]). Saraval’s rendition of the aria therefore expresses the religious aspect of the threat to the Jews in a way that is much more thoroughly grounded in biblical tradition and Jewish self-understanding than the English libretto with its talk of “temples.”

Another echo of Esther (MT) appears in act 1, scene 4, which begins with Mordecai’s anguished announcement that Haman has issued the decree. Whereas in the English version Mordecai says “Haman hath sent forth his decree,” Saraval’s equivalent elaborates on the description of Haman:

Haman the enemy gnashed his teeth

הָמָן צֶרֶר שִׁנָּיו חָרַק

The description of Haman as “the enemy of (all) the Jews,” [צֶרֶר כָּל-] הַיְּהוּדִים, is fundamental to his portrayal in the book of Esther, where it occurs several times (Esth 3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24), and it contributes to his “pantomime baddy” characterization that is such an important aspect of Purim. Saraval has therefore augmented the English version with a description of Haman that has particular significance for his Jewish audience.

A particularly effective biblical allusion appears in act 2, scene 2, where Mordecai attempts to persuade Esther to go to the king. In the Handelian version, Mordecai sings the following aria to Esther:

Dread not righteous Queen the Danger,  
Love will pacify his Anger;

Fear is due to God alone:  
Follow great *Jehovah's* calling,  
For thy Kindred's Safety falling;  
Death is better than a Throne.

Saraval renders Mordecai's aria thus:

Put on strength, for you won't be ashamed;	לְבָשִׁי עֹז כִּי לֹא תִחְפִּירִי
You will excite his compassion in a moment	נִיחֻמֵּי וּפִתְאוֹם תַּעֲרִירִי
And the Lord, he is your refuge.	וַיְיָ הוּא לְךָ מְחֻסָּה
Why do you forget your people [cf. Ps 45:11 (Eng. 10)]?	לָמָּה אַתָּה עֹמֵד שְׂכַחַת
If for their sake you see destruction,	בְּגִלְלָם אִם תִּרְאִי שַׁחַת
Death is better than a throne.	טוֹב הַמָּוֶת מִכֶּסֶּא:

Mordecai's question in the fourth line, "Why do you forget your people?" echoes the words of Ps 45:11 (Eng. 10), a royal wedding psalm of which the second half is addressed to the queen-to-be, urging her to forget her own people and her father's house, presumably in order to dedicate herself entirely to her royal husband. But Mordecai reverses the instructions in addressing Queen Esther, urging her *not* to forget her people, because the very reason why she has married the king and become queen at all is so as to be in a position to help them.

The place in Saraval's version where there are the most allusions to Esther (MT) is in act 3, scene 2, in which Esther reveals Haman's treachery to the king, Haman is punished, and Mordecai is rewarded. In Saraval, Ahasuerus's response to the revelation that Haman has planned the pogrom expresses the spirit of Purim: borrowing thoughts and words from Pss 9:16 (Eng. 15) and 7:17 (Eng. 16), Ahasuerus declares that there is no refuge for Haman, for

He has laid a snare;	פֶּחַ זֶה טָמֵן
It will trap his foot [cf. Ps 9:16 (Eng. 15)];	יִלְכַּד רִגְלוֹ
All the mischief will recoil upon Haman's head [cf. Ps 7:17 (Eng. 16)].	כָּל־הָעֲמָל יָשׁוּב עַל רֹאשׁ הָמָן:

This reflects the notion that Purim celebrates the overturning and reversal of fortune as expressed in Esth 9:1, which states that although the Jews' enemies hoped to get mastery over them, this was overturned, and the Jews themselves got mastery over their enemies. The Handelian libretti by contrast simply show Ahasuerus condemning Haman to death, without the same sense of reversal. Thus the 1756 version:

I swear by yon bright Globe of Light,  
Which rules the Day,  
That *Haman's* sight  
Shall never more behold the golden Ray!

There are also differences in the rendition of Ahasuerus's sentencing of Haman and rewarding of Mordecai in each version. In the Handelian version, Ahasuerus condemns Haman with a nonspecific death sentence; the appropriate line reads, "Death shall reward the dire offence." In Saraval's version, however, Ahasuerus condemns Haman to be hanged, using vocabulary from Esth 7:9:

And hang him on the tree.

וּתְלֹהוּ עַל הָעֵץ

Then, in describing the honours to be paid to Mordecai, in the English version Ahasuerus commands:

The Royal Garment bring.  
My Diadem shall grace his Head;  
Let him in Triumph thro' the Streets be led,  
Who sav'd the King.

Saraval, however, shows Mordecai riding on the royal horse, and a report of him going out in the city square, as in Esth 6:8, 11:

Let him ride upon a royal horse,  
Let my report go out in the city square,  
That because of him I am alive, and on my  
bed  
I sleep easy.

עַל סוּס מַלְכוּת יָרִיב  
בְּרָחוֹב הָעִיר יֵצֵא שְׁמִעִי  
כִּי בְגִלְלוֹ אֶחָיָה גַם עַל עֲרֹשִׁי  
שְׁלֹו אֶשְׁכֵּב:

Finally, Ahasuerus sings an aria about the rewards due to Mordecai. The Handelian version reads:

Thro' the Nation he shall be  
Next in Dignity to me;  
All my People shall revere  
Merit to their Prince so dear.  
Daily to his honour'd Name,  
Incense shall on Altars flame.

Saraval's version, however, once again relies more closely on the text of Esther for its rendition:

Let him be given wealth and riches	הוֹן וְעֶשֶׂר הוּא יִקְנֶה
For he is the king's second-in-command [cf. Esth 10:3].	כִּי לְמֶלֶךְ הוּא מְשֻׁנָּה
Upon his head let his diadem shine	עַל רֹאשׁוֹ יֵצִיץ נִזְרוֹ
For I am pleased to honour him [cf. 6:7, 9, 11].	כִּי חִפְצָתִי בִיקְרוֹ
Report of him will circulate among the peoples [cf. 9:4]	בְּעַמִּים שְׁמָעוֹ נִקְטָר
And to his name incense will be offered.	גַּם לְשִׁמוֹ מִגִּשׁ מִקְטָר:

With such allusions, Saraval uses the thoughts and cadences of the biblical text to create for his audience a distinctively Jewish version of the anglicized Esther narrative in the Handelian libretto.

In Saraval's translation, then, the libretto of the Handelian Esther has journeyed far from its point of origin. Just as the Handelian libretti display elements that adapt the biblical narrative to their own political and cultural contexts, Saraval's rendition of the Handelian libretto "re-judaizes" the narrative, moving it closer to the biblical text and making it more clearly relevant to the Jewish context of Saraval's own day. The de-emphasizing of monarchy and earthly power, the change from an exilic to a Diaspora setting, and the use of biblical vocabulary, particularly that from the book of Esther, all serve to transform the Handelian oratorio's Protestant Christian monarchic polemic into an affirmation of Jewish identity.





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