

PERFORMING MEMORY IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE AND BEYOND



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Athalya Brenner



PERFORMING MEMORY IN  
BIBLICAL NARRATIVE AND BEYOND

edited by  
Athalya Brenner  
and  
Frank H. Polak



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ratives (Ex 7:8-12:51)', in *Thinking towards New Horizons: Collected Communications to the XIXth IOSOT Congress, Ljubljana 2007* (BEATAJ, 55; Frankfurt/Main, 2008).

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INTRODUCTION:  
MEMORY, TELLING AND THE ART OF [SELF-]DEFINITION

Athalya Brenner, Tel Aviv University and University of Amsterdam  
and Burke O. Long,<sup>1</sup> Bowdoin College, USA

*A. In General*

This volume is the result of a cooperative research project initially undertaken by members of the Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA, the Netherlands) and Tel Aviv University (TAU, Israel). Along the way others have joined in: from Haifa University (Israel); Poznan University (Poland); Bowdoin College and Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University (USA); University of Sheffield (UK); and one of us has meanwhile moved to Utrecht University (The Netherlands).<sup>2</sup> We met in Tel Aviv at the beginning of 2005, then again in Amsterdam at the end of 2006. We enjoyed the financial support of the various institutional instances of the UvA and of TAU, as well as a grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) via the Netherlands Research School for Theology and Religion Sciences (NOSTER). We thank all these bodies for their support, which facilitated our enjoyable meetings and conversations and, eventually, the publication of this collection.

The project, initiated at the UvA, was a continuation of a research project about the bible and religion at the onset of the 21st century. Our aim was to examine how narrative and discourse interact to perform socially and culturally meaningful recollections in/of the bible and beyond it, in Jewish and Christian communities, from different angles. Those angles were largely dictated by the interests of individual participants. All proceeding from the premise that texts are social products, in both the senses of their creation and influence, several contributors were more interested in narrativity or discourse, others in the texts' functions and their transformations. Another starting point was that narrative writing (and reading) is an act of performance, and therefore it always contains or creates social memories. Those created or contained memories are performed, recycled if you wish, with every act of writing or reading. Therefore, at this point, it

1. Section B of this Introduction was written by Burke O. Long, the remainder by Athalya Brenner.

2. For the List of Contributors, including their institutional affiliations, see p. vii.

would be pertinent to define what we, as a group, refer to when we discuss ‘memory’ and especially socio-textual memory.

At the end of our last research meeting we asked one of the participants, Burke O. Long, of Bowdoin College, to write a broad orientation for us, based on the wide research corpus now available for memory theory as applied in literary criticism and beyond it. His study is reproduced below, under ‘B’. In the last part of this Introduction (C), individual contributions are briefly presented. Additional theoretical considerations are to be found at the Afterword to this volume.

### B. ‘Memory’—*What Do you Mean?*

Indeed the whole scene is now a fluid mix of imagery and supposition. He sees Kath, and small Polly flitting about in the long grass, and experiences the satisfaction of lighting on a perfect apple—no bruising, no scabs or holes. He sees that alien look on Kath’s face. Snatches of what is said ring out: ‘My heart is not broken... The thing is to move away... Before they change their minds’. The rest is unreliable—perhaps that is how it was, perhaps later wisdoms have imposed themselves, perhaps the need for narrative and sequence has stepped in. Suffice it that he was there, then, with Kath, and it was thus, or very like.<sup>3</sup>

Wherever memory is shared and articulated, it becomes a ‘social fact’—at once an expression of popular historical awareness and an indispensable constituent of the social itself... [Yet] social memory is not stable as information; it is stable, rather, at the level of shared meanings and remembered images.<sup>4</sup>

The above quotations suggest two senses of the word ‘memory’—personal and public—and the unsettling instability that permeates both. Both individuals and groups, and thus personal recollection of the past and public discourse about the past, are shifting and shifty, yet consequential, constructions based on communal or personal experience and built out of a ‘fluid mix of imagery and supposition’. Individuals remember, of course, but they do much of their recollecting together. It is the latter, the social dimensions of recollection, that has grabbed most of the attention in recent years owing to the interest of scholars who self-reflexively inquire into the political and ethical consequences of professionalized knowledge about folkways, popular wisdom, and ideology.

Studies of social memory today owe much to Maurice Halbwachs who, in 1925, distinguished among autobiographical memory, historical memory,

3. Penelope Lively, *The Photograph* (New York: Viking, 2003), p. 188.

4. James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), p. 59; John Tosh, Review of Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, in *Social History* 19.1 (January 1994), pp. 129-32 (130-31).



history, and collective memory. For Halbwachs, autobiographical memory means personal recollection of events, while historical memory reaches us only through historical records and historians. History is the remembered past that no longer has an active relation to our contemporary concerns. Collective memory is nearly the opposite—an active recall of the past that forms our social identities.<sup>5</sup>

At the time, Halbwachs decisively moved the study of memory from the Freudian world of the individual to the social world of collective interaction.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, studies on the social aspects of memory have proliferated, although at the cost of isolating the liberal arts and social sciences from neuro-biological understanding of mnemonic processes.<sup>7</sup> Halbwach's ideas have been debated, critiqued and refined, especially since the late twentieth century, and mainly with a view to preserving differentiated indeterminacy in both the phenomenon and our conceptions about it. Perhaps typical of that sensitivity among taxonomists, Jan Assmann tried to capture the range of memory problematics in four types of social memory that form the connective tissues of society. First, there is mimetic memory, the transmission of practical knowledge from the past. Second, material memory, which refers to recollection of the past that is embedded in material objects and their cultural significance. Third, communicative memory encompasses the residues of the past in language and communication. And last, cultural memory, the transmission of historical meanings through explicit historical reference and consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

Despite such attempts at systematization, and a vast amount of multidisciplinary research,<sup>9</sup> studies of social memory still lack the confident (and modernist) strength of an orderly center. Instead, contributors to this area of study lavish attention (and postmodern perspectives) on geographically and

5. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (trans. and ed. L.A. Closser; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925 [1992]).

6. Charles Golden, 'Where Does Memory Reside and Why Isn't It History?', *American Anthropologist* 107 (2005), pp. 270-74 (271).

7. Joaquin Furster, *Memory in the Cerebral Cortex: An Empirical Approach to Neural Networks in the Human and Nonhuman Primate* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995); Mark Gluck and Catherine Meyers, *Gateway to Memory: An Introduction to Neural Networks Modeling of the Hippocampus and Learning* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001); Gary Lynch, James McGaugh and Norman Weinberger (eds.), *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory* (New York: Guilford Press, 1984); Daniel Schacter and Joseph Coyle, *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

8. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992).

9. Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: from "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), pp. 105-40.

culturally diverse particularities of social contexts and mnemonic practices through which human beings shape themselves and the overlapping social groupings to which they belong. All of which may be a strength, at least in a climate that resists totalizing hegemonies, academic or otherwise. In any case, researchers describe how social memory is selective, how it involves shared or contested meanings, often outside the arenas of formal historical discourse. Scholars study how social memory is entangled with understandings of the present, lives actively within institutions and groups, how it is entangled with cultural products, and imbued with cultural meaning.<sup>10</sup> Social memory has been approached from sociology, anthropology, literary criticism, history, religious studies, art history, psychology, and political science. Some scholars emphasize social memory as identity-forming myth found in both oral and written tradition<sup>11</sup> and expressed through religion and nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Others find sets of mnemonic practices in specific social sites, such as rituals of commemoration and monuments.<sup>13</sup> Some consider social recollection to include all that is habitual in human activity, such as ritualized gestures and food ways.<sup>14</sup> Others emphasize the malleability of social memory and its potential to become a potent political tool.<sup>15</sup>

Many researchers remain focused on memory as a complex of culturally specific social processes, not a thing. Memory is also a concept that itself has a social and intellectual history.<sup>16</sup> In this light, it is well, as Olick and Robbins urge, to consider social memory studies as a 'general rubric for inquiry into the varieties of forms through which we are shaped by [recall of] the past, conscious or unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual or challenged'.<sup>17</sup>

10. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

11. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*.

12. John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Jeffrey K. Olick (ed.), *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

13. David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

14. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

15. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (trans. D.F. Bouchard and S. Simon; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Gillis, *Commemorations*; Joanne Rapaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995).

16. Olick and Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies', pp. 112-22.

17. Olick and Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies', p. 112.

### C. *The essays in this volume*

As will be presently seen, the essays in this volume deal with Jewish and Christian articulations and production of personal and social memory as narrated in the bible and beyond.

In *Part I: Biblical Narratives, Memory, Performance*, seven authors write about various aspects of narration and memory construction in the Hebrew bible. The essays are arranged alphabetically by author's names rather than by biblical text order (and this is followed throughout this collection). Most authors in this Part, albeit in varying degrees, grapple with the problematics of narrated memory versus 'history' in the biblical texts.

Yairah Amit sees the story of Araunah's Threshing-floor as a 'Lesson in Shaping Historical Memory'. Juxtaposing the two versions of the story of David's buying of the threshing floor—in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21—she shows how, in each case, national memory is developed in order to meet the historical needs of the community for which the text is produced.

In 'Remembering the Past in the Psalms', Toni Craven moves from a consideration of social memory's 'Janus face'—its double function as producer of both past and future—to a short survey of literature about memory that informs her work, with the hope of answering more fully what a better understanding of narrative and memory could contribute to our interpretation of biblical texts. She then moves, like Amit, into discussing memory and history, taking up the notion of 'geneological time' to define the Psalms' concern for past, present and future generations. A step-by-step case study of Psalm 71 emerges from the understanding that 'For biblical interpretation, it seems to me that the act of forging links between text and meaning is primarily an act of memory-making for both psalmist and interpreter' and ends with the assessment of the value of memory theory for biblical interpretation.

In 'Story, Memory, Identity: Benjamin', Philip R. Davies puts the biblical Benjamin on the couch, so to speak, in order to tell his stories and recall his memories, reliable or otherwise. Davies takes license for so doing from the notion that the 'historiographical' books of the Hebrew bible are basically Judean collective memory that tells us less about history and more about identity. From Genesis to Saul/Paul in Romans, Benjamin's corporate identity is examined, with concluding considerations about narrative, history, identity and the past/future dimension of performed memory.

Frank H. Polak writes about 'Negotiations, Social Drama and Voices of Memory in Some Samuel Tales'. For him, 'Biblical narrative embodies significant parts of the cultural memory of ancient Israelite society. Written down and transmitted throughout the generations it conveys a picture of the past that bonds the community of ancient Israel, provides the charter for its various ways of life and its visions of the future, and thus constructs and

confirms a view of Israel's communal identity'. From this premise he examines some dialogue in Samuel, shows how the social drama is constructed, and concludes that the multiplicity of negotiations and voices enables preservation of different and at times conflicting cultural memories.

Meira Polliack looks at Joseph's story as a 'Trauma of Memory and Resolution' first and foremost for Joseph himself, but also for his brothers and father. When Joseph recollects his dreams told to his brothers (Gen. 42.9, referring to Genesis 37), this is the beginning of his healing and consequently the family's reunion. Building on trauma theory, Polliack describes how the recollection of trauma, then its enactment and performance, gradually brings it to consciousness, which is a prerequisite for recovery and social reconciliation. For the brothers and Jacob too, memory, even if selective, is necessary for the family to come together again, even if uneasily.

Teresa Stanek examines the Exodus and Covenant traditions as myth about origin. For her, stories about the exodus from Egypt and covenant making form a *myth* that in the religion of Israel replaced the *creation myths* that religions of the neighbouring countries were based on. She considers both as one *foundational myth* that presents two complementary aspects of the God-human relationship, forming the basis for a doctrinal, cultic and ethical structure. She commences to show how the *Exodus-Covenant* event can be understood as a *location* that reveals the nature of God and forms the basis for religious life.

Finally, in 'Lexical Fields and Coherence in the Jacob Narrative', Talia Sutskov reads the Jacob cycle of stories in Genesis 25–36 for what she understands as its centre: the lexical field of sight. She applies the theory of Lexical Fields to the cycle, claiming that the narrative as a whole is dominated by the lexical Field of Sight (= SF). She concludes that 'Jacob, then, is the only character in this narrative to experience sight both in the human and in the divine sphere. Moreover, and uniquely, he succeeds in combining the two sight modes when, upon uniting with Esau, he sees the face of God in the face of his brother'. While no overt reference to 'memory' is contained in Sutskov's essay, it is easy to see how her argument changes the way we as readers 'remember' Jacob.

In *Part II: Post-biblical Jewish-Traditional Perspectives*, two scholars discuss the afterlives of biblical texts in rabbinic sources and beyond.

In "Of making many books there is no end" (Qoheleth 12.12): The History of Commentary from Prohibition to Legitimation', Avraham Melamed deals with the history of the interpretations and commentaries on this verse during the ages. While midrashic literature interpreted it as a prohibition of studying any books besides the Torah, more philosophic commentaries during the middle ages, the Renaissance and early modern times, interpreted this verse in a completely opposite manner—as allowing, even demanding, the acquisition and study of books. The changing historical and cultural

circumstances enabled the varied usage of this popular verse and its 'recollection' for different purposes.

In 'The Eretz Israel Narrative in the Babylonian Talmud', Shulamit Valler shows how location, tradition and ensuing ideologies change the way biblical texts are remembered and commented upon in *Aggadic* midrash. Valler discusses midrashim where an Eretz Israel source was preserved, and points out a paradox: 'precisely those Babylonian Sages whose rigid "scientific" approach kept them from creating their own aggadot and midrashim did as they pleased with the Eretz Israel aggadot, reworking them and changing not only words but also the meaning, while introducing truths suited to their own needs and inclinations'. She chooses three examples to show how Babylonian sages did not hesitate to adapt the Eretz Israel and biblical texts to their own needs, even when they avowed loyalty to and precise preservation of both sources.

The articles in *Part III: Remembrance of Memories* remain anchored in the bible but go beyond it and beyond direct interpretations or commentaries on it into the cultural phenomena it fosters or influences in contemporary cultures. In this section, then, memories of the biblical 'past' are manufactured and used to shape the present and future, as set forth by several authors in *Part I*. Here we move from verbal text to media, examining recollection by narrativity as not only verbal but also as performed by visual and virtual processes and representations.

In 'What Matters in Life: Memory and Narrative in *Simon* (Netherlands: Eddy Terstall, 2004) and *Wit* (US: Mike Nichols, 2001)', Jonneke Bekkenkamp analyses two significantly different recent and popular films, *Simon* and *Wit*. Both films tell the story of someone who is quite certain to face death within a short time span. She focuses her attention on the link between death and the main character's individual life story. While so doing, she discusses the religious and cultural dimensions of the wish to be remembered, as well as the qualities of life and death within a Christian and Jewish context.

In 'Rizpah [Re]membered: 2 Sam. 21.1-14 and Beyond', Athalya Brenner traces several lines for the remembering and re-remembering (enlisting for contextual uses) of the biblical Rizpah (2 Samuel 21). Four types of materials are utilized: the name Rizpah and its contexts in family trees/genealogical lists (from the US); nineteenth and twentieth century poetry, from Alfred Lord Tennyson's onwards; contemporary charismatic churches and religious organizations in the US; and other, ostensibly non-religious sources. Working solely with Internet sources, modes of actualization and recycling are described and analyzed. After presenting the relevant clusters of materials, three main questions are discussed: ideologies, form and time/place characteristics.

In 'Genealogies, Gender, and the Politics of Memory: 1 Chronicles 1-9 and the Documentary Film *Mein Leben Teil 2*', Ingeborg Löwisch reads

a biblical text and a film side by side. Her conclusion is that the exercise sharpens the understanding of the two sources' distinctiveness and limits: one source facilitates assessing the other, and each involves two extremely different perspectives on women's subjectivity and has different implications. 1 Chronicles 1–9 has a gendered corpus of fragments and gaps within a text that performs Israel's memory and identities. 1 Chronicles 1–9 aims at the ongoing identity of Israel's community; the integrative power of its female gendered genealogies serves this concern. Women's subjectivity is not addressed as such and, as a powerful but slender trace, remains at the fringe of its memory. In the film, women's subjectivity comes to the fore.

Burke O. Long takes a critical look at 'The Holy Land and its Bible in Orlando'. Drawing upon theoreticians of culture, performance, geography and human space, the author investigates The Holy Land Experience, a theme park in Orlando, Florida, USA. Orlando's theme park mainly focuses on Christian evangelism. However, its emphasis on musical theater marks it as a successor to nineteenth century spectacles that used huge outdoor sets, pantomime and pyrotechnics to present the bible as popular education, cautionary tale and morally respectable mass entertainment. The Holy Land Experience is a contemporary high-tech version that enacts a made-in-America bible entangled with social and ideological realities of Messianic Christian evangelism, capitalist enterprise, nationalism, socially conservative politics, mass-market entertainment and Holy Land kitsch.

The last essay in this section is 'Cutting Edges and Loose Ends, Or: How to Re-Member John the Baptist'. Caroline Vander Stichele proceeds from the notion that 'The process of remembering a story is not only a matter of bringing it back to mind, but as much one of re-membling, of putting it together again'. Vander Stichele's chosen story is the biblical narrative about the death of John the Baptist (Mk 6.14-29; Mt. 14.1-12). She focuses on Kristeva's reading as a particular case study of how this story is indeed re-membered, re-assembled. To that end, she analyzes the sources Kristeva uses and how she uses them for her own purposes. And Vander Stichele concludes: 'Kristeva contributes to [the story's] afterlife...her own interpretation carries the seeds of its own subversion, in that she makes it possible to unmask the powers of horror in the feminine as a "trick" to shift away the gaze (and blame) from the male protagonists in the story: Herod and the severed head of John the Baptist'.

The materials presented in this volume are varied. We, Athalya Brenner and Frank Polak, the editors of this volume and coordinators of the joint research project from which the volume originated, hope that variety in our case does not mean lack of focus. Our group set out to explore how memory studies, especially the study of social and cultural memory, can be utilized for



interpreting biblical narratives and texts influenced by the bible, directly or otherwise. We found out that the task we set for ourselves was more complex than we initially thought: that we had to redefine 'memory', for our purposes; that the links between narration and memory needed redefinition as well; that a notion of mediating performativity should be introduced; that the burgeoning volume of literature about memory studies should be examined and reexamined for viability concerning our tasks; and so on, with the particular and obsessive issue of memory and history overshadowing the proceedings. And indeed, for some reflections on these difficult issues please refer to this volume's 'Afterword: Perspectives in Retrospect' by Frank H. Polak.

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## Part I

### BIBLICAL NARRATIVES, MEMORY, PERFORMANCE



# ARAUNAH'S THRESHING-FLOOR: A LESSON IN SHAPING HISTORICAL MEMORY

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## 1. *Introduction*

This article proposes to show how much the authors of biblical literature were conscious of the importance of shaping the national historical memory, and what tools they developed to achieve this goal.

I will examine two versions of the story about Araunah's threshing-floor in order to show that the later version, the one in 1 Chronicles 21—which is a reworking of the earlier one, in 2 Samuel 24<sup>1</sup>—was designed to meet the needs of historical memory at the time of writing.<sup>2</sup>

Before proceeding I wish to note that although Araunah is called Ornan in Chronicles, I use the name as it appears in Samuel.

## 2. *The different settings of the two versions*

The story of Araunah's threshing-floor is first mentioned within the addendum to the books of Samuel (2 Samuel 21–24). To be more precise, this story (2 Sam. 24.16b-25), in its present context, is not an independent story, but appears as the outcome of and ending to the story of David's census and the plague (2 Sam. 24.1-16a).<sup>3</sup> Because both stories are part of an addendum, rather than an integral part of the narrative of the books of Samuel, the

1. On the assumption that the Chronicler reworked the Samuel text, see Klein (2006: 417): 'This is the last time that the Chronicler quotes from the books of Samuel, and we need to review what he has selected for inclusion and what he has omitted from the final chapters of these books, 2 Samuel 21–24'.

2. This goal is additional to others. On the suggestion that the same story might have different messages, see Amit 2001: 132-37. For other messages in this text, see Klein (2006: 417): '...to indicate how the place for the temple and the altar of burnt offerings were obtained by David at divine direction. The David who sins in this chapter is also one who trusts in the manifold mercies of God (v. 13), which would also be available to the Chronicler's audience through the temple'.

3. On the possibility that 2 Samuel 24 is a combination of several independent stories, see McCarter 1984: 517-18; Anderson 1989: 283.

reader is unable to place them in the chronological sequence of the main narrative.<sup>4</sup> The circumstances in which the threshing-floor was purchased are said to have followed the counting of the people, as commanded by David, and the resultant plague. However, we are not told at what stage in his reign David wished to hold a census in order to ascertain the number of his subjects, and we can only speculate about it.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the Araunah story gives no hint that the location of the altar would eventually become the site of the temple.<sup>6</sup> According to the story in Samuel, David built the altar on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, because when the angel was about to destroy Jerusalem—after seventy-thousand people between Dan and Beersheba had already perished—God desisted just when the angel reached Araunah's threshing-floor (2 Sam. 24.15-16).<sup>7</sup> That day the prophet Gad told David to erect an altar at the site and make burnt offerings to God. David then decided to purchase the cattle and the threshing-floor from Araunah, in order not to offer sacrifices he had not paid for. Then the plague stopped (2 Sam. 24.18-25). Nothing in the 2 Samuel story suggests that this would be the site of the temple in Jerusalem.

On the one hand, the absence of any reference to the location of the temple—which was, perhaps, connected to the place where David had erected the tent for the ark of the Lord, as described in 2 Sam. 6.12-17—and, on the other hand, the explicit connection in the story with Jerusalem, leave room for doubt whether the story was meant to announce the future site of the temple, or to sanctify the choice of Jerusalem. Any position on this question is inevitably interpretational, and is usually based on the story in Chronicles.<sup>8</sup>

The latter version (1 Chron. 21.15b–22.1) clearly dispels the doubt. 'For the Chronicler, however, this is the whole point of the account', says Williamson.<sup>9</sup> The Chronicler depicts David stating clearly and directly that

4. See Smith 1899: xxvi-xxvii; Bar-Efrat 1996: 225.

5. For some speculations, see McCarter 1984: 516-17.

6. Williamson 1982: 142; Bar-Efrat 1996: 269. However, this did not prevent Hertzberg (1964: 408) from entitling the chapter: 'The Census and the Temple Site'.

7. I refer to the Hebrew *mal'ak* consistently as 'angel'.

8. Anderson (1989: 283) suggests the two possibilities: according to von Rad it is 'a Jerusalemite *hieros logos*', and according to Rudolph it is 'the *hieros logos* of the Jerusalem temple'. He concludes: 'It seems that at an earlier stage the site of this altar was not, as yet, identified with the temple hill, unless this equation is implicit in the narrative and was obvious to any reader'. At the end of his explanation he adds: 'At least at a later time, this narrative was understood also as an etiology for the choice of the temple site (1 Chr 22.1; 2 Chr 3.1)'. However, many commentators read this story in the light of Chronicles, and see, for example, note 6 above and the next paragraph.

9. Williamson (1982: 142) emphasizes that what makes it clear is the Chronicler's own addition of 21.28–22.1 (and cf. 2 Chron. 3.1).

the site of the altar on Araunah's threshing-floor 'will be the house of the Lord' (1 Chron. 22.1). This interpretation has been accepted from ancient times—and I name only the book of *Jubilees* (18.13), Flavius Josephus (*Ant.* I, 224, 227; VII, 333) and the Rabbis<sup>10</sup>—to the present, with the result that most commentators who discuss the story in Samuel automatically assume that the site was that of the future temple. A recent example is the commentary of Shimon Bar-Efrat, who emphasizes: 'The book of Samuel concludes with a pious deed of David: the acquisition and sanctification of the site of the Temple'.<sup>11</sup> In my opinion, the Chronicler's version of the story is a model of editorial revision designed to establish once and for all the indisputable status of Jerusalem with its temple and the role of David in the process.

No one, I think, would argue that the Chronicler failed to attain his purpose, so I would like to focus on the means and tools he used to achieve it.

### 3. *The Means Used by the Chronicler*

By what means did the Chronicler achieve his purpose, and thus determine the historical and cultural status of the city, in Judaism and in the monotheistic world?

**3.1.** The first step was to integrate the story into the sequence. According to the Chronicler, the story of the census and the subsequent purchase of Araunah's threshing-floor took place after the end of David's wars, as recounted in 1 Chronicles 18–19—namely, the wars with the Philistines, the Moabites, the Aramaeans and the Ammonites. The implication is that with the end of the fighting it became necessary to count the people, and this led to divine punishment in the form of a plague, followed by David's repentance and the purchase of the threshing-floor. The sequel (1 Chron. 22.2ff.) goes on to describe the preparation of working teams and materials for building the temple, and the bequest of the project to Solomon, as part of David's testament.

Thus in the Chronicler's narrative the purchase of Araunah's threshing-floor, destined to be the site of the temple, is not an addendum but an indispensable link in the chain leading up to David's testament. In other words, it constitutes the stage of preparing the site and materials prior to David's instructions to his son Solomon concerning the temple's construction and operation.

10. The Rabbis took it for granted that one of the peaks in the land of Moriah is Mount Moriah, which is mentioned in 2 Chron. 3.1; and see, for example, *M. Ta'anit* 2.4; *Sifre* Deuteronomy 62, and many more.

11. Bar-Efrat 2004: 667.

**3.2.** Another device is the enhancement of the story's genre and its conversion from an unfocused etiological story in Samuel into a focused *hieros logos* in Chronicles.<sup>12</sup>

As is well-known, the story in Samuel lacks the formulaic features and the etiological focus which would tell the reader whether the place was to be, specifically, a temple location, or would only indicate the choice of Jerusalem in general. In Chronicles, however, it is an etiological story about the dedication of a cult site—specifically, a plain link between the plot and the temple of Jerusalem. Readers of the books of Samuel are in a different situation. Because they know that Jerusalem was chosen to be not only David's capital (2 Sam. 5.5-15), but also the place of the ark (2 Samuel 6) and the intended site of the future temple (2 Samuel 7), they may feel the gap and assume that the addendum story, which is associated with the deliverance of Jerusalem, is the missing etiology of the temple location. Thus, on the one hand, they may even assume that this is why the story of the census was included in the addendum; and, on the other hand, wonder why this important story was not incorporated in the sequence of the books of Samuel.

It is worth noting that, unlike other sacred places such as Bethel (Gen. 12.8; 28.10-22; 35.1-15), Shechem (Gen. 12.6-7; 33.18-20; Deut. 27; Josh. 8.30-35; 24.1-28, 32), or Hebron (Gen. 13.18; 18.1; 23), Jerusalem lacked an etiological story to account for its status.

Moreover, Jerusalem is not mentioned explicitly in the Pentateuch, and its association with the tradition of the Patriarchs is indirect and given to interpretation. The allusions found in Pentateuchal literature, as in the case of the stories of Melchizedek and the binding of Isaac, are purely a matter of interpretation, and not all the commentators accept them as valid.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, before the description of its conquest by David, Jerusalem is mentioned only as an alien city, on the border between the territories of Judah or Benjamin (Josh. 10; 12.10; 15.8, 63; Judg. 1.8, 21; 19.11-12). The story of its conquest by David (2 Sam. 5.6-9) accounted for the custom of banning the blind and the lame from entering the temple, and for its name as the City of David—but not for why it was chosen, or the reason for locating the temple in it.

The appendix in 2 Samuel 24 fills the lack with a story of a divine manifestation and favour, which accounts for the city's choice over any other. It mentions the altar built by David to stop the pestilence from decimating the

12. On *hieros logos* in biblical historiography, see Seeligmann 1992: 35-37. For an objection to the interpretation of the story in 2 Samuel 24 as a *hieros logos*, see Knoppers 2004: 760.

13. The question why Jerusalem is not mentioned in the whole Torah literature is discussed widely in Amit 2000: 130-68, with more literature. I suggest that Jerusalem is behind the short insertion on Melchizedek (Gen. 14.18-20), but not behind the story of the Aqedah.

people, but as noted above, it says nothing that explicitly links the altar with the site of the future temple.

By contrast, the story in Chronicles is a classic *hieros logos*, accounting unambiguously for the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem, where the angel of the Lord appeared to David. The Chronicler decided to change the picture and to complete what was missing. He emphasized that when David performed the cultic ritual, he was granted a divine response in the form of fire from heaven, and later the angel's sword barred him from reaching Gibeon, all of which led him to conclude that the site of the altar on Araunah's threshing floor was indeed the house of the Lord, as he said: 'Here will be the House of the Lord and here the altar of burnt offerings for Israel' (1 Chron. 22.1).

If in the Deuteronomistic history the Jerusalem temple is a project of Solomon, in the Chronistic history he is only the contractor, because the place, the plans, the materials, the management, and even the contents were prepared by David and passed on to Solomon in David's will.

**3.3.** The third device is the implementation of intertextual tools, such as the repetition of words, expressions and semantic fields for close or identical meanings, as well as the highlighting of a character's similar qualities and actions.<sup>14</sup> The use of these tools in the relatively short story in Chronicles is unusually intense, giving it the appearance of a storehouse of intertextual references. Examination of the story as it progresses reveals that many of its verses allude to other texts, serving as a source of influence and creating associations, in effect adding David to a parade of the nation's heroes.

The following are the allusions:<sup>15</sup>

- 3.3.1 **V. 16a1.** David seeing '*the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth*' is influenced by Ezek. 8.3 and Zech. 5.9. This

14. It is rare in biblical scholarship that most commentators agree about the date of a text, but this is the case of Chronicles, about which all agree that it is late. Therefore, when it comes to intertextuality, it is clear that the Chronicler drew on his sources, like the Torah literature, the former prophets and some of the later prophets. Williamson (1982: 143) emphasizes that 'This process of allowing other texts to colour the detail of narration had already begun prior to the Chronicler's own composition, but, since textual evidence to the contrary is lacking, we must suppose that he continued this process, whether for theological or more generally typological reasons'. Knoppers (2004: 758) adds: 'The similarities [...] seem to result from deliberate authorial (and not scribal) activity'.

15. I would like to emphasize that my purpose here is not a close reading of the whole text or the different details of lower criticism. I discuss these issues only when it comes to the verses, or parts of verses, which are important to the question of intertextuality.

description does not appear in Samuel.<sup>16</sup> Its presence highlights the scene of divine manifestation and places David in line with the nation's prophets.

- 3.3.2 **V. 16a2.** The description of the angel with '*a drawn sword in his hand*', which is absent in Samuel, is taken from Joshua's encounter with the angel on the eve of the Jericho conquest (Josh. 5.13). Thus David the conqueror gets to share in the glory of Joshua, the first conqueror of Canaan.<sup>17</sup>
- 3.3.3 **V. 16b.** The description of David and the elders, covered in sackcloth and falling on their faces, recalls the description of Hezekiah and his senior officials, likewise in sackcloth, appealing to Isaiah during the siege of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19.1-2). This description, which is also absent in Samuel, alludes to Hezekiah, the Deuteronomist's favorite king (2 Kgs 18.5), in whose reign Jerusalem was saved from destruction (2 Kgs 19.32-35), and to whom the Chronicler attributes an extensive cult reform (2 Chronicles 29-31). In our story, too, David's repentance contributed to God's decision not to destroy Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> This association hints at the future salvation of Jerusalem and places David alongside Hezekiah's positive image.<sup>19</sup>
- 3.3.4 **Vv. 18-20.** On the basis of this passage, the story has been linked to Gideon's encounter with the angel of the Lord (Judg. 6.11-24) when he was threshing wheat in a secret place.<sup>20</sup> That encounter also concluded with a fire that consumed the offering presented to the angel and the building of an altar at the site (vv. 21-24). Here the association lies in the motif rather than in the wording.
- 3.3.5 **Vv. 22-26a.** This passage is loaded with allusions to the story of Abraham's purchase of the Machpelah cave in Hebron (Gen. 23).

16. The fragment from 4QSam<sup>a</sup> shows that the scroll's text here is much fuller than the MT text of Samuel, which means that some of the Chronicler's allusions were already in his *Vorlage*. As to the material from Qumran, see Cross 1964: 294; Rofé 1990. According to Knoppers (2004: 762), 'The parallels between 4QSam<sup>a</sup> and Chronicles indicate that the Chronicler was remarkably conservative in quoting his *Vorlage*'.

17. An angel with a drawn sword in his hand appears in Balaam's story too: Num. 22.23, 31. However, there his function is different.

18. We have to keep in mind that David's prayer comes after God's decision. Therefore God's decision is not the result of David's prayer, which is mentioned in order to demonstrate David's behaviour.

19. In her interpretation of v. 16, Japhet (1993: 384) adds: 'The threshing-floor scene is a new creation, forged from previously isolated elements'.

20. Williamson (1982: 148), following Willi, speaks of 'a deliberate comparison', because the one who threshes the wheat is Ornan, though he thinks that 'the basic analogy is attractive'. For the details of the comparison, see Klein 2006: 427.



While the story's essence—namely, the seller offering the object as a gift, and the buyer insisting on paying its full price—does appear in Samuel, where it looks like a recurrent motif, the Chronicler's version indicates a borrowing from the story in Genesis:

- (1) The root *n-t-n* recurs five times in Chronicles, seven times in Genesis, but only once in the relevant Samuel passage. There is no doubt that the Chronicler was influenced by the function of the verb in the negotiations over the burial cave, where it denotes either giving or selling, but the evolving negotiations reveal it to mean payment in full. In Chronicles, too, the term is ambivalent—David means getting for a price, whereas Araunah understand giving as a gift.
- (2) The expression '*at full price*' (בכסף מלא) appears first in Genesis but nowhere else—except in Chronicles, where it is repeated (vv. 22, 24).
- (3) The inclusive purchase motif appears in both stories. In the Machpelah story it consists of the burial ground, which includes the field and the cave, while in Chronicles it includes everything that was at the threshing floor at that moment—the oxen, the threshing boards and the wheat, enabling David to make a burnt offering as required in the priestly tradition (Exod. 29.38-41; Num. 15.1-11).
- (4) In Samuel, the price of the threshing-floor is relatively low, whereas the Machpelah is costlier. In Chronicles, following Genesis, the price of the threshing floor is very high, especially as the sum of 600 shekels was paid in gold.

3.3.6 **V. 23b.** '*...and offerings of well-being*'. This part is missing in Samuel. Chronicles follows Exod. 29.1-2, 38-41 and Num. 15.1-21, which demand that burnt offerings should be accompanied by a cereal offering.<sup>21</sup>

3.3.7 **Vv. 22, 25.** The word '*place*' or '*site*' (מקום) is repeated. This term, which has often an association with 'religious site' (Gen. 12.6, 13.4; Deut. 12.5; 14.23-25; Josh. 9.27, and many more), is also repeated in the story of Jacob's dream (Gen. 28.11 [3 times], 16, 17, 19), which refers to the dedication of the temple in Bethel.<sup>22</sup>

3.3.8 **V. 26b.** When the transaction was completed, David '*invoked the Lord*' with '*burnt offerings and offerings of well-being*', and God responded by sending *fire from heaven onto the altar*. This description is influenced by the story of the divine fire on the altar built following Moses' order in the desert (Lev. 9.24)—a motif used again by the Chronicler in the description of the dedication of Solomon's

21. See also 1 Chron. 16.29; 23.29; 2 Chron. 7.7.

22. The association with Bethel does not seem coincidental to me, and see paragraph 3.3.10 below.

temple (2 Chron. 7.1), and by the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18.37-38). The use of this motif emphasizes the importance and legitimacy of the temple in Jerusalem, and includes David in the glory of Moses and Elijah.

3.3.9 **Vv. 28-30.** The reference to the '*tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offerings, were at that time in the shrine at Gibeon*', indicates the importance of the shrine that was already there. The text also states that David was unable to go to Gibeon '*to worship the Lord*' at that time. Be these verses an interpolation or not,<sup>23</sup> they are clearly intended to indicate to David as well as to the story's readers that Jerusalem was the superior cult site.

3.3.10 **V. 22.1:** David states that the place of the altar in Araunah's threshing-floor is Israel's legitimate temple, repeating the deictic expression 'this' (זֶה) twice: '*This is the house of the Lord and this is the altar for the burnt offerings for Israel*'.<sup>24</sup> This phrasing takes us back to the story of Jacob's dream, in which Jacob reiterates the sanctity of the place by repeating the deictic expression 'this' four times (Gen. 28.16-17). It is difficult to ignore the resemblance between Jacob's words—'*This is none other than the house of God*'—and those of David—'*This is the house of the Lord God*'—although Jacob was sanctifying Bethel while the Chronicler is discussing Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

We find that the various allusions serve to place David alongside the nation's greatest figures, from the Patriarchs (Abraham and Jacob), through a number of leaders (Moses, Joshua, Gideon and Hezekiah), to the prophets (Ezekiel and Zechariah). Thus David, whose failings were highlighted in the book of Samuel, is elevated in Chronicles to a higher status, engraving him in the historical memory as a supreme king who combined the qualities of the nation's great men, from primordial times to the author's presence, a king who represented God's kingdom on earth.<sup>26</sup>

23. See Japhet's detailed discussion (1993: 388-90). But Knoppers (2004: 760) argues that 'Not the Chronicler, but a later scribe is bothered by the story's evidence for divinely approved worship away from the Gibeon altar'.

24. Although the citations are according to the Jewish Bible = JPS, here I bring my own translation, which reflect exactly the Hebrew and my discussion relating to the Hebrew version.

25. See Rudolph (1955: 148), who connects it to an anti-Samaritan polemic, but according to Klein (2006: 429) 'he errs in attributing this to an anti-Samaritan polemic'.

26. On the perception of God's kingdom in the book of Chronicles, see Japhet 1989: 395-411.

#### 4. *Jerusalem and its Rivals*

This story is also significant with regard to the status of the temple, by adopting a firm position on the preeminence of Jerusalem, as opposed to alternative temples. We know that during the Second Temple period, despite the law centralizing the cult, there were a few active temples to Yhwh, several of which will be listed. Aside from the temple on Mount Gerizim, which some archaeologists today are convinced was already active in the 5th century BCE,<sup>27</sup> there was the one at Yeb (Elephantine),<sup>28</sup> which was destroyed in 410 and rebuilt in 402 BCE. It is also thought that there may have been a temple, likewise called 'the place', in Casiphia in Babylonia (Ezr. 8.17), from which Ezra brought the Levites to serve in the Jerusalem temple.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Blenkinsopp maintains that Hag. 2.14, Zech. 7.1-3 and Jer. 41.4-9 indicate that there was a temple in Bethel during the Persian period,<sup>30</sup> and Vink is convinced that there was a temple in Deir 'Alla in Transjordan, hinted at in Josh. 22.9-34.<sup>31</sup> I would confine myself to adding the temple at Leontopolis, possibly hinted at in Isa. 19.19,<sup>32</sup> mentioned by Josephus (*Ant.* XII, 387-88; XIII, 62-73, 285; *War* I, 31-33; VII, 421-37), where Onias IV was the high priest and which was destroyed by the Romans in 74 CE. Though this temple was built in 168 BCE—i.e., long after the book of Chronicles had been written—it does demonstrate the multiplicity of temples and their persistence.<sup>33</sup>

The existence of temples rival to the one in Jerusalem not only in the Chronicler's time (early 4th century BCE), but before and after him, explains the need to depict Jerusalem as the sole legitimate temple of the one God Yhwh, especially vis-à-vis Gibeon, with its tradition of sacred cult objects (1 Chron. 21.29), and even more Bethel, with its tradition of primordial sanctity.

27. Magen 1990, Stern-Magen 2002; see also Na'aman 1993.

28. Cowley 1923, no. 13, 30.

29. See Brockington (1969: 100), who asks: 'Does this mean a sanctuary of some sort?' However, Blenkinsopp (1988: 165-66) is convinced that 'It must have been the site of a cultic establishment of some kind, and the peculiar construction "Casiphia the place", repeated twice in the same verse, recalls the Deuteronomic use of "place" for temple... This in its turn has raised the question whether the Babylonian exiles, like their co-religionists in Elephantine, worshipped in their own temple'. There is also speculation that Zech. 5.5-11 refers to a temple in Babylon, because of the wording, 'a shrine for it in the land of Shinar'.

30. Blenkinsopp 1998; 2003; and see also Schwartz 1985.

31. Vink 1969: 74-75; on Josh. 22.9-34 as a polemic against temples which are located outside God's territory, see Dinnur 2006.

32. See Skinner 1915: 158-61.

33. This list could be continued, but as this paper deals only with the Jerusalemite temple, the above will suffice.

### 5. *Shaping the Memory*

This dispute over temples explains why the Chronicler felt it necessary to establish conclusively that the Jerusalem temple was also Mount Moriah, thereby dismissing any interpretation linking the binding of Isaac with the temple on Mount Gerizim,<sup>34</sup> and chose to open the story of the building of the temple in Solomon's reign (2 Chron. 3.1) by emphasizing the triple link of the Temple Mount with Mount Moriah and Araunah's threshing-floor.

This interpretation of the Chronicler shaped the historical memory. The author of the book of Jubilees already wrote, in reference to the binding of Isaac, that the name Abraham gave the place was Mount Zion (18.13). Josephus, who recounted the story according to the sequence in Samuel, added, 'And it so happened that it was the very place to which Abraham brought his son to be sacrificed' (*Ant.* VII, 333). And most commentators follow suit to this day.

### 6. *Conclusion*

In the absence of other testimonies, we cannot but conclude that it was the Chronicler's version of the story about David's purchase of Araunah's threshing floor that established the view that the Temple Mount was the site of the binding of Isaac, as well as of the divine manifestation and salvation in Araunah's threshing floor. By turning the story of this acquisition from an almost marginal addendum into a key element in the status of Jerusalem vis-à-vis its rivals, and by loading the story with many allusions to the leading figures of the nation's epic, the Chronicler made a major contribution to its position in Jewish monotheistic civilization and its inheritors.<sup>35</sup> This tells us much about the power of an ideologically shaped story, the expectations it raises, and its capacity for designing history.

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34. This kind of interpretation began in the days of the Second Temple, and cf. the Samaritans' version of Genesis 22.

35. Knoppers (2004: 760) declares: 'Hence, the Chronicler construes the mandate to construct an altar at this particular location, not as an ad hominem emergency maneuver to avert divine wrath, but as a decisive turning-point in the history of Israelite religion'.

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## REMEMBERING THE PAST IN THE PSALMS

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### *A. Passion for the Past*

Steven Breck Reid has been thinking about memory for a long time. In discussing the Song of the Sea in Exodus in an episode of *Mysteries of the Bible: 'Old Testament Heroines'* (1997), he said of this poem, 'It only has power when it's remembered. Without Miriam, it's not remembered'.

Though this interest represents 'a new and emerging field,' once you start to think about memory, you realize it is a practice essential to the very way in which meaning is made. We all do it, all the time. In the Psalms for instance, there is not a single prayer in the Western or Eastern canons (150 or 151 Psalms) that doesn't depend upon something remembered about self, community, or God.

In 2002, Werner Kelber rightly said that critical work with memory had 'burgeoned in humanities and social sciences' through 'no comparable effect can be noticed in New Testament scholarship' (so quoted by Alan Kirk in *Semeia* 52, p. 1). Today this is changing. We see increasing evidence in biblical scholarship of attention to memory theories. What was once in the background is coming to the foreground. I suspect we are now dealing with, 'What is or will be the yield of memory theories in biblical studies?'

On April 7, 2008, Elie Wiesel poetically said on *All Things Considered*,<sup>1</sup> 'Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future'.

What is changing is that we have brought to consciousness some of the constraining bedrock ideas we have held. In a book Sherrie Reynolds and I have just finished, *Higher Education Reconceived: A Geography of Change*,<sup>2</sup> we argue that,

Beliefs and assumptions formed by ideas that undergird a culture and/or time period are layered within larger narratives or interpretive frameworks. Periodically, a kind of earthquake erupts through the intellectual landscape

1. 'A God Who Remembers', online, *All Things Considered*, April 7, 2008.
2. Toni Craven and Sherrie Reynolds, *Higher Education Reconceived: A Geography of Change* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2009).

that overturns these deeply held ideas. When bedrock assumptions topple, as in the Enlightenment, there is a phase shift in human history. We are currently living in the midst of such an era. Assumptions that have been invisible for generations are now being questioned. Bedrock ideas of the dominant culture are giving way, and a new story is emerging (p. 16).

Many of the assumptions that defined and shaped ideas about biblical studies, constraining literally everything from definition of ‘classical texts’, how we understand history and the practices of the disciplines of biblical studies, to how we construct and shape a syllabus, class discussion, assessment, and qualifying examinations are giving way to a new story that I believe we will shape together as a constellation of scholars.

In a lovely essay on ‘The Janus face of Mnemosyne’, neurobiologists Yadin Dudai and Mary Carruthers, from the Faculties of English, History and Religious Studies at NYU, write:

In ancient Greek mythology, Memory (Mnemosyne) was the mother of all the muses. In the mortal world, Aristotle, Galen, and their medieval Arab commentators, emphasized the role of memory in the ethical virtue of ‘prudence’, the ability to make wise judgments and plan effectively. The word used by these scholars for concepts was ‘phantasms’ (in Greek, *phantaisai*; in Latin, *imagines*). Memory was also associated with prophetic writing, as in the Book of Ezekiel, whose prophecy consisted in recreating imaginatively the dimensions of the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem to envision and motivate the future—in this case, the Jews’ return from captivity. Important in this planning effort is not the accuracy of reproduction, but the act of imaginative recreation itself as a totally sensed and felt experience.<sup>3</sup>

This one-page essay reviews our collective memory of memory or neural plasticity, concluding that it ‘is worth remembering that Mnemosyne has a Janus face, looking to both time past and time future’ simultaneously.

### B. *What I Wish I Had Been Able to Do or Had Known*

In 2005–2006 there was an International Symposium, ‘Narrative, Narrativity, and Memory’, sponsored by the University of Amsterdam (with Athalya Brenner) and Tel Aviv University (with Frank Polak), which initiated this volume, but which I had to miss for health reasons. I was experiencing first-hand magnetic resonance imaging, MRI’s of the brain and spine. The workings of memory can sometimes get very basic—how to write one’s name or speak in words, for instance.

Then, in Fall 2006, ironically, I taught a course on ‘Memory and Narrative’ with the hope of answering more fully what a better understanding

3. ‘The Janus Face of Mnemosyne’, *Nature* 434, 31 March, 2005, p. 567; essay available online at [www.nature.com/nature](http://www.nature.com/nature). See also Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).



of narrative and memory could contribute to our interpretation of biblical texts. When I was ordering books for the course, the volume edited by Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*,<sup>4</sup> was not available. When I found this rich resource, we did profitably read Alan Kirk's 'Social and Cultural Memory' as well as Werner H. Kelber's 'The Works of Memory: Christian Origins as Mnemo-History—A Response' in the class.<sup>5</sup> But I was stumbling around looking for other Bible specific resources, especially those applicable to Hebrew Bible studies. How I missed Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer's 1998 edited volume, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* is a mystery, but I did.<sup>6</sup> I chose interdisciplinary works including Donald E. Polkinghorne's *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*;<sup>7</sup> Lewis P. and Sandra K. Hinchman's edited collection *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*;<sup>8</sup> Janice Haaken's *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory and the Perils of Looking Back*;<sup>9</sup> and most helpfully, Hilde Lindemann Nelson's *Damaged Identities: Narrative Repair*, a book I highly recommend.<sup>10</sup> Frameworks for looking back, and for recovering historical memory were what I was after, including ways of recovering the past in order to understand the present and have some guidelines for the future. These books each helped in their own way.

### C. What I Know Now

Today I would select other resources. Here I will mention four books that have been helpful to me for one reason or another.

First, Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (2007) point out helpful information, such as the fact that the first major critique of the 'memory boom' of the 1990s was Kerwin Lee Klein's

4. *Semeia Studies* 52 (2005).

5. Alan Kirk's article is on pp. 1-42 and Kelber's is on pp. 221-48 in Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. *Semeia Studies* 52 [2005]).

6. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Dartmouth, 1998).

7. Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (SUNY Series in Philosophy of the Social Sciences, NY: State University of New York, 1988).

8. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (eds.), *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences* (SUNY Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

9. Janice Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

10. Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001).



essay 'On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse' (2000),<sup>11</sup> in which he warned that 'memory' has assumed the role of a meta-theoretical trope, and in its current usage refers both to individual psychologies and to cultural practices of remembering and their attendant material artifacts. 'Discussions of collective memory', Klein argues, 'too readily accord to memory the status of a historical agent' (p. 136). It is important, Klein maintains, 'to remain attentive to *who* is doing the remembering and the forgetting' (*Theories of Memory*, p. 10). Memory appeals to us, 'because of the (often unstated) implication that it occupies a site of authenticity. In this sense, "memory" currently serves as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse. Memory is often opposed to the hegemony of history...' (*Theories of Memory*, p. 10).

In *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, you will find a comprehensive survey of theories of memory from the classical period to the present day. I cannot recommend this book more highly for its recollection of memory's past and its guesses about a future direction for memory studies, including that emphasis on forgetting may play a significant future role in understanding memory (p. 12). 'The attempt to think through the relationship between forgetting and forgiving' is 'an important focus for both individuals and political communities, and we are confronted with the problems of how to live with, and move on from, violent, disruptive and traumatic histories' (p. 13).

This book is a marvelous general introduction to memory theories and says straight out that from Aristotle's distinction between remembering and recollecting to the present, 'memory has proved itself too overwhelming a topic to be encompassed by a single definition' (p. 3). The various definitions of memory

are not exclusive but in continual dialogue with one another: It is overly simple to think of memory as one 'faculty' which can be explained by one account. But it is not much better to think of memory as two faculties ('habit memory' [meaning learned behaviors] and 'conscious memory' [meaning recalled or recollected behaviors]), according to Mary Warnock and others (p. 3).

Second, *The Poetics of Memory*<sup>12</sup> (1998), edited by Thomas Wägenbaur. His 'Memory and Recollection: The Cognitive and Literary Model'<sup>13</sup> maintains that 'The debate on *memory* and *recollection* in the humanities has become part of the larger controversy between *mind* and *brain* research'.

11. Kerwin Lee Klein, 'On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse', *Representations* 69 (2000), pp. 127-50.

12. Thomas Wägenbaur (ed.), *The Poetics of Memory* (Stauffenburg Colloquium, 45; Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1998).

13. T. Wägenbaur, 'Memory and Recollection: The Cognitive and Literary Model', in Wägenbaur (ed.), *Poetics of Memory*, pp. 3-22.

Wägenbaur makes the important claim that ‘the major achievement of memory is not to remember what has actually happened, but a constant discrimination between recollection and forgetting’ (p. 4).

Third, Doron Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan and Christian Societies of the Graeco-Roman World*<sup>14</sup> (2004), questions the idea of Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945), whom some think of as the father of modern memory theory, of ‘collective memory’, proposing instead ‘common events’, ‘common matters’ or ‘common experiences that may have been known to the community (p. x). Mendels also maintains that, ‘The past is used in a recycled manner, in different forms of memory’ (p. xvi).

Lastly, in *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible*,<sup>15</sup> Ronald Hendel makes three instructive points:

- (1) There is an old tradition preserved in the Palestinian Targums, that the Hebrew Bible is ‘the Book of Memories’ (ספר דוכרניא, p. ix).<sup>16</sup>
- (2) ‘Even if some or many of these formative events did not really happen in the way they were told, they were—and still are—felt to be a shared memory of a collective past’ (p. 8).
- (3) Genealogical time or ‘generation’ (*toledot*) time suggests that ‘the concept of genealogical time prominent in many biblical passages, is a useful one for understanding the Bible’s sense ‘not only for the past and the present, but also for the future’ (p. 117). I came to understand that *toledot* or ‘generation time’ is time for the sake of the next generation.

#### D. For the Sake of the Next Generation

*Toledot* does not appear in the Psalms. But Hendel’s concept of genealogical time is helpful in understanding the Psalter’s sense of the past, present, and future. Forms of דור are used to express concern for the next ‘generation’ in the Psalms. So in: Psalms 9–10 (Individual Lament); 12 and 14 (Communal Laments); 22 (Individual Lament); 33 (Hymn of Praise); 45 (Royal Psalm);

14. Doron Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan and Christian Societies of the Graeco-Roman World* (Library of Second Temple Studies, 45; New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

15. Ronald Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

16. Hendel’s note details where these references can be found in the Palestinian Targums and he thanks Daniel Boyarin for clarifying the passages in Exod. 12.42 and 15.18. The references comes from Exod 12.42 (Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan, Fragment Targums V and N) and Exod. 15.18 (Fragment Targum P, Geniza manuscript FF). The targumim in Bible Works 7.0 for Exod. 12.42 and 15.18 show the uses of ספר דוכרניא.

48 (Song of Zion); 49 (Wisdom Psalm); 61 and 71 (Individual Laments); 72 (Royal Psalm); 77 (Individual Lament); 78 (Liturgy of Divine Protection); 79, 85 and 90 (Communal Laments); 95 (Judgment Liturgy); 100 (Communal Lament); 102 (Individual Lament); 105 and 106 (Liturgy of Divine Protection); 109 (Individual Lament); 112 and 119 (Wisdom Psalms); 145 and 146 (Hymns of Praise).

Cutting across form-critical categories, concerns for the future generation appear in hymns of praise, individual and communal laments, royal psalms, songs of Zion, wisdoms psalms, judgment liturgies, and liturgies of divine protection. Thus memories and concern for the future of the next generation eclipse form-critical categories. Memories of the past for the sake of the future generation become a new way of thinking about these psalms and redescribing their cognitive framework. A short case study of Psalm 71 will illustrate this point.

#### *E. Psalm 71.1-24*<sup>17</sup>

Redescribing the world of Psalm 71, one of these psalms that make use of concern for the next generation, encourages me to think with you about both text and method.<sup>18</sup> The text is part of the poem-prayer of a gray-haired, aging musician (cf. vv. 9, 18, 22) who sings lament and praise with harp and lyre (v. 22).<sup>19</sup> Interpretations generally highlight the fact that this trust-filled psalmist pledges to ‘hope continually’ (v. 14) and to proclaim God’s rescue and deliverance ‘to all generations to come’ (v. 18); in this instance, those who meant to harm the suppliant are themselves ‘put to shame, and disgraced’ (v. 24). A lifetime of experiences—birth (v. 6), youth (v. 17), and old age (vv. 9, 18)—lie behind this proclamation that what goes around comes around. Past memories intertwine with the present and hope for the future.

Walter Brueggemann tells his students to enter the world of the biblical text through (1) rhetorical analysis of its artistic literary design, (2) linguistic analysis (word study) that focuses ‘upon the freight carried by particular words that emerge as important in rhetorical analysis’,<sup>20</sup> and (3) ideological

17. Portions of the following comments appeared in T. Craven, ‘Between Text and Sermon: Psalm 71’, in *Interpretation* 58 (January 2004), pp. 56-58.

18. I am deeply indebted to W. Brueggemann, ‘That the World May Be Redescribed’, *Interpretation* 56 (2002), pp. 359-67 for his wonderfully provocative reflection on exegetical methods suitable for faith and criticism.

19. J.L. Crenshaw points out that either rhetorical flourish or literal membership in a professional singers’ guild can account for the musical references (*The Psalms: An Introduction* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], p. 150).

20. ‘That the World May Be Redescribed’, p. 362.

analysis that asks, 'Whose vested interest is voiced here?'<sup>21</sup> He argues that this three-step practice is 'doable without great technical competence or a host of tools' by those who 'will do something discerning with the text, but not everything'.<sup>22</sup>

Word study (Step 2), Brueggemann says, is a

way of entering into 'intertextuality', whereby wording, phrasing, or imagery in one text alludes to another, perhaps quoting or being quoted or perhaps offering a less precise correlation. The outcome is to situate the text in a network of other texts, so that while the text is the point of singular attention, it is not isolated.<sup>23</sup>

It is surely the case that the imaginative world of the Bible encourages the reinterpretation or reanimation of one text in light of another. In the case of Psalm 71, for instance, the text, according to Carroll Stuhlmueller, is a 'collage of quotations from other psalms'<sup>24</sup> or a 'filigree of other laments or songs of thanksgiving'.<sup>25</sup> Citation, allusions, and echoes testify to the importance within the Bible of reapplying, reworking, and reformulating biblical traditions. New speech—or in this case a new song—assumes that each new generation not only can, but must, take up reinterpretation of the paradigmatic stories of creation, exodus, and covenant in order to tell of God's ready attention to human plight and inclination to deliver. Speech about and to God rests in the memories of a history of God's seeing, hearing, remembering, and intervening when Israel cries out (Exod. 2.23-25; 3.7-14). Israel has a story that eventually, if not always quickly, works across the long-haul, speaking order in the face of chaos, life in the face of death, success in the face of failure, and survival in the face of defeat.

Michael Fishbane, focusing of the textual-exegetical dimensions of the Hebrew Bible, describes intertextuality in terms of 'inner-biblical' interpretation and exegesis, suggesting that it is the essence of biblical texts to be

21. 'I intend this question to be taken in a quite open way. The answer may be a truth claim offered in good faith, or it might be a theological conviction stated with passion, or it might be a bad faith assertion serving political, economic interest. The purpose of the question is to help students consider the ways in which *ideological forces* are at work in our best theological claims and in our most faithful interpretation' ('That the World May Be Redescribed', p. 362).

22. 'That the World May Be Redescribed', pp. 366-67.

23. 'That the World May Be Redescribed', p. 362.

24. J.C. McCann, 'Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections on the Book of Psalms', in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), IV, p. 958.

25. C. Stuhlmueller, *Psalms 1* (OTM, 21; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), p. 317, lists repetitions between vv. 1-3 and Ps 31.1-3a; vv. 5-6 and Ps 22.9-10; v. 12a and Ps 22.1, 11, 19; v. 12b and Ps 38.22, 40.13; v. 13 and Ps 35.4, 26; v. 18 and Ps 22.30-31; v. 19 and Ps 36.6.

reinterpreted by successive generations.<sup>26</sup> Others distinguish ‘intertextuality’ as a broader interaction between text and culture. ‘Text’ for deconstructionist literary critics who follow Bakhtin, Barthes, Kristeva, and Derrida includes any system of signs, not simply literary texts. For the Bible, such an understanding of intertextuality means bringing interpretive partners from outside the canon. Anthropology, cognitive psychology, computer science (called by some ‘prosthetic memory’), education, ethnology, film and television, linguistics, literary criticism, psycholinguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics, personal interests of all sorts, come to the interpretive process with enriching questions, insights, and interests.

For biblical interpretation, it seems to me that the act of forging links between text and meaning is primarily an act of memory-making for both psalmist and interpreter that could be helpfully uncovered by a four-step process that holds as points of entry to the text: (1) the compositional shape of the text; (2) word-study of key terms; (3) inner-biblical exegesis that highlights resonances between biblical texts; and (4) intertextuality that brings the concerns of the cultural setting of the listeners to the interpretive process. Such a process of ‘imaginative appreciation’ of the text involves ‘looking *at*’ the text, as well as ‘looking *through*’ it.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of Psalm 71, the compositional shape of the text is tempered by its context in a prayer that Konrad Schaefer charts as a two-panel diptych:<sup>28</sup>

<i>First panel</i>	<i>Second panel</i>
vv. 5-6a, recollection: birth	v. 17a, recollection: youth
vv. 6b-8, present praise	vv. 17b, 19, present praise
v. 9, may God not forsake one in old age	v. 18, may God not forsake one in old age
vv. 10-11, description of present trouble	v. 20a, reference to past assault
vv. 12-13, request for help and curse of enemies	vv. 20b-21, confidence in God’s intervention
vv. 14-16, promise of praise for the rescue	vv. 22-24, promise of praise for the rescue

26. For bibliography and summary, see C.S. McKenzie, ‘Inner-Biblical Interpretation, Hebrew Bible’, in J.H. Hayes (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), pp. 538-40.

27. W.P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), p. 9. Brown explores the iconic power of the metaphors employed in the psalms to inspire new theological vision.

28. K. Schaefer, *Psalms* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), pp. 170-71.

God's 'righteousness' (vv. 2, 16, 19) and 'righteous acts' (vv. 15, 24) occupy the psalmist 'all day long' (vv. 8, 15, 24). 'Shame' (vv. 1, 13, 24) frames and gives sequence to this prayer in which petitions ('let me never be put to shame', v. 1; 'let my accusers be put to shame and consumed', v. 13) are followed by reported relief ('those who tried to do me harm have been put to shame, and disgraced', v. 24); restitution to 'honor' is sure (v. 20). Text divisions are vv. 1-8, testimony that God is refuge and rescuer; vv. 9-16, petitions, trust, and praise; vv. 17-24, autobiography of praise and hope for the future.<sup>29</sup> Because Psalm 71 lacks a superscription, it is often linked to Psalm 70, with which it shares urgency for relief (70.1, 5; 71.12) from those who mean harm or hurt (70.2; 71.13, 24), in addition to repetitions of the verb 'shame' (70.2, 4; 71.1, 13, 24).

Inner-biblical exegesis is well underway in these linkages between Psalms 70 and 71. Psalm 70 is almost identical to Ps 40.13-17, and both occur very near the ends of Books I and II. Because Psalm 71 quotes Psalms 22 and 31, it has been associated with the passion of Jesus and the services of Tuesday of Holy Week.<sup>30</sup> In Ps 71.5-6, 'For you, O LORD, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you' (NRSV), as in Ps 22.9-10, '*from my birth*' (Heb. *min*), may mean *after* exiting the womb or *while in* it. By contrast in Ps 139.13 and Job 10.8-12 sustenance begins unambiguously during the time *in utero*.

Intertextuality, I maintain, brings interests from outside the biblical text to the interpretive process. Here illustrations could helpfully be drawn from movies<sup>31</sup> or other linkages known to the community (such as art exhibits or current events). Age, affliction, confidence in God's intervention—all support the bringing of other stories to this interpretive process. In the case of Psalm 71, discussion of divine anatomy, divine roles, or questions related to God as mother raise pertinent contemporary memories for some. In the context of Holy Week, many Christians may be ready to grapple with God as a parent who requires the death of the only Son. Given the 'shame' that haunts many Christian communities of late, memories of this aspect of the text are in order. In short, the 'text' of the interests and needs of the community comes into play in this stage of interpretation. It is precisely here, I believe, that the spiritual needs and questions of the community are given voice through imaginative interactions of memory.

29. See T. Craven and W. Harrelson, 'The Psalms', in *NISB* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), pp. 748-892 (813).

30. See J.L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), p. 234. Compare Pss 22.10 and 71.6; 22.11 and 71.12; 31.1-3 and 71.1-3.

31. See Peter Malone and Rose Pacatta, *Lights, Camera..., Faith! A Movie Lover's Guide to Scripture* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, Lectionary Cycle A, 2001; Lectionary Cycle B, 2002; Lectionary Cycle C, 2003).

Finally, it is incumbent on text and interpretation, teaching and memory to bring a living word to a particular community. As Uriel Simon has said,

Each generation produces its own Bible commentaries, in accordance with what it find perplexing, its exegetical methods, and its emotional and spiritual needs. A generation that shirks its duty of reinterpretation is shutting its ears to the message that the Bible has to offer. The gates of exegesis are not shut and never will be; each generation has its own special key.<sup>32</sup>

Focus on the text takes us both *into it* and *beyond it*. Compositional artistry evidenced in the shape of the text; word-study of key terms that emerge from literary-rhetorical analysis; inner-biblical exegesis that highlights resonances between biblical texts; and intertextuality that brings the concerns of this biblical text to ‘texts’ of other sorts, charge us in the case of Psalm 71 to remember a story bigger than the limits of one psalm or even two, Psalms 70–71. Rich images of endurance through old-age, of confidence that God will not forsake either the psalmist or us, is remembered for the sake of the next generation. Or as Steven Breck Reid has said, Miriam’s story ‘only has power when it’s remembered’. To which I would like to add, memory theories bring together numerous perspectives, methods, and disciplines whose redemptive potential for individuals and the discipline of biblical interpretation is enormous. Memory theories bring to consciousness some of the constraining bedrock ideas that bind us.

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32. U. Simon, *Jonah* (JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: JPS, 1999), p. vi.



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## STORY, MEMORY, IDENTITY: BENJAMIN

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We must all know by now that stories construct worlds into which we can step, that memory is not just photographic but creative, and that identity is created by both story and memory. We also know that stories and memories exist at the social as well as the personal level, since identity is never purely individual but also embraces family, social circle, profession, class, nation, religion and race.<sup>1</sup> We are a talking species and it is talk that has enabled us to communicate our thoughts and thus create not only a shared world—or set of worlds—but also that complex and competing mix of identities that we call personality. Talking externalizes personality, which then becomes externally fragmented among those who hear us and see us, as well as fragmented inside ourselves. But through talking stories—and of course this includes the medium of writing—we create order and meaning: an ordered world, an ordered history and ordered persons. However, the interacting collective and individual memories are neither totally reliable nor indeed coherent; individual and social identity are both multi-layered; memory is creative; and forgetting is not always a matter of failure but of intent.

These observations can be elaborated with theory and the empirical data they have generated, though intelligent reflection and common sense are probably sufficient to support them. In the (post-)postmodern intellectual climate of the twenty-first century they can almost be taken for granted. Where a particular theory might be useful, however, is in acknowledging that narratives and memories often use code and symbol: I refer especially to Freud<sup>2</sup> and the entire psychoanalytic movement that he generated and which has influenced subsequent literary theory, especially in respect of the dream as a signifier of memory or of desire (or often both together). According to this theoretical current, underlying the personality we create

1. The inventor of the concept of 'collective memory' (sometimes interchangeable with 'cultural memory' and 'social memory'), the philosopher-sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, in fact proposed, almost certainly under the influence of Durkheim, that individual memory was not possible without a social dimension (Halbwachs 1935 [ET 1980, 1992]).

2. In particular, Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, first published in 1900.

and recreate for ourselves and for each other, and therefore underneath the narratives we generate and project, is a massive subconscious from which we draw our narratives and memories, and, more importantly, in which reside memories and narratives that we do not want to disclose or confront. In Freud's theory the dream is the primal narrative, but it is solipsistic. For social dreams we have to resort to something like social memory, and perhaps also shared structures of thought that make social psychoanalysis possible—and here the theoretical streams are those of Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss (less so Jung and his 'collective unconscious'), and the structuralism (both cultural and literary) that rests upon mechanisms of encoding. Like personal dreams and memories, social dreams (myths) and memories ('histories') have a surface plot, but are also susceptible to decoding. I need not add that dreams and symbolic visions are also an intrinsic part of the fabric of biblical discourse, as of most ancient (and some modern) cultures, where they are believed to be transcendental signs.

But no more theory is necessary. I want to try and perform a kind of literary psychoanalysis, using a biblical character, Benjamin. This kind of exercise—as an *academic* one—is certainly not unusual in contemporary biblical exegesis;<sup>3</sup> but in addressing a corporate entity as well it ventures into the terrain of collective memory. Yet are the 'historiographical' books of the Hebrew Bible anything other than Judean collective memory? At any rate, here lies Benjamin on the couch, from which he will tell us his stories and recall his memories, reliable or otherwise. This tells us less about history and more about identity.

We'll begin with his earliest memory, one that has been reinforced by his constantly being reminded by his family: how, as the youngest of twelve sons, he was brought to Egypt to see his next eldest brother, as a condition of wellbeing for the whole family. This brother was also his only full brother, having the same mother, Rachel. Joseph has taken on, and performed brilliantly, the traditional role of the youngest brother that he used to be: the paternal darling rejected by his brothers who becomes an outstandingly successful entrepreneur. As the *new* younger brother, Benjamin, whose mother died after childbirth having named him Ben-Oni, has nothing to offer in this role. He has arrived too late. But he was always determined, he says, to perform this role in time, to become greater than any of his brothers.

Within the family of Israel Joseph survives, tribally speaking, through his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, with whom Benjamin remains as close as

3. For example, the joint effort of a biblical scholar and a psychoanalyst to address the character of Jonah: A. Lacocque and P.-E. Lacocque 1981; on characters in Ruth, Fewell and Gunn 1990; on biblical characters generally, in autobiographical mode, Davies (ed.) 2002; on female characters, Brenner 2004.

he was to Joseph. But he is still the youngest and weakest of all the tribes, or so he keeps saying (see 1 Sam. 9.21). But this is not exactly borne out by events. The time comes for the family to move from Egypt back to its promised land, carrying the bones of Joseph to the ancestral land. Here Benjamin takes on the challenge of emulating Joseph. Never mind that Moses was from Levi and Joshua from Ephraim: the conquest of the land that is depicted in the book of Joshua is focused on the territory allotted to Benjamin. Although there is a vaguely described foray into the land of Judah and an excursion to Hazor, these episodes are incidental to the main operation that starts and ends at Gilgal, and whose central scenes are the destruction of Ai and Jericho. Modern critics have concluded that this conquest narrative probably emanates from the memory of Benjamin himself since, in the chauvinistic politics of ancient tribal memory, it is unlikely that any other tribe invented this story or entertained this memory. Though it seems that such a memory is largely an invented one, because no plausible trace of these exploits can be discovered, it has made its way, apparently, into the memory of the kingdom of Israel and from there into canonized Judean memory. Since we are not dealing with a genuine memory, even allowing some exaggeration or distortion, but with a dream of brutal invasion and extermination, we might consider that it represents an encoding of something else in Benjamin's own past. Perhaps a compensation for some lack elsewhere, either earlier or later in his life, or both?

But the conquest of the land of Canaan is not an isolated fragment of Benjamin's memory: interrupted by a lengthy description of tribal allotments, it continues with a series of oppressions and recoveries, led by charismatic 'judges', who again are recorded in the Judean canon. Benjamin would claim that while the book of Joshua remains much more like the history he told, the book of Judges has been distorted by Benjamin's neighbouring brother, Judah (who also claims to be the eldest). For although the present account generously offers a leader to each tribe, it claims that the conquest had first to be redone by the tribes individually, and with limited success. But Judah and its tribal components was the first of Jacob's sons to 'go up' and successfully take all its land. Although in the initial conquest they had failed to take the city of Jerusalem (see Josh. 15.63), they do so now (Judg. 1.8). But Benjamin is not sure that Jerusalem did belong to Judah. He points to Josh. 18.28, which, he says, assigns Jebus to him; and to Judg. 1.21, which denies that Benjamin drove the Jebusites out of Jerusalem. That they are said to have tried, he points out, is an admission that the city was theirs to take. Ownership of Jerusalem is to become a major issue between him and his brother to the south.

In the book of Judges that Benjamin claims Judah has written to elevate himself over the other tribes, and especially Benjamin, it is Judah, not Benjamin, who now provides the first judge, Othniel. Benjamin says—and there

is a widely-held critical conclusion that agrees with him—that Othniel is an artificial creation, inserted at the beginning of the sequence in order to deny priority to Benjamin. For the real first judge was Ehud, a left-handed Benjaminite who assassinated the king of Moab using this sinister endowment to his advantage (ch. 3). But the ending of the book of Judges mocks both this physical characteristic and the story of the conquest of Ai by telling how an entire left-handed tribe succumbed to the combined forces of the other tribes and, having been refused intermarriage with all the other tribes, was given women from Jabesh-Gilead and from Shiloh (ch. 21). It's certainly an odd story, and Benjamin says that it is part of a vendetta that Judah—who led the other tribes against Benjamin—has with their king Saul. The war is provoked by a nasty story about Gibeah, Saul's birthplace, while Jabesh in Gilead was a city that Saul once rescued and was grateful to him ever after (Judges 19–21; 1 Samuel 11).

Benjamin's version of the memory is that there was a dispute with his brothers and he beat them all, thus establishing his military supremacy. Look at where the Israelite convocations take place, he says: in *Mizpah* (Judg. 20.1,3) and *Bethel* (20.18). This is in *my* territory! Such a convocation makes no sense! And how else, he says, would the Israelites soon after have accepted Saul the Benjaminite as their first king if we have not shown them who is in charge? But we have only Benjamin's memory to set against what is, after all, the Jewish scripture. All the same, it is clear enough that this story is told against Benjamin and against Saul, and that it is biased in favour of Judah. In any case, he is wrong: Bethel is not in Benjamin, but in Ephraim (Josh. 16.1–3). Look at Josh. 18.11–13, he replies: Luz was ours, and Luz is Bethel. For the moment, we shall have to leave it there, but will come back to it. It is yet another territorial grievance that Benjamin has with Judah's claims, since Ephraim (he says) never claimed Bethel as theirs: this is a Judean invention.

In support of his version of events, Benjamin reminds us that never mind the choice of Saul as king, the judge Samuel was clearly doing all his work in the territory of Benjamin—his circuit moves between Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah (1 Sam. 7.16), while his home is in Ramah (see Josh. 18.25). This hardly makes sense if the preceding war had really happened as Judah says. So, we ask, are you also claiming Shiloh as part of your territory? Yes, of course, he says. I cannot remember when we took it (it is mentioned a few times in Joshua, but not assigned to any tribe). Listen, the place was ours. We took women from there (Judges 21) when we captured it. It was destroyed years later. And who bothered to remember it? Only Jeremiah—who was one of us. He mentions it four times! (See Jer. 7.12,14; 26.6,9; we should add that it is also mentioned in Jer. 41.5 along with Shechem and Samaria, in connection with the death of Gedaliah, another Benjaminite. So does Benjamin have a point?) Whatever we may believe of all this, we have to

agree that Benjamin and his brothers all remember Saul being the first king of Israel. The youngest brother finally made good. Joseph may have been vizier of Egypt, but he was never a king within his own family. He could only dream about it, says Benjamin.

It is intriguing: so far Benjamin has told us a story that, whether or not we actually believe any of it, makes sense, and which the scriptural texts confirm regarding conquest and kingship. Where they contradict Benjamin's claims, they are usually less credible. Of course we could challenge him over the extent of the kingdom of Saul: he thinks of it as 'Israel', but we suspect it was only his own territory plus Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of his full brother Joseph. That makes sense: there was never any animosity between Joseph (or his sons) and Benjamin. No, the animosity is towards Judah, and it was obviously reciprocated. This is strange, since the scriptural memory claims that these two later achieved political union under the Judean monarch.

The animosity towards Saul that is quite clear in Judges 19 and 20 is expressed even more clearly in the Judean memory of him as a failed king who tried to kill David—whose loyalty to Saul was nevertheless unquestionable, and whom Yhwh chose in favour of Saul. For Benjamin, Saul remains a great hero, who died the classic hero's death. (This profile has been beautifully drawn by David Gunn [1980].)

Now, Judah's memory holds that after Saul's death David united the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Benjamin again flatly denies this. He says that Saul and David actually never met at all. Saul's kingdom did not include Judah (which was then based in Hebron), while David never ruled over any part of Saul's kingdom. But it is surely clear that the city of Jerusalem at any rate did come under the control of Judah and indeed became its capital city. Benjamin says this happened after Saul's death, that the Philistines gave it to David as a reward for helping them subdue Saul's kingdom. Again we find that the Judean version does not entirely contradict this: it admits that David was a Philistine vassal. But could it be true that the entire Saul-David story is just a Judean fiction? What would be the point? Oh, says Benjamin, you are not much of an analyst are you. I thought that would be obvious. It is a clear attempt to show that Judah and Jerusalem are the real centre of Israel, indeed, they *are* 'Israel', since they seem to think that all the other tribes disappeared and were replaced by immigrants. (He must mean the story in 2 Kings 17.)

Look, he goes on, even Judah's own memory recalls that 'Judah' and 'Israel' were, during Saul's reign, two separate 'houses'. The so-called 'split', which Judah claims was secession, was already a fact. Even if Rehoboam had been a king of Judah and Israel, the 'division' would only have been just a return to the status quo. Here we can challenge him, though: Judah says that under Rehoboam, Benjamin sided with Judah. Benjamin

denies this, laughing. He says that later on Judah did annex Benjamin and then pretended this had happened at the beginning and that Benjamin had wanted it. The idea that he would desert his closest brothers, Ephraim and Manasseh, is ridiculous. Israel was in any case a much bigger and stronger group than Judah. Is he making this up? Well, it does seem strange that Benjamin would side with Judah. And Judah can give no reason why Benjamin would side with him. Indeed, he remembers intense hostility between the families of Saul and David (this is described in the books of Samuel). Again, we have to wonder whether Benjamin's memory is the more reliable of the two. As for his claim of annexation to Judah at a later stage, Benjamin is not sure exactly when it happened. He thinks it was probably when the Assyrians put an end to the kingdom of Israel—as a reward for the loyalty of Ahaz and Hezekiah, but he is not clear about what happened when Hezekiah revolted. He does not recall Sennacherib attacking his own land, which makes him think that perhaps it wasn't part of the kingdom even then. But in any case, he can remember being ruled by Manasseh, who groveled to Assyria—something that hurt, because Benjamin had no love of Assyria, destroyers of Israel. All the same, this was a prosperous time for Benjamin as well as Judah (2 Kings 18–21).

There is one other interesting thing Benjamin has to say, and it brings us back to the ownership of Bethel. Bethel seems to have been recognized as one of the two royal sanctuaries of Israel by Omri (1 Kings 16). We do not have time to deal with Jeroboam, but it is worth reporting that Benjamin insists neither Rehoboam nor Jeroboam (1 Kings 12–15) ever existed. He says something about 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee'. Omri was the next king of Israel after Saul, following an interval of several decades recovering from Philistine domination. Dr Finkelstein, incidentally, tells me that this may very well be true (Finkelstein 2001: 169–95). The sanctuary was, as Benjamin recalls (we noted this earlier) in his own land. But the Judean memory that Benjamin was part of Judah means that Judah thinks Bethel cannot have been in Benjamin and must therefore have been in Ephraim. Again, Benjamin seems to have some arguments on his side. It looks as if Bethel was part of Judah when the annexation finally did occur: Judeans remember that their king Josiah desecrated the sanctuary there (2 Kgs 23.19), in an action separate from his attack on the 'high places in the cities of Samaria'. The ransacking of Samaria is probably fictional, but the attack on Bethel might not be, and the implication is that it was not one of these 'Samaritan high places' but a sanctuary in Judah-Benjamin: i.e. in Benjamin! And, later on, both Ezra and Nehemiah include Bethel within Benjamin (Ezra 2.28; Neh. 7.32; 11.31).

As Benjamin comes to the next part of his story, he becomes more excited. And so do we, because here we can be more confident that we know what really did happen, or at least that Judah's story agrees with Benjamin's

explicitly. After Jerusalem fell to the Neo-Babylonians, the province of Judah was reorganized, so that the capital now lay in Mizpah. The Babylonians took revenge on the royal city of Jerusalem, and depopulated it considerably. From the Neo-Babylonian records we know that the territory of Benjamin was relatively untouched and from archaeological surveys, we are informed, it can also be deduced that the bulk of the population lived close to the centres of Mizpah, Bethel and Gibeon, while Jerusalem and its environs remained comparatively depopulated (see, e.g. Lipschits 2005). Although the Judean story does not dwell in detail on this, it does nevertheless acknowledge these facts. And Benjamin can tell us why this happened. He never liked either the Assyrians or Judah, and the Babylonians defeated both. A lot of Benjaminites (including the great prophet Jeremiah, in cahoots with a cabal including Gedaliah) supported the Babylonians. And what a reversal they make! Benjamin is now ruling over Judah. Mizpah is now the capital. And, what's more, Bethel has taken over from Jerusalem the role of major cult centre! All those Israelite religious traditions, and all those Benjaminite memories, are now being absorbed by what is left of Big Brother. The 'Holy One of Zion' has been replaced by the 'god of Israel' (i.e. 'god of Jacob')!

The Judean story does not tell us why all this happened, but Benjamin has an explanation. 'We never supported the king or the temple in Jerusalem' he says. 'There was a very influential Benjaminite caucus that included the family of Shaphan and the prophet Jeremiah. If you do not believe me, look at the predications Jeremiah made—he attacked the royal dynasty and the temple in Jerusalem, and after the deportation wrote an open letter from Mizpah telling the deportees to give up any hope of coming back! (Jer. 29) Well, we did not want them returning to power. We were quite happy with Jerusalem in ruins and its temple out of action. The tables were turned: we were now ruling *them*, and having virtually ignored us since they took us over, they were now rather keen to be nice to us! Anyway, our Benjaminite leaders lobbied hard for capitulation—in fact, let me tell you, we were in secret discussion with the Babylonians before and during the siege of Jerusalem about a future loyal government'.

I have put this version of events to Dr Lipschits, who tells me he thinks it is probably correct. Gedaliah was assassinated: 2 Kgs 25.25 describes this and the immediate aftermath, but does not say any more; as far as the Judeans who later came back were concerned, the rule from Mizpah seems to have been forgotten. Indeed, some Judeans claimed that the land of Judah had been empty of Judeans. But, according to Benjamin, and this seems to be the case, the fact is that the Mizpah regime remained securely in control of Judah for nearly 150 years, even after the Persians allowed resettlement in Judah. But after a while Jerusalem was reinstated by the Persians as the capital. The Judeans claim it was as a result of their lobbying, and that may



be true. Anyway, their little temple became a rival cult-centre to our shrines, and the rivalry continued (on the question of Jerusalem's reinstatement, we consulted Edelman 2006).

My conclusion, after a good deal of reflection, is that this episode is crucial in understanding Benjamin's psyche. Restoring Jerusalem, downgrading Mizpah and Bethel, and even finally insisting on the exclusivity of the Jerusalem temple represented the final victory of Judah over Benjamin and, later on, over Samaria, the old Israel, as well. It follows that this time the authorities in Jerusalem made sure that Benjamin was absorbed more fully. Its memories, still strongly Israelite and not Judean, absorbed over the recent period of hegemony, were overlaid, rewritten. In the stories of national origins the Judeans, who could remember only as far back as a shadowy figure called 'David', the eponymous founder of the old Judean royal house, borrowed the Israelite history, with its stories of Jacob, of conquest and premonarchic life, and grafted their David onto that, inserting Judah into an 'Israel' that they enlarged into twelve tribes. They retrospectively justified Jerusalem as capital and exclusive divine abode by having the ark moved from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6), with David replacing Saul as king of Israel. Benjamin was then 'remembered' to have been joined to Judah from the time of Rehoboam—and much else. In fact, both Benjamin's and Judah's collective memories arise from a trauma—a trauma in which the political and religious leadership changed sides, and in which the identities and deities of Judah and Israel were entangled. Benjamin tells us that during the nearly two centuries (so he reckons) of Benjaminite hegemony, the traditionally strong ties with Samaria were re-established (he reminds us of Jer. 41.5), and a 'greater Israel' was once again being formed. The new Judah was never quite sure, it seems, whether it wanted Samaria in or out. Its scriptures seem to reflect that uncertainty. While, for instance, Ezra and Nehemiah seem to reject Samaria, the books of Chronicles regard Samaria as part of an Israel that should be ruled from Jerusalem. One of its two official histories (Joshua–Kings, basically a highly reworked rewrite of Benjamin's history) seems antagonistic, but the Mosaic books and the other history (Chronicles) are more sympathetic.

But the old differences and resentments did not entirely go away. Nor did the memory of King Saul, Benjamin's great hero. The story of Esther features another Benjaminite hero, Mordecai. 'Now there was a Jew in the citadel of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair son of Shimei (yes, the curser of David!), son of Kish (yes, Saul's father!), a Benjaminite' (Est. 2.6). Mordecai's enemy is called Haman, an Agagite. Now Agagites do not exist: there is no such tribe or people. But one of the grounds on which Saul was, according to the Bible, stripped of his kingship was that he failed to kill an Amalekite king called Agag (1 Samuel 15). Now, the Amalekites are a race especially abhorred in the Bible. Here are some samples:



Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven' (Exod. 17.14).

First among the nations was Amalek,  
but its end is to perish forever (Num. 24.20).

Therefore when Yahweh your God has given you rest from all your enemies on every hand, in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget (Deut. 25.19).

So Haman is a symbol of Saul's fall; and just as Israel was supposed to exterminate Amalek, so Haman vows to exterminate Israel. But he is defeated, and Mordecai the 'Jew' avenges Saul.

Re-reading this story caused me to ponder again a question that had been nagging me from almost the beginning: the genocidal conquest of Joshua. Is it really what scholars call a 'Deuteronomistic' theme, an explanation of why there are no Canaanites left, that everyone is an Israelite now? Or does it contain something specifically Benjaminite, a clue to 'his' character? I suppose we shall never know, given all the rewriting and re-remembering that has taken place within Judah. But Saul was criticized for not executing Agag, as the laws of *herem* demanded, and the genocidal aspects of the book of Esther may point to something deep in Benjamin's psyche, betrayed in the (invented?) memories of an extermination of the aboriginal dwellers of the land of Benjamin.

But Benjamin is not quite finished with his tale. He pulls out a New Testament (which I had not expected) and opens it at Romans. 'Paul?' I said and quickly earned a look of exasperation. 'Saul. He persecuted followers of Jesus before he became their most influential convert'. 'Another rebuff for Benjamin?' I ventured. 'Son of David beats son of Saul'. At this point Benjamin decided he had been analyzed enough. (Maybe he has been reading too much Lacan.)

I suspected that in fact he had been willing to talk more, and so I read more carefully. Yes, Saul/Paul is a Jew. But he was not of the people of Judea, since he was born and brought up, or so he says, in Cilicia, in Tarsus. And how did he like the label 'Judean'? In Rom. 11.1 he said of himself, 'I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin', he says. A rather distinctive sort of 'Jew'. 'Israelite' is a very rare term in Greek: it occurs several times in the New Testament: for example of Nathaniel, in Jn 1.47. But while he thought of himself ethnically as Israelite, Saul/Paul probably regarded himself as a Jew *religiously*. While he rejected the *religion* he could not reject his Israeliteness. Circumcision was a special problem for him, because it was both ethnic and religious. The one element he clung to, the other he dismissed.

Finally, he could never bring himself to call Jesus ‘Son of David’ or even ‘Messiah’: he simply turned *christos* into a cognomen, meaningless in Greek (‘smeared’). The habit spread and many of the writers of the books of the New Testament follow it. On the one occasion he might have spoken of ‘son of David’ he is very careful: ‘The gospel concerning [God’s] son’, he says, ‘who was descended from David *according to the flesh*’ (Rom. 1.3). A matter of biological fact, no more. By contrast, the writer of the ‘Acts of the Apostles’ (ch. 13) has him speaking very proudly of Saul, his namesake (13.21), with no hint of the struggle between Saul and David. Saul is even said to have reigned for 40 years (as long as David did, according to 2 Sam. 5.4).

What Saul/Paul said and did, then, cannot be divorced from who he was, and that means a son of Benjamin and descendant of Saul. The same can be said of other members of the Benjamin family: Mordecai’s actions now appear in a rather different light, as do Jeremiah’s. Without the memories these characters are less than rounded.

What scholarly objective, if any, does the foregoing exercise achieve? I think some concluding comments are needed by way of justification. I am above all else a historian, I suppose, and despite my disingenuous claims, I am really interested in the real world of the past and that means the real world of the present. But rather than an exclusive fixation with the ‘facts’, I am interested in the way the ‘facts’ are manipulated: how different stories (or ‘histories’) exist side by side, and how some manage to squeeze out others and pretend to be ‘the truth’, or ‘what really happened’. Yes, there are facts. But facts do not make stories. And there are stories that fit the facts and those that do not.

The problem, as we are often reminded, with biblical history is that it is, if I may simplify, Judah’s story. And not so perfectly tidied up that we cannot see the holes in it. From this story other stories can be deduced; whether or not we can accurately reconstruct them, they must have existed. I hope this exercise has provided yet another way of reminding us that the biblical story is just *a* story, whose canonization adds nothing to its historical authority. Indeed, the biblical ‘history’ is not just one memory, not even one collective memory, but a memory that is really a combination of collective memories: some old, some new, some borrowed and some true, as we might say. At the risk of involving more theory (Bakhtin), the only place where we can read all these memories, the Bible, is dialogical: it presents dominant, but also submerged, voices, identities and recollections. From the literary point of view, that is an important part of its power. But I do not rest content with the view that all stories are as good as each other. I have tried to show that sometimes Benjamin’s story can be supported by evidence, that it is a more competent or adequate reading. That does not of course make it into history, but it does allow us to prefer one to

the other on the basis of a critical judgment. (For a more elaborate investigation of this, see Davies 2007.)

In the end, I suppose Benjamin has reminded me that memories (especially those in the form of ‘histories’) should never be monopolized by any one group, and that a plural past is a guarantee of a stable plural present. Stories are about what people think they are: we might deny them as history, but we cannot deny the identity of the people who tell them. Agreed historical facts, yes: let’s by all means strive for accuracy and knowledge. But facts alone do not make stories, nor do they necessarily account for what people think they are. Stories do that. Memories do that. Let’s not forget our dreams, whether individual or collective. In the end our future lies with them.

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## NEGOTIATIONS, SOCIAL DRAMA AND VOICES OF MEMORY IN SOME SAMUEL TALES

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### 1. *Memory, Dialogue and Social Drama*

Biblical narrative embodies significant parts of the cultural memory of ancient Israelite society. Written down and transmitted throughout the generations it conveys a picture of the past that bonds the community of ancient Israel, provides the charter for its various ways of life and its visions of the future, and thus constructs and confirms a view of Israel's communal identity. On the face of it, this picture could be depicted as unified theo-historical narrative, constructed by a thoroughgoing theological redaction.<sup>1</sup> But upon a closer look into the narratives embodying this picture, the impression of a monolithic construction proves largely illusory.<sup>2</sup> Even the picture of such foundational events as the slavery in Egypt and the exodus, and such archetypal figures as Abraham and Jacob incorporates an endless variety of different voices. The multifaceted interplay of these voices is even more intense, as the individual narratives themselves are dominated by the dialogue between various characters that all make their voices heard. The dialogue between two or more characters often covers almost the half of the wording of the entire story.<sup>3</sup> A description of this play of voices is still a desideratum in biblical studies.

1. Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (trans. R. Livingstone; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 64-80.

2. There is no better testimony to the variety of biblical memory than the proposal to describe the seventh-century stage of DtrH as a library: Thomas C. Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), pp. 58-59.

3. According to Verheij the books of 1-2 Samuel consist for 43.33% of quoted discourse, but in 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles the mean is lower (34% and 21% respectively): Arie J.C. Verheij, *Verbs and Numbers: A Study of the Frequencies of the Hebrew Verbal Tense Forms in the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles* (Studia semitica neerlandica, 28; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), pp. 32-36. In Genesis Radday and Shore find 42.71% of character speech: Yehuda T. Radday and Haim Shore, *Genesis: An Authorship Study in computer-Assisted Statistical Linguistics* (AnOr, 103; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1985), pp. 24-25. For comparison, in the Iliad de Jong

In addition, I wish to consider the role of such dialogues in biblical narrative. It is possible to point to the vividness of the dialogue, to its roots in the oral culture, and to 'the embedding of the narrative in a broad social framework that supports a "dialogue of languages"'.<sup>4</sup> But when the dialogue is paradigmatic, it can also be viewed as a social drama.<sup>5</sup> The participants in this drama represent two sides in social, cultural, religious or ethnic oppositions; and the drama itself is a way to formulate, mediate or resolve a social conflict by way of a 'rite de passage'. Turner's conceptualization of ritual as social drama is apt to encompass the 'interaction ritual' of spoken encounter and dialogue (Goffman),<sup>6</sup> in particular when the issues at hand and the characters are paradigmatic for social, religious and other conflicts that touch the roots of the societal tissue.

In the present essay I will attempt to analyze the contribution of paradigmatic dialogues and social drama to the societal framework in which this cultural memory is cultivated. My point of departure is the methodology of Conversation Analysis (CA), which studies the alternation of speaking turns in spoken interaction. At the outset it has to be observed that the literary representation of spoken interaction is only partially analogous to real conversation. The encounter of the characters takes place in the narrative world, and their communication is in the hands of the narrator, who also fashions their consciousness of this communication and the circumstances of the encounter. Many concrete features of spoken intercourse are not expressed in biblical narrative, such as, e.g., hesitation, 'uh, uh...' Speakers do not correct themselves, nor do they interrupt others, and tone is only rarely indicated.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless the study of dialogue in narrative has much

finds 45% speeches (by far the largest part of direct discourse), and in the *Odyssey* 66%: I.J.F. de Jong, 'Convention versus Realism in the Homeric Epics', *Mnemosyne* 58 (2005), pp. 1-22 (12).

4. See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in Michael Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 256-422 (314-15); Richard M. Dorson, 'Oral Styles of American Folk Narrators', in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1959), pp. 27-51 (43, 46-51); Viv Edwards and Thomas J. Sienkewicz, *Oral Cultures Past and Present: Rappin' and Homer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 27, 61, 195; and my article, 'The Style of the Dialogue in Biblical Prose Narrative', *JANES* 28 (2001), pp. 55-97 (94-95).

5. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969); *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

6. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); see also n. 13 below.

7. See Ian Hutchby and Robin Wooffitt, *Conversation Analysis: Principles, Practices and Applications* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Willis Edmondson, *Spoken Discourse: A Model for Analysis* (London: Longman, 1981).

to gain from systematic analysis of the interchange, as is already shown by Eberhart Laemmert, whose classical treatise on narrative contains a chapter on the spoken encounter as 'Zwiesprache' (dialogue) that anticipates CA by fifteen years.<sup>8</sup> Laemmert notes the role of 'conversational opening' and initiative,<sup>9</sup> discusses different kinds of response and studies a series of arguments that are mutually related and lead to a decisive conclusion, a 'victory' for one of the sides. For the study of biblical narrative Laemmert's approach is all the more instructive as he bases himself on Thomas Mann's contestation between Joseph and Mut-em-enet, Potiphar's wife.<sup>10</sup> In biblical narrative Cynthia Miller has pointed to some special effects in dialogue, such as the different functions of silence,<sup>11</sup> and Raymond Person has analysed the dialogues in the Jonah tale by means of CA methodology in the narrow sense of the word.<sup>12</sup>

For biblical narrative, however, a wider approach is imperative. Special attention is to be paid to the attitude of the participants to each other, in particular, but not exclusively, with regard to the defense of the participants' status and self-esteem.<sup>13</sup> An important dimension of spoken interaction relates to the goals the participants set for themselves, and the tactics used to achieve them.

By these methods I will analyse three tales about Samuel, in which the prophet confronts Saul or the Israelite elders, in the light of the structure of

8. Eberhart Laemmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1955), pp. 214-22.

9. Emanuel A. Schegloff, 'Sequencing in Conversational Openings', in John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes (eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), pp. 346-80.

10. Laemmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens*, pp. 214-18. An analysis of dialogue in drama and other literary texts by means of CA is undertaken by Deirdre Burton, *Dialogue and Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Modern Drama Dialogue and Naturally Occurring Conversation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Vimala Herman, *Dramatic Discourse: Dialogue as Interaction in Plays* (London: Routledge, 1995); Michael Toolan, *Language in Literature: an Introduction to Stylistics* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 194-213. Additional literature is adduced by Raymond F. Person Jr, *In Conversation with Jonah: Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism, and the Book of Jonah* (JSOTSup, 220; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 11.

11. Cynthia L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis* (HSMM, 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 235-43, 257-61; 'The Pragmatics of *waw* as a Discourse Marker in Biblical Hebrew Dialogue', *ZAH* 12 (1999), pp. 165-91; 'Silence as a Response in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: Strategies of Speakers and Narrators', *JNSL* 32 (2006), pp. 23-43.

12. Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*.

13. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual; The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959; repr. London: Allen Lane, 1969); Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

the dialogue and negotiation tactics. But first I have to introduce some of the basic concepts and methods, together with examples for illustrating them.

## 2. *The Structure of the Dialogue*

### a. *Initiative, Response and Exchange*

A narrated dialogue is the narrative representation of a spoken interaction of two interlocutors speaking in turn, of whom the first initiates the conversation ('conversational opening') by addressing a second party, the addressee who is to respond to the opening.<sup>14</sup> A spoken interaction of this kind is first of all an exchange between initiator and respondent. A sequence of opening and response is termed an adjacency pair, following the founding father of CA, Harvey Sacks.<sup>15</sup> In the following discussion the opening turn will be indicated as 'P1a', the response as 'b'; additional turns will be indexed by numbering, 'P2a', etc. This notation will include silent responses. One notes, for example, the encounter of Boaz and the people he employs during the harvest (Ruth 2.4):<sup>16</sup>

Presently Boaz arrived from Bethlehem.

P1a He greeted the reapers, 'The Lord be with you!'

b And they responded, 'The Lord bless you!'

Still, the character of this adjacency pair is not exhausted by the description of the two speaking turns. The turns are relevant to one another. Arriving at the field Boaz acknowledges the presence of the reapers working for him, who respond to his benevolent patronizing by a subservient salute. From this angle we can view this speaking pair as an exchange in which the conversational opening constitutes a proffer that is met by a response.<sup>17</sup>

In real life an exchange includes more than just speaking turns: the participants face each other, express (and perceive) reactions by posture, gesture

14. Schegloff, 'Sequencing in Conversational Openings', pp. 351-70; Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Jail Jefferson, 'A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation', *Language* 50 (1974), pp. 696-735 (700-705); Hutchby and Wooffitt, *Conversation Analysis*, pp. 38-69; Miller, *Representation of Speech*, pp. 235-43, 257-61; Frank H. Polak, 'On Dialogue and Speaker Status in the Scroll of Ruth', *Beit Mikra* 46 (2001), pp. 193-218 (194-96) (Hebrew with English summary); 'On Dialogue and Speaker Status in Biblical Narrative', *Beit Mikra* 48 (2002), pp. 1-18, 97-119, esp. pp. 2-8 (Hebrew with English summary).

15. Sacks's role is discussed by, e.g., Hutchby and Wooffitt, *Conversation Analysis*, pp. 14-37.

16. If not mentioned otherwise I use (sometimes with slight variation) the English version of *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

17. Edmondson, *Spoken Discourse*, pp. 80-94.



and look, and act in different ways.<sup>18</sup> The overall picture of the exchange constitutes a spoken encounter. In a literary context; however, the representation of body language and other physical expressions of inner life is entirely at the narrator's discretion. In many cases the narrator indicates actions that express the participant's feelings without verbalization (e.g., weeping, laughter, sighing, bowing down); in such cases we will speak of paralinguistic acts.<sup>19</sup> Actions that are represented as closely connected to speech acts in the interaction, though not in themselves expressive of inner life, can be characterized as non-linguistic acts in the encounter, such as, for example, Boaz's appearance at the scene.

An interaction of this type comprises moves of various kinds. A proffer can include or imply a request, a promise, a threat or a reference to the addressee's best interests. The reply can signify acceptance (the 'preferred' response from the initiator's point of view), rejection, refusal or refutation (a 'dispreferred' response).<sup>20</sup> The respondent may also prefer dodging the question (which would be then 'dispreferred') or posing conditions;<sup>21</sup> silence may indicate different responses, dependent on the context.<sup>22</sup>

#### b. *The Indication of the Participants*

Longacre and de Regt point to several ways of indicating the participants in biblical narrative in general, and in the dialogue in particular.<sup>23</sup> Four features stand out:

- (1) The opening of the dialogue-episode mentions both speaker and addressee by name, e.g., 'And Sarai said to Abram' (Gen. 16.2, 5; so also, e.g., 29.15, 21).<sup>24</sup>

18. Amongst Erving Goffman's contributions to the analysis of these aspects (see n. 13 above) one notes in particular his *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp. 35-54.

19. Edmondson, *Spoken Discourse*, pp. 34-37

20. In CA (Hutchby and Wooffitt, *Conversation Analysis*, pp. 43-47) answers are classified as 'preferred'/'dispreferred' responses, rather than as 'positive'/'negative': if the preceding question was in the negative mood, 'yes' may entail rejection ('negative'), and 'no' acceptance ('positive').

21. See Miller, 'Pragmatics of *waw* as a Discourse Marker'.

22. Michal Ephratt, 'The Functions of Silence', *Journal of Pragmatics* 40 (2008), pp. 1909-38 (1919-23); Dennis Kurzon, *Discourse of Silence* (Pragmatics and Beyond, NS, 49; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1998); Miller, 'Silence as a Response'.

23. Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence. A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), pp. 162-65; Lénart J. de Regt, *Participants in Old Testament Texts and the Translator: Reference Devices and their Rhetorical Impact* (Studia semitica neerlandica, 39; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), pp. 3-4, 13-23.

24. In Gen. 16.2 the mention of Sarai is repetitive, since she was introduced as main



- (2) In the continuation of the dialogue no such mention is necessary because both participants are known, e.g.,<sup>25</sup>

Gen. 37.5 Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; and they hated him even more.

v.6 He said to them, 'Hear this dream which I have dreamed...'

- (3) The narrator may continue to mention both parties by name in order to show that both insist on their position, e.g.,<sup>26</sup>

31.36 Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, 'What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me? ...'

v. 43 Then Laban spoke up and said to Jacob, 'The daughters are my daughters...'

- (4) After the introduction of both sides by name, the narrative often continues indicating them by name. In Longacre's view this is the way of treating the participant who dominates the scene, is highest in rank (Pharaoh: Gen. 41.15, 17, 38-44; Eli: 1 Sam. 1.17; David: 2 Sam. 9.3-7), or plays an important role in the plot (Joseph: Gen. 41.16, 25).<sup>27</sup> However, the latter definition is too vague. In many cases the party mentioned by name is the one successful in the negotiations, e.g., in the case of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1.11-18):<sup>28</sup>

P1a But Naomi replied, 'Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me?' (v. 11)...

b ...But Ruth clung to her (v. 14b)

P2a So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law' (v. 15).

character in v. 1 (the exposition). But when the dialogue-episode immediately follows the exposition, this episode may still open with the introduction of the participants, e.g., 31.36. In addition de Regt (*Participants*, pp.15-16) notes that the ending of the tale also invites the mention of both parties, e.g., Num. 24.25; 1 Sam. 13.15 (LXX); 21.1; 23.28-24.1; 24.23; 26.25.

25. So also, e.g., Gen. 29.18; 37.29-30; see de Regt, *Participants*, pp. 23, 28-32.

26. So also, e.g., 1 Sam. 1.14-15; 20.3-12; see Longacre, *Joseph*, pp. 166-67. De Regt (*Participants*, pp. 57-69) mentions emphasis and climactic points in the narrative.

27. Longacre, *Joseph*, pp. 144-50. De Regt (*Participants*, pp. 23-26) distinguishes between minor and major participants, in analogy to the definition of minor and major characters in the narrative.

28. See my articles, 'Dialogue in Ruth', pp. 210-13; 'Dialogue and Speaker Status', pp. 6-13. In addition the narrator may mention a participant's name/title if the latter conveys important information (2 Sam. 9.3-4), if he or she renounces certain rights (Gen. 31.43; 2 Sam. 9.11; Ruth 4.6), or if the narrator imputes to the participant responsibility for a deed (Gen. 3.12-13; 'Dialogue and Speaker Status', pp. 14-15, 112-13). See now also Steven E. Runge, 'Pragmatic Effects of Semantically Redundant Anchoring Expressions in Biblical Hebrew Narrative', *JNSL* 32 (2006), pp. 55-83.

- b But Ruth replied, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go'.  
 P3a When she saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her.

In this episode both Naomi (a) and Ruth (b) are mentioned by name (vv. 11, 14). In the sequel, however, Naomi is only referred to by the verbal prefix (וְנָאֹמִי, v. 15; וְנָאֹמִי, v. 18),<sup>29</sup> whereas Ruth's name reappears in her reply (v. 16). The point is that Ruth prevails, whereas Naomi has to give in (v. 18, 'she saw'). A similar pattern unfolds in the dialogue between Ruth and Naomi after their arrival (2.2):<sup>30</sup>

- P1a Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain...'.  
 b 'Yes, daughter, go', she replied.

Avoidance of a participant's name may indicate humility (Hannah: 1 Sam. 1.18), confusion and anxiety (Hagar: Gen. 16.8, 13; 21.14-19), secretiveness (Jacob: Gen. 27.18),<sup>31</sup> self-abasement (Mephiboshet: 2 Sam. 9.6, 8) or, for example, wariness (Jacob: Gen. 33.2-3, 8).<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the mention of the name of one of the parties of the negotiations or of both of them can contribute significantly to our understanding of the role of the parties, the relationship between them, and the narrator's attitude toward them.

### c. Goal, Transaction and Negotiations

In biblical narratives exchanges have a goal, and thus constitute a transaction<sup>33</sup> that consists of a series of moves. A 'move' indicates any utterance (or paralinguistic/non-linguistic act), by one of the participants in the encounter, that changes the situation relative to the interaction.<sup>34</sup> Esau's

29. Unlike Luther, KJV, ASV and NKJV and many other modern versions that introduce Naomi by name in v. 18 (NAB; NET; NRSV; *Tanakh*; Willibrordvertaling; the filling-in policy is defended by de Regt, *Participants*, pp. 61 n. 31, 96-97).

30. And likewise, e.g., 1 Sam. 3.17-18; 1 Kgs 2.18, 22.

31. In Gen. 27.18 the lack of Jacob's name is particularly striking, since this verse opens a new scene.

32. These aspects of speaker representation and 'self-perception' are studied in my paper, 'Dialogue and Speaker Status', pp. 97-102, 112-15.

33. See Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, pp. 15-28, 35-48; Edmondson, *Spoken Discourse*, pp. 75-81; Eddy Roulet, 'On the Structure of Conversation as Negotiation', in Herman Parret and Jef Verschueren (eds.), *Searle on Conversation* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1992), pp. 91-99.

34. Goffman (*Forms of Talk*, p. 24) defines a 'move' as 'any full stretch of talk or of its substitutes (e.g., 'body language', F.P.) which has a distinctive unitary bearing on some set or other of circumstances in which the participants find themselves (...)

request that Jacob give him ‘some of that red stuff, that red stuff to gulp down, for I am starving’ (Gen. 25.29) is a move. Jacob responds with a counterdemand that constitutes a condition: ‘First sell me your birthright’. When Esau meets this condition, Jacob demands an oath. Only by fulfilling the last demand Esau receives the meal he has asked for. This exchange, then, forms a series of moves that lead to a transaction,<sup>35</sup> and thus can be viewed as a negotiation process, a spoken interaction aiming at:<sup>36</sup>

securing agreement between two or more parties, each of whom usually wants to get more than s/he has and yields less than the other party would like. Its essence is the reluctant exchange of commitments by those who have less than 100 percent trust in one another.

In biblical narrative many dialogue episodes recount how participants raise demands, convince one another, achieve goals and settle disputes, and may thus be viewed as narratives of negotiations, all the more so as negotiations fulfill an important role in ancient Near Eastern diplomatic and literary texts.<sup>37</sup> The narratives of such negotiations often involve highly intricate

such as a communication system, ritual constraints, economic negotiating, character contests (...), or whatever’.

35. The exchange of blessings between Boaz and his harvesters constitutes a transaction because their mutual blessings establish or renew their phatic communion and affirm their rank in the social network, as discussed by, e.g., Allen D. Grinsham, ‘Greetings in the Desert’, in A.S. Dil (ed.), *Language as Social Resource: Essays by Allen D. Grinshaw* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), pp. 129-74.

36. David Kuechle, ‘The Art of Negotiation—An Essential Management Skill’, in Ira Asherman and Sandy Asherman (eds.), *The Negotiation Sourcebook* (Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press, 1990), pp. 109-21. Kuechle adds that ‘It is at the same time an exercise in conflict and compromise and depends for its success on parties who believe they can gain more by working together than being apart’.

37. The Mari archive has yielded letters in which Zimri-Lim’s envoys to Babylon (1771–1765 BCE) report about their negotiations with Hammurabi; see my paper, ‘Negotiating with Ḥammu-rāpi: A Case Study’, in C. Cohen *et al.* (eds.), *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), pp. 645-65. Their extremely detailed letters even quote spoken discourse, and thereby enable analysis of the moves of both parties as one of the participants understood them. The middle Assyrian Tukulti-Ninurta epic reflects the diplomatic negotiations between the Assyrian king, Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208), and the king of Babylon, Kashtiliash IV (1242–1235) through a literary prism; see Peter Machinist, ‘Literature as Politics: The Tukulti-Ninurta Epic and the Bible’, *CBQ* 38 (1976), pp. 455-82; Benjamin R. Foster, (ed.), *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian literature*, vol. 1 (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2nd edn, 1995), pp. 212-30, esp. ii, lines 25’-v 30’). The Ugaritic epic of Aqhat tells of the altercation between Aqhat and the goddess Anat about the hero’s bow (CTA 1.17 VI, lines 16-46); see Simon B. Parker (ed.), *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBLWAW, 9; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 60-62. In addition one notes, e.g., the negotiations between Kirta and Pabulu, the king of Udmu, and between Ba’al and Kotar wa-Ḥasīs.

tactics. The tale of Abraham and Abimelech of Gerar recounts how the king proposed a covenant (Gen. 21.22-23):

P1a     God is with you in everything that you do. Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned as loyally as I have dealt with you.

The blessing by which Abimelech opens praises Abraham's prosperity, thus serving as an expression of goodwill in preparation for the proposal itself.<sup>38</sup> The proposal itself, 'Therefore swear to me here by God' closes with a reference to the good relationship prevailing between them until then, 'as loyally as I have dealt with you'. This motivation glosses over the conflict that ended with Abraham's virtual expulsion from Gerar (20.15).<sup>39</sup> This reevaluation of their past relationship indicates that the former conflict has lost its relevance, now that the king is interested in friendly ties.<sup>40</sup>

Abraham responds by avowing his readiness to conclude an agreement (v. 24), but immediately starts berating Abimelech about the wells he had dug, and that had been closed by the people of Gerar (v. 25):

P1b     And Abraham said, 'I am ready to swear it'.<sup>41</sup> But Abraham reproached Abimelech for the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.

How could Abraham voice such objections after assuring the king of Gerar of his readiness to such an agreement?<sup>42</sup> A negotiation perspective suggests

38. The reports to Zimrilim concerning the negotiations with Hammurabi point to the paramount importance of a good atmosphere in the view of the envoys (my article, 'Negotiating with Hammurabi', pp. 604-605, 611-12).

39. The benign formulation ('Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please', 20.15) rather seems a mere veil for the implied invitation to choose a dwelling place outside the king's town.

40. According to texts from Mari, similar methods are used by Hammurabi and Ishme-Dagan; see Dominique Charpin, 'L'évocation du passé dans les lettres de Mari', in Jan Procský (ed.), *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale. Prague, July 1-5, 1996* (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, 1998), pp. 91-110 (109-10); and my article, 'Negotiating with Hammurabi', pp. 605-606 n. 32.

41. In this verse the imperfect **יִשְׁבַּע** is to be construed as a volitive; see Yoshonobu Endo, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew in the Joseph Story: An Approach from Discourse Analysis* (Studia semitica neerlandica, 32; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), pp. 47-49, 59; an on-the-spot obligation is expressed by the perfect as performative (Endo, *Verbal System*, p. 58).

42. Gunkel (followed in substance by Westermann) finds here a contradiction: one part of the narrative represents E (vv. 23-24, 27), whereas the other part represents

that Abraham's positive response is no more than an initial agreement to open negotiations.<sup>43</sup> Abimelech's initiative provides Abraham with an opportunity to raise the issue of the wells. In response Abimelech declares that he has nothing to do with the seizure of the well, and adds that Abraham has never mentioned it (v. 26). Thus the king is excused, but at the same time accepts responsibility for the situation and paves the way for an agreement between himself and his semi-nomadic neighbor. Abraham's cautious approach enables him to attain a satisfactory settlement of the question of the wells.

This case demonstrates that analysis of the moves of the parties, their tactics and the interaction between them is indispensable for any understanding of biblical narrative. What is even more important is that such analysis makes for a better insight into the social role of the narrative, the voices represented, and thereby also into the mode of memory involved. A case in point is the tale about Samuel and the elders who demand the appointment of a king.

### 3. *The Tale of the Demand for a King: An Interplay of Voices*

#### a. *Israel's Elders and Samuel*

The narrative of the installation of the monarchy confronts the elders of Israel who demand a king, with Samuel's resistance to this innovation. Hence this tale embodies two contrasting positions, both of which can claim authoritative support, since weighty arguments against kingship are voiced by Samuel, whereas the introduction of this regime is ultimately sanctioned by God. What, then, is the 'message' of this tale? How can we follow its logic? A second question relates to the social rationale. Whose is

his J<sub>p</sub> (vv. 25-26); see Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (HKAT, I/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd edn, 1910), pp. 233-35; Claus Westermann, *Genesis. II. Genesis 12-36* (BKAT, I/2; Neukirchener Verlag: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981), pp. 425-26.

43. Precedents for initial agreements in ancient Near Eastern context are proposed by Moshe Anbar, "'Thou Shalt Make No Covenant with Them" (Exodus 23.32)', in H. Reventlow, Y. Hoffman and B. Uffenheimer (eds.), *Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Postbiblical Literature* (JSOTSup, 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 41-48; Bertrand Lafont, 'Relations internationales, alliances et diplomatie au temps des royaumes amorrites. Essai de synthèse', in Dominique Charpin and Jean-Marie Durand (eds.), *Amurru 2. Mari, Ebla et les Hourrites. Dix ans de travaux. Deuxième partie* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2001), pp. 213-328; and in my article, 'The Covenant at Mount Sinai in the Light of Texts from Mari', in C. Cohen, A. Hurvitz and S. M. Paul (eds.), *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), pp. 119-34 (123-24).

the speaking voice, and why does it remind us of the problems of kingship? What kind of historical memory is being communicated and to what socio-historical context does it belong?

When we look for a unitary summary of content or even an unequivocal message, one could suppose that Samuel's theocratic opposition to the monarchy forms the main idea, as explained in the divine answer to his prayer, 'it is me they have rejected as their king' (1 Sam 8.7).<sup>44</sup> But if we accept this explanation as the ultimate point of view, we have to face the problem that this explanation is given by word of God, whereas Samuel's voice is not heard; the prophet does not express his opposition.

An additional problem is posed by the exposition, in which the narrator highlights the shortcomings of his corrupt sons, whom Samuel nevertheless appointed as judges, 'in Beer-sheba' (at safe distance, vv. 2-3). The expository note is taken up in the preamble to the elders' demand: 'You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways' (v. 5a). Thus the elders who demand the installation of the monarchy represent the same view of Samuel's sons as the exposition. Is the narrator siding with the elders?<sup>45</sup> Is he opposed to Samuel's view?

My point is that a unitary view of meaning can only barely accommodate a narrative that centers on the negotiations between two parties. The logic of the present tale is not embodied by a single party but by the dialectics of the give-and-take between two sides, two groups of participants.

44. Historical-critical studies of this tale register it either as an expression of a late, theological opposition to the monarchy on the part of the deuteronomistic historian-redactor, e.g. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J.S. Black and A. Menzies; Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885; reprinted as *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* [New York: Meridian, 1957]), pp. 249, 252; or as a tale that has been revised in order to express such late opposition; see, e.g., Walter Dietrich, *David, Saul und die Propheten. Das Verhältnis von Religion und Politik nach den prophetischen Überlieferungen vom frühesten Königtum in Israel* (BWANT, 122; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2nd edn, 1992), pp. 90-91; see also Christophe Nihan, 'Le(s) récit(s) Dtr de l'instauration de la monarchie en 1 Samuel', in Thomas C. Römer (ed.), *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (BETL, 147; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), pp. 147-77. On the other hand, Buber and Weiser found here the expression of an ancient authentic opposition against the introduction of the rule of the king in the name of Yhwh as *melek*; see Martin Buber, 'Das Volksbegehren', in Martin Buber, *Werke*. II. *Schriften zur Bibel* (Munich: Kösel, 1964), pp. 727-42 (727-38); Arthur Weiser, *Samuel. Seine geschichtliche Aufgabe und seine religiöse Bedeutung* (FRLANT, 81; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 29-32.

45. A view of this tale as a defense of the monarchy, in accordance with the divine instructions to the prophet, is proposed by Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), pp. 253-55. Vette concludes that this tale demands a solution in the sequel of the narrative; see Joachim Vette, *Samuel und Saul. Ein Beitrag zur narrativen Poetik des Samuelbuches* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), pp. 125-26.

Let us, then, follow the negotiations. The narrative assigns the initiative to the elders:

- P1a 'You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations'.
- b Samuel was displeased that they said, 'Give us a king to govern us'.

The prophet does not answer the request,<sup>46</sup> and does not even vent his displeasure. Does he have a counter-argument? Raising the question is answering it. In order to buttress their initiative the elders silence the other party by means of an implicit accusation. The prophet has no answer, nor does he express his position in any other way. It is only the exchange between prophet and deity that allows for an expression of Samuel's view, albeit in an oblique way:

- P2b Samuel prayed to the Lord (v. 6b)
- c and the Lord replied to Samuel, 'Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you.<sup>47</sup> For it is not you that they have rejected; it is me they have rejected as their king' (v. 7).<sup>48</sup>

Thus rather than Samuel's position, the issue is the theopolitical theme of divine 'kingship'. But this theme is only brought up as an aside. The divine rebuke of the prophet confirms the weakness of his position vis-à-vis the elders and their complaints of his leadership.

No less problematic is the behest to 'heed the demand of the people'. Is this an instruction to give in to the elders' demands? In the light of the Abraham tale discussed above this bidding is better taken as a direction to agree to open negotiations. This interpretation tallies with the reiteration of the order, which continues with the argumentation the prophet is to use:

- c Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and inform them of the practices of the king who will rule over them (v. 9, partly following NAB).

46. The prophet is allowed to comment on the complaint by the elders (1 Sam. 12.2), but not to counter it.

47. The expression 'heed the demand of the people' contains a term which is new to the present narrative (עָנָה). However, since this term functions as an appellation it entails a point of view (like the term אֲנָשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל, v. 22) and does not, in itself, introduce the 'people' as a different entity. This appellation rather reflects a different focalization, centering on the position of the representatives of the people vis-à-vis the deity, whereas the opening scene, which mentions the elders, centers on their authority vis-à-vis Samuel as judge.

48. Verse 8, which sounds like an overt Dtr comment on Israel's apostasy, does not provide an additional argument.



Thus, Samuel's countermove is the exposition of the social and economic consequences of the establishment of the monarchy. He warns the people that the king will take their sons as 'charioteers and horsemen', and 'outrunners for his chariots' (v. 11). They will have to serve the king by imposed labor (v. 12), and the king even 'will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his courtiers' (v. 14).<sup>49</sup> But Samuel's warning is rejected:

P3a     'No', they said. 'We must have a king over us, that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles' (vv. 19-20).

Samuel's position, though not refuted, turns out to be irrelevant. The people's demand is fuelled by the hope that the king will bring them victory in battle, and will prevent their subjugation to other nations: 'Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles'. This is the decisive argument: existential needs outweigh the king's potential demands from his subjects. Reporting the popular reaction, Samuel obtains divine approval of the institution of royal rule.<sup>50</sup>

Thus the narrative gives voice to two opinions, one voice opposed to kingship, implicitly because of the rupture in the order of the polity, but explicitly because of social structure. The second voice supports the monarchy because of the weaknesses of the ancient regime, its dependence upon the sporadic and incidental leadership of the 'judges', and the need for a strong, central authority. The second voice carries the day: monarchical rule

49. The linguistic status of the description of 'the practices of the king' is analyzed in my article, 'Speaking of Kingship: The Institution of the Monarchy in Israel—Negotiations, Historical Memory and Social Drama', in H. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman (eds.), *Religious Responses to Political Crises in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (LHB/OTS, 444; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), pp. 1-15 (11-14); see also my, 'The Book of Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Syntactic-Stylistic Analysis', in Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger (ed.), *The Books of Samuel and the Deuteronomists* (BWANT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, forthcoming).

50. If one views this order as a resumptive repetition of the divine response to Samuel's prayer (vv. 7-9), the entire discussion could look like a digression or secondary insertion at the hands of, e.g., a later Deuteronomistic redaction, DtrN; see, e.g., Timo Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (AASF B., 198; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, 1977), p. 55; Dietrich, *David, Saul*, p. 92. But this solution must accept that the text of this section itself is far older (so also according to syntactic-stylistic criteria; see previous note), and may preserve some memory of real opposition against the royal regime, whether in connection with the popular opposition and rebellion against David (2 Sam. 16.5-8; 20.1-2), or Jeroboam's rebellion against Solomon (1 Kgs 11.26-28)—supported by Ahijah, the prophet from the ancient cult centre of Shiloh (1 Kgs 11.29-30); or the secession of the Northern tribes at the time Rehoboam inherited Solomon's realm (1 Kgs 12.16).



is sanctioned by God, in accordance with the wishes of the people. But the opposition to the monarchy is not disregarded. Its voice is heard in the dialogue between God and the prophet, and in the prophetic warning. Thus the opposition is allowed to enjoy the moral authority of Samuel, even if the prophet fails to convince the leaders. Eventually, though, even the opposition accepts the reality of the monarchy, in spite of the perceived dangers. In other words, the confrontation between the two contrasting positions is ironed out by an intricate game of negotiations in which the supporters of the monarchy, represented by the elders, have the upper hand. However, the opposition to kingship is not silenced. The weight of the opposition's social and religious objections is acknowledged, although it is not allowed to overrule the strategic and existential needs mentioned at the closure of the narrative, which eventually carry the day.

#### b. *Social Drama and Memory*

Let us, then, do some stock taking. Spoken discourse and negotiations presents the instauration of rule by the king as a rupture in the theopolity, but also posit a new equilibrium, in which royal authority organizes and concentrates the diverse groupings of the Israelite society, and commands the respect of even the most conservative religious circles. The narrative of the negotiations between elders and prophet preserves the memory of this controversy for the generations to come, shows how the balance was attained, and gives both sides of the debate a place in biblical memory. Thus the logic of both sides is recognizable for the future, and codetermines the nature of the positions in new discussions. The import of the narrative of these negotiations, then, extends far beyond the dialogue as such. These negotiations constitute a social drama in the sense used by the anthropologist Victor Turner: a ritual in which problems threatening the community (or the individual and his or her place in the community) are solved in a liminal situation, by way of a 'rite de passage'.<sup>51</sup> In Turner's view, societies in which the ritual practice of the social drama has been abandoned long ago, often continue to preserve the social drama as literature.<sup>52</sup> The concept of social drama is particularly appropriate for the framework of the encounter of the elders with the prophet, and the dialogue between the prophet and God. The notion of ritual can accommodate the prophetic and divine roles, while the encounter with God and prophet is a liminal occasion par excellence, as demonstrated by the assemblies at Mizpah (10.17-25) and Gilgal (11.15-12.25).<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the instauration

51. Turner, *Ritual Process*, pp. 94-111, 125-39.

52. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, pp. 8-12, 27-35, 52-55, 89-101, 106-11.

53. The act of dismissal which closes the assembly at Mizpah (10.25) is one of a series of cases in which the dismissal represents the termination of the liminal interval

of the monarchy actually constitutes an important transition in the life of the community. In this respect the confrontation of Samuel and the elders constitutes a 'rite de passage' in itself.

#### 4. *Samuel and Saul at Gilgal: The King's Burden*

Both the solemnity of the liminal interval and the logic of the negotiation process stand out in the tales of the confrontations between Samuel and Saul at Gilgal, preceding the battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 13.8-15), and following the Amalekite war (15.13-34). According to the common view, both narratives center on the rejection of Saul's kingship because of his failure to obey the divine orders conveyed by the prophet.<sup>54</sup> However, the way in which the confrontation develops is different in each case. The tale of the Amalekite war opens with an explicit divine order transmitted by Samuel, and shows how Saul failed to execute this command in full. The point of departure for this tale identifies Samuel as the authoritative messenger of God, and Saul as the transgressor. But the issue is not at all that clear in the tale of the preparations for battle at Gilgal. The point of departure for this episode is the threatening advance of the Philistine forces, and Samuel's failure to appear. In view of this confluence of motifs a more detailed analysis seems imperative.

##### a. *King, Prophet and the Opening of the Battle*

The episode at Gilgal opens as Saul is assembling his forces (1 Sam. 13.4: 'When all Israel heard that Saul had struck down the Philistine prefect, and that Israel had incurred the wrath of the Philistines, all the people rallied to Saul at Gilgal'), but finds himself abandoned while the Philistines are concentrating their troops at Michmash. So 'he waited seven days, the time that Samuel had set. But when Samuel failed to come to Gilgal, and

(Josh. 24.28; 1 Kgs 8.66). The dismissal which closes the encounter of Samuel and the elders (1 Sam. 8.22) may fulfill a similar function. In view of the ritual aspects of the preparations for warfare, liminality also plays a role in notes concerning the dismissal of people not able to participate in the war (Jdg. 7.8; 1 Sam. 13.2). The popular assembly at Shechem which was closed by a proclamation of dispersal (1 Kgs 12.16) hardly was a secular occasion only.

54. See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, pp. 257-59; Peter Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB, 8; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 20; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN, 1985), pp. 495-96. Fabrizio Forresti (*The Rejection of Saul in the Perspective of the Deuteronomistic School* [Rome: Edizioni del Teresianum, 1984], pp. 165-67) attributes 13.7b-12 to DtrH (promonarchical), and vv. 13-14 to DtrN (antimonarchical), whereas the primary basis of ch. 15\* is attributed to DtrP, amplified by DtrN. Dietrich (*Saul, David*, p. 109) views 13.7b-13a as part of the 'Overall Narrative' (created by the *Gesamterzähler*) of the David-Saul history opening in 1 Sam. 9.1-10.16.

the people began to scatter, Saul said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the sacrifice of well-being”; and he presented the burnt offering’ (vv. 8-9). Thus we see that Saul and his troop are waiting for seven days in a holy place, a *temenos* that forms a clear liminal locality,<sup>55</sup> in an extreme crisis. The scene, then, suits the requirements of a social drama, as set forth by Turner.

What happens when Samuel arrives at Gilgal? Let us leave the initiative to the prophet:

- P1a ...when Samuel arrived;<sup>56</sup>
- b and Saul went out to meet him and welcome him.
- P2a But Samuel said, ‘What have you done?’
- b Saul replied, ‘I saw the people leaving me and scattering; you had not come at the appointed time, and the Philistines had gathered at Michmash. I thought the Philistines would march down against me at Gilgal before I had entreated the Lord, so I forced myself to present the burnt offering’ (vv. 11-12).

Saul’s explanation is rejected by Samuel:

- P3a Samuel answered Saul, ‘You acted foolishly. You have not kept the commandments that the Lord your God laid upon you! Otherwise the Lord would have established your dynasty over Israel forever. But now your dynasty will not endure. The Lord will seek out a man after His own heart, and the Lord will appoint him ruler over His people, because you did not abide by what the Lord had commanded you’ (vv. 13-14).

This forceful accusation looks like a definitive repudiation, but is not. Samuel does not explain himself, fails to address Saul’s reproaches and disregards the problem of the immediate military threats. His reference to a divine commandment is not backed by the prophetic directive at Saul’s anointment, ‘Wait seven days until I come to you and instruct you what you

55. This issue was disregarded by Wellhausen’s note on the ‘impossibility’ of the location at Gilgal (*Prolegomena*, p. 258). The indication of seven days implies the liminality of a sacred *tempus clausum*; see Gerald A. Klingbeil, ‘Ritual Time in Leviticus 8 with Special Reference to the Seven Day Period in the Old Testament’, *ZAW* 109 (1997), pp. 500-13; W. Brede Kristensen, ‘Kringloop en totaliteit (1938)’, in W. Brede Kristensen, *Godsdiensten in de oude wereld* (Aula, 294; Utrecht: Spectrum, 1966), pp. 229-89 (265-70).

56. In this verse P1 forms an extralingual pre-exchange sequence, which is, however part of the interaction (or the encounter). Saul’s attempt ‘to meet him and welcome him’ entails a speech act.

are to do next' (10.8).<sup>57</sup> This episode ends with Samuel's departure, while Saul advances toward the lines of the Philistines (v. 15):<sup>58</sup>

- P3b     (...)  
 P4a     Samuel arose and went on his way from Gilgal,  
 b        The rest of the people followed Saul to join the army; they  
           went up from Gilgal toward Gibeah of Benjamin...

What has happened here? Is this the insertion of a later, e.g., prophetic, redactor? This opinion could be defended in view of the lack of reaction on Saul's part, which makes it seem as if the current episode is totally isolated within the narrative framework.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless analysis along these lines remains unsatisfactory. After all, Saul's description of his extreme distress is entirely in keeping with the narrative context (one recalls the Gideon tale, Jdg. 7.1, 12 and Ps. 20),<sup>60</sup> and even makes Samuel's pronouncement seem ridiculous. The question why the prophet did not arrive in time demands an answer which is not forthcoming. From the vantage point of CA and negotiation tactics the lack of adequate response by Samuel must be deemed extremely meaningful. Even more significant is the question, why doesn't Saul answer these accusations?

The narrative context permits two possibilities. Since Samuel's departure immediately follows his diatribe, one might argue that Samuel walked out straightaway after the indictment.<sup>61</sup> But the clause 'Samuel arose' (אָרָם) implies a certain pause between the prophet's address and his departure (and possibly a different posture, if he has not been standing).

Hence an alternative course seems preferable. Saul does not answer his accuser, and responds to the indictment by silence (P3b).<sup>62</sup> If one wishes to

57. Wellhausen's judgment to the contrary (*Prolegomena*, p. 258) fails to address the difference in attitude between the slightly vague directive of 10.8 and the mention of a divine command in 13.14bd.

58. My rendering follows the Septuagint. The corruption of the Masoretic text by homoioteleuton (from Gilgal...from Gilgal) is noted by McCarter, *I Samuel*, p. 230.

59. McCarter, *I Samuel*, pp. 23, 230.

60. See Fritz Stolz, *Jahwes und Israels Kriege. Kriegstheorien und Kriegserfahrungen im Glauben des Alten Israels* (AThANT, 60; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972), pp. 115-19. On the analysis of Forresti and Dietrich see n. 54 above.

61. See, e.g., Ian Dersley and Anthony J. Wootton, 'In the Heat of the Sequence: Interactional features Preceding Walkouts from Argumentative Talk', *Language in Society* 30 (2001), pp. 611-38.

62. In CA silence is primarily indicated as a pause, but when the narrative suggests that an answer is expected (the turn is attributed to the addressee), the result is significant silence; see Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 299-300; see also Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Jail Jefferson, 'A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation', *Language* 50 (1974), pp. 696-735 (713).

gauge the meaning of this silence, one has to take into account that silence does not automatically signify consent.<sup>63</sup> By the same token it can indicate, e.g., speechlessness. Saul's silence, then, indicates that the prophetic accusation leaves him flabbergasted,<sup>64</sup> but does not prevent him from advancing toward the enemy lines. This reading is supported by the sequence found in the Greek, which narrates that the people follow Saul to the battle ground.

What, then, is the import of this scene? In my view, what is at stake is the balance between prophetic authority and royal power: the king prevails, whereas the prophet has overstepped the boundaries. The divine directions will come through another channel, Jonathan's valour (1 Sam. 14.8-12). That is the outcome of the social drama preceding the Philistine war.

### b. *Prophet, King, and the Violation of the Ban*

An entirely different constellation is represented by the tale of Saul's war against Amalek. The point of departure and vantage point of this tale is Samuel's announcement of the divine order to engage the ancient enemy in battle (1 Sam. 15.1-3). Saul obtains a decisive victory, but fails to carry out the complete destruction of the booty, leaving the king and part of the cattle alive (v. 9). Hence Samuel announced that Saul no longer enjoys divine grace (v. 10). These developments set the scene for the confrontation between king and prophet during the victory festivities at Gilgal. The ritual character of the occasion suggests the liminality of the social drama, which indeed is indicated by the location itself.<sup>65</sup>

The drama opens when the prophet proceeds to meet the king at Gilgal, and is proudly greeted by a king, who is perfectly certain of his success:

- P1a     When Samuel came to Saul,<sup>66</sup>
- b     Saul said to him, 'Blessed are you of the Lord! I have fulfilled the Lord's command' (v. 13).
- P2a     'Then what', demanded Samuel, 'is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of oxen that I hear?' (v. 14).

63. Ephratt, 'The Functions of Silence', pp. 1919-23, 1927-32; Kurzon, *Discourse of Silence*, pp. 51-57. Kurzon deals both with silence in forensic context (the accused person exercising his right to remain silent and its legal implications) and in literary context. On the expression of agreement and disagreement by silence in biblical narrative see Miller, 'Silence as a Response', pp. 32-35.

64. See, e.g., Charles R. Berger, 'Speechlessness: Causal Attributions, Emotional Features and Social Consequences', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 23 (2004), pp. 147-79 (154, 172-74); Kurzon, *Discourse of Silence*, pp. 102-103; Miller, 'Silence as a Response', pp. 39-40.

65. In view of the *herem* theme the entire tale of the Amalekite crisis may constitute a liminal situation within the Saul-David narrative.

66. As noted above, appearing at the scene often constitutes a non-linguistic act in the dialogue.

The positive overtones of Saul's welcome are drowned by the bluntness of Samuel's hostile question.<sup>67</sup> By referring to Samuel as speaker, even though he has already been mentioned, the narrator highlights the conflict situation.<sup>68</sup> Saul's reply is marked by the same explicit opening:

P2b     Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the choicest of the sheep and the cattle, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have proscribed' (mainly NRSV).

Saul's reply refers to his national responsibilities: his position vis-à-vis the people and the ritual ceremonies.<sup>69</sup> Rhetorical analysis indicates the difference between Saul's reference to his successes ('I have fulfilled the Lord's command', v. 13) and the explanation of the failure, which refers to the role of the 'people' (v. 15). On this view Saul is portrayed as if he throws the responsibility for the failure upon the warriors.<sup>70</sup> But although the continuation of the discussion indicates Saul's use of the troops' decision as a subterfuge (v. 24), at present the king is not aware of any wrongdoing on his part.

But the prophetic attack continues, and at this time by the fully explicit inquit that is characteristic of open conflict:

P3a     Samuel said to Saul, 'Stop! Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night!' (v. 16a).

This time Saul's answer is not marked by the mention of the subject:

b       'Speak', he replied (v. 16b).

Lack of subject indication could be a matter of narrative tempo, but this solution is less likely, since the narrator continues to mention Samuel as

67. See John Heritage, 'The Limits of Questioning: Negative Interrogatives and Hostile Question Content', *Journal of Pragmatics* 34 (2002), pp. 1427-46.

68. See above. Nevertheless it is to be noted that the addressee is not mentioned, unlike the prophetic rebuke in vv. 16a, 26, 28, and Saul's *riposti* in vv. 20, 24. The conflict has not yet reached its high point.

69. The ambiguity of the term *hā'ām*, also meaning 'the troops', plays an important role in the present tale. At the present stage 'troops' would be right (so in the JPS *Tanakh*), but at the end of the tale (v. 30) this term refers to the nation. Fortunately, the English term 'people' is fraught with similar ambiguity; 'folk' would do well, were it not for the connotation 'common people'. In the following I will use the *Tanakh* version, but replace the mention of the 'troops' by an ambiguous reference to 'the people'.

70. See Meir Weiss, 'Weiteres über die Bauformen des Erzählens in der Bibel', *Biblica* 46 (1965), pp. 181-206; Sternberg, *Poetics*, pp. 506-507. Forrester (*Rejection of Saul*, pp. 26-27) treats the repetition with variation as a sign of secondary elaboration (DtrN) of the core tale, entirely disregarding Weiss's literary analysis.

speaking subject. Hence the lack of mention of Saul's name indicates that the king is getting the worst of it. Diminishing Saul's stature, the narrator introduces a premonition of defeat, whereas Samuel's authority is maintained:

- P4a 'And Samuel said, 'When you were insignificant in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel... Why did you disobey the Lord and swoop down on the spoil and defy the Lord's will?' (vv. 17-19).

Saul counters by proud defense of his achievements, rejecting the prophet's point of view. The narrator marks the open conflict by a fully explicit mention of speaker and addressee:

- b Saul said to Samuel, 'But I did obey the Lord! I performed the mission on which the Lord sent me: I captured King Agag of Amalek, and I proscribed Amalek (v. 20), and the people took from the spoil some sheep and oxen—the choicest of what had been proscribed—to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal' (v. 21).

This reply includes two moves: the assertion of Saul's successful execution of the divine commands, and the reference to the grand public sacrifice. This is exactly what Samuel rejects (vv. 22-23):

- P5a But Samuel said: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the Lord's command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, Compliance than the fat of rams... Because you rejected the Lord's command, He has rejected you as king'.

This response includes two parts: the *a priori* rejection of sacrifice accompanied by disobedience,<sup>71</sup> and the future rejection of Saul as king. Still, this announcement is not marked by a fully explicit introduction. The conflict has not yet reached its high point. But we are close:<sup>72</sup>

71. The theme of rejection of 'the sacrifice of the wicked' also appears in Prov. 15.8; 21.3, 27, and thus is not exclusively 'prophetic' (see also Ps. 50.14-16). The connection between the themes of obedience and ban is provided by Samuel's rhetorical question in v. 14, ומה קול הצאן הזה באזני וקול הבקר אשר אנכי שמע, 'voice of the sheep...the oxen' rather than 'bleating' and 'lowing' (against KJV; NJPSV).

72. The scholarly proposal to attribute the episode of vv. 24-29 to a different source (e.g., McCarter, *I Samuel*, p. 268; Forresti, *Rejection of Saul*, pp. 26-28; Dietrich, *Saul, David*, p. 169) does not tally with the results of syntactic-stylistic



- P5b Saul said to Samuel, 'I did wrong to transgress the Lord's command and your instructions; but I was afraid of the troops and I yielded to them. Please, forgive my offense and come back with me, and I will bow low to the Lord' (vv. 24-25).

Saul admits his sin. By now he refers to his relationship with the 'troops', but demands to be forgiven, and to be able to continue with the ritual. His demand is presented with full royal authority, since it is preceded by a fully explicit introduction, marking high conflict. Samuel responds by the same token:

- P6a But Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not go back with you; for you have rejected the Lord's command, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel' (v. 26).  
 b As Samuel turned to leave, *he* (Saul) seized the corner of his robe, and it tore (v. 27).

Samuel has the upper hand, and Saul is unable to answer him. Thus he tries to stop him by seizing the prophet's robe,<sup>73</sup> *but* his defeat is indicated by his lack of indication as acting subject:

- P7a And Samuel said to *him*, 'The Lord has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you. Moreover, the Glory of Israel does not deceive or change his mind, for he is not a man that he should change his mind'.  
 b But Saul pleaded, '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 may bow low to the Lord your God'.

This confession marks the end of the conflict: 'So Samuel followed Saul back, and Saul bowed low to the Lord' (v. 31).

analysis which point to continuity (see my article, 'Syntactic-Stylistic Analysis'). From a literary point of view this episode leads to a second climax, the tearing of Samuel's robe, and a third climax, the announcement of Saul's formal rejection and Saul's capitulation.

73. This gesture is the opposite of the symbolic act of 'seizing the corner of the robe' signifying the instigation of a covenant relationship, mostly as the inferior partner (submission, as indicated by Zech. 8.23; see Ronald A. Brauner, "'To Grasp the Hem'" and 1 Samuel 15:27', *JANES* 6 [1974], pp. 35-38), and results in a rupture between prophet and king, the opposite of a covenant relationship. Brauner's contribution is entirely disregarded by Forresti (*Rejection of Saul*, pp. 82-84) who views the similarity to the Ahijah tale (1 Kgs 11.29-30) as basic to any understanding of the tearing of Samuel's cloak, even though the situation and symbolic meaning are entirely different.



This altercation, then, ends with Saul's recognition of Samuel's authority, but lets the prophet uphold the king's rule, in spite of the expectation of his reign's demise. The social drama is concluded by a tense balance, and a hardly veiled stand-off, but does not lead to open, immediate rupture.

### 5. *King and Prophet: a Balancing Act*

Thus the tales of the confrontations between Saul and Samuel, rather than forming a one-sided sequence of conflict situations, represent two sides of the balance. In the inception of the war against the Philistines the prophet oversteps the boundaries as he fails to support the king in a way appropriate to the circumstances. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the Amalekite campaign Saul disregards the full extent of the divine instructions. Once the king accepts prophetic authority, the prophet respects royal sovereignty over the nation, in spite of the rupture. The king, on the other hand, does not proceed without prophetic authorization. This balance is reached by representing both sides of the conflict: respecting both the voice of the prophet, who gets the best of it in the Amalek tale; and the part of the king, who prevails in the account of the Philistine war. These tales, then, represent two sides of the balance, thus leading to an equilibrium which honors the claim to authority of king and prophet alike.

In the overall composition of the book of Samuel, these conflicts play an important role in that they preannounce Saul's future demise. The equilibrium is set, and dominates the ensuing David tales. The cultural memory tells not only how this equilibrium arose out of a series of confrontations, but also preserves some of the voices involved in the conflict. Negotiations and social drama, then, form a particular mode of memory building, in which the give-and-take between the parties allows different groups to present their identity. The ancient leading families, conservative religious groups and supporters of the king are all able to claim a role in the community. Thus the multiplicity of voices in polyphonous memory enables a dialogue of different groups and strata in the society whose self-expression is embodied in cultural memory.

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## JOSEPH'S TRAUMA: MEMORY AND RESOLUTION

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*In loving memory of Peter Lipton*

———— \* \* \* ————

### 1. *Joseph: Dreams and Traumatic Memory*

Joseph 'remembered the dreams', not just any dreams, but, as the narrative accentuates, those 'which he had dreamt about them', about his brothers (42.9).<sup>1</sup> This moment of recollection is described in the sequence of Joseph's strained encounter with his brothers as a flicker of his consciousness. The content of the dreams, which he had dreamt a long time before, is not conveyed or retold by the narrator; for in identifying with the stirring of Joseph's memory, the reader is also to awaken in himself or herself some recollection of these dreams, however flimsy, registering them, for a passing moment: the first dream, about the brothers' sheaves gathering round in the field and bowing down before Joseph's upright sheaf; and the second dream, about the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowing down to him (37.5-11).

Joseph's indistinct reminiscence of the dreams is in tune with the terseness of biblical narrative art and with the elusiveness of memory, as a psychic phenomenon. However 'other' dreams, namely nightmares of remembered or unremembered horrors Joseph may have dreamt 'about them', his brothers, in the twenty years that have lapsed since their last fateful encounter, are also evoked by the particular wording and the immediate and wider narrative context of the phrase: **וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלֵם לָהֶם**. As if behind the memory of the symbolic dreams there lurks another memory, unstated, that of a traumatic event, which tends to surface in dreams, of what occurred to Joseph when his brothers had come close to his attempted murder, by throwing him, after stripping him of his exceptional garment, presumably close to naked, into a pit, later selling him off to merchant travelers that happened to pass by, brutally severing him from his protective father and destining him to what in all likelihood can be imagined as a life of slavery and exile (37.23-30). Surely, in paraphrasing Shakespeare's *Tempest*, 'such stuff' as nightmares

1. All English translations are from the NEB.

'are made on'.<sup>2</sup> The ambiguity of Joseph's act of memory has intrigued commentators through the ages. In pre-modern exegesis it was usually solved by relying on the main biblical (and pre-modern) conception of dreams as prognostications, encodings of future events.<sup>3</sup> The medieval Jewish commentator Nahmanides suggests, for instance, that Joseph most accurately 'remembered', when meeting his brothers, the detailed images of both his symbolic dreams, as a complementary pair. Having realized the first dream had come true in their present bowing before him as ruler of Egypt (42.6), Joseph now sought the complete fulfillment, in detail, of his second dream, wherein Benjamin and Jacob are also to come under his authority. Joseph's subsequent actions, according to Nahmanides and other commentators, are not so much motivated by his revenge upon his brothers (though this psychological level is acknowledged by some); rather, they anticipate and are even meant to create the necessary conditions for the enactment in reality of the second dream.<sup>4</sup>

Modern literary analysis of the Joseph narrative highlights the complex role of the memory flashbacks by the various characters as contributing to the portrayal of their consciousness, as well as to the structuring and buildup of the plot. Thus, Joseph's 'remembering' of his dreams characterizes his wider state of mind upon encountering his brothers—not only for their symbolic content, now about to be realized, but also for the memory of his ordeal at his brothers' hands, one which came about as the result of his symbolic dreams.<sup>5</sup> The interpretive history of 42.9 illuminates the deep

2. The connection of dreams to traumatic symptoms and to repression in general is essentially based on Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (first published in 1900), most notably the first full account of his dynamic view of mental processes and of the unconscious. For a recent appraisal see K. Frieden, *Freud's Dream of Interpretation* (foreword by Harold Bloom; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990). Since then the subject of dreams and traumatic memory has been researched in depth; see further bibliographical background in the *Postscript* below.

3. On dreams in the Bible and the ancient World, see the *Postscript*.

4. See H.D. Shavel, *perushey ha-tora le-rabenu moshe ben nahman* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1996 [Hebrew]), pp. 232-33. Other mediaeval commentators (e.g., Rashi and Radak) emphasize Joseph's realization that his dreams are coming true; see M. Cohen (ed.), *Mikra 'ot Gedolot Haketer, Genesis* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 130-33 [Hebrew]). This approach is also found in modern commentaries on this verse (see in those mentioned in the *Postscript*). The biblical plot underlines the eventual physical hierarchy between Joseph and his siblings, less so with regard to his father (Gen. 42.6; 43.26; 45.28; 46.29). Radak's psychological reasoning stands out in his comments on the wider implications of Joseph's 'memory' (42.9): 'and when he remembered all that they did to him he did not repay them badly, but caused them sorrow and annoyed them' (*Mikra 'ot Gedolot Haketer*, p. 133).

5. See especially F. Polak, *Biblical Narrative: Aspects of Art and Design* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994 [Hebrew]), pp. 173-74, who illuminates the contrastive structuring of the scene of Joseph's memory of his dreams, and the scene of the ordeal in which the brothers remember them (37.18-19). R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York:



structure of memory, dreams and the connection between them in the Joseph narrative, as well other aspects of its prophetic and religious-historical significance. Within a traumatic-centered psychological reading of the story, as I would like to suggest here, Joseph's unspecified reminiscence of his dreams, at this charged moment of his reencounter with his brothers, hints at a wider traumatized facet in his character. This facet is further revealed in the narrative span of chs. 42-45, wherein Joseph's behavior can be analyzed as reflecting the distress symptoms and behavioral patterns typical of traumatized people. This approach has wider implications for the story of Joseph and his brothers as a whole, suggesting that the theme of trauma and its resolution is central to the understanding of its plot.

In her classic study on *Trauma and Recovery* the psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman defines the common core of the varied traumatic experiences of victims of captivity and domestic abuse, as follows:

Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless... Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning... Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death... certain identifiable experiences increase the likelihood of harm. These include being taken by surprise, trapped, or exposed to the point of exhaustion... In each instance, the salient characteristic of the traumatic event is its power to inspire helplessness and terror.<sup>6</sup>

Basic Books, 1981), p. 163, comments on 42.9 as triggering 'a whole train of memories in Joseph' and as a rare instance in which the biblical narrator reports 'the character's consciousness of his past... which unlike knowledge of the future, is not a guide to policy but a way of coming to terms with one's moral history, a way of working towards psychological integration'. M. Sternberg (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative; Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987], p. 288) considers the act of memory as a trigger in the tit-for tat process of Joseph's revenge upon his brothers that is about to unfold: 'The hypothesis that Joseph is bent on revenge gains further psychological support from the object of remembrance—the dreams, whose narration led to the crime and whose fulfillment enables the punishment—and more subtly from the playacting that follows... In ethical terms, moreover, such vengeance has a rough justice about it that might appeal even to one who has not gone through, and just relived, a series of traumatic experiences: attempted murder, enslavement, seduction followed by the charge of attempted rape and three years in jail'. In the detailed traumatic contextualization of the narrative I will suggest below, revenge (and fantasies relating to it) is recognized as a minor motivation in the story, as one stage, in fact, in Joseph's reckoning with the past, whereas the process of psychological 'integration' of the initial trauma of domestic abuse into Joseph's life story becomes central to the unraveling of Joseph's subsequent actions in the buildup of the plot.

6. J. Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 33-34. Further on this work see in the *Postscript*.



Joseph's ordeal at the hand of his brothers, as described in Gen. 37.23-30, can be identified within the above definition as a traumatic experience. For in being stripped and then thrown, partially or completely naked, into the pit, as into a live grave, he is not only rendered completely helpless by the overwhelming force of his gang of brothers, the threat to his life and bodily integrity evident, but he is also taken by surprise, completely unaware of the extent and fervor of their hatred towards him.<sup>7</sup> The silent reaction afforded to him by the narrator, in the primary record of the event, can also be interpreted, when contrasted with the talkative conniving of the brothers, as a sign of complete shock, reflecting the alteration of the victim's consciousness (as a means of self-defense). Such alteration has been identified behind the known symptom of 'constriction and numbing', typical of post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>8</sup> Joseph's subsequent actions also reflect the 'dialectic of psychological trauma', defined as 'the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud... When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often when secrecy prevails, the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom'.<sup>9</sup>

Traumatic-related behavioral patterns can also be uncovered in the narrative portrayal of the brothers and Jacob. As will be shown more briefly at the end of this essay, these characters are contrastively juxtaposed with that of Joseph in as much as their ability to cope with trauma is concerned. Joseph's place in this triangle of traumatized behavior is the most developed and pronounced in the story: not only because he is the main character but also since, after all, he is the direct recipient of his brothers' victimization.<sup>10</sup> In this light, Joseph's 'remembrance' of his dreams at the start of the story, beyond their known interpretations, is also an expression of his 'dialectic of trauma', reflecting the tension between 'the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy', namely, his victimized sense of self, still deeply hidden

7. Joseph's unawareness is underlined in the narrative by his father's ignorance in sending him after his brothers (37.12-14), and further echoed by Jacob's shock when learning of Joseph's 'disappearance' (37.32-33). See Section 4 below.

8. *Trauma and Recovery*, pp. 42-47.

9. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 1.

10. Moral and psychological aspects of offensive forms of familial and domestic relations have been widely addressed in relation to biblical narrative in general and the patriarchal and Joseph narratives in particular in biblical study (see, for instance, the works and commentaries mentioned in nn. 23 and 29) as well as in works of rabbinic teaching; see for example N.J. Cohen, *Self, Struggle and Change: Family Conflict Stories in Genesis and their Healing Insights for our Lives* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1995). Nonetheless, as far as I am aware, the specific expression of traumatically related behavior has not been discussed with regard to Joseph's character and this narrative at large.

as a secret on the one hand, but also in search of proclamation on the other hand. This tension builds up in his psyche from the moment he sets eyes upon his brothers, his behavior from that point reflecting his fluctuation between these two pulls until they implode. The memory of ‘the dreams’, when followed by the unspecified relative phrase ‘which he had dreamt about them’, can thus also be alluding to other, unspoken dreams he may have had about them, in which the traumatic experience finds its primary unconscious outlet.<sup>11</sup>

The immediate context of Gen. 42.7-9 supports this analysis from several angles. On the one hand, the occurrence of reminiscence, as it is described in this narrative sequence, is manifestly associative. It is a moment all of us recognize in the workings of our own memories, for it is triggered by an associative image: in seeing his brothers bowing to the ground before him (42.6) Joseph is thrown back in time upon the bending movement of the sheaves and heavenly elements, the common core of his dream pair. Hence he is provided with a hint to their symbolic ‘unlocking’; this would suggest that what he primarily remembers are his adolescent dreams, which have now passed from unconscious to conscious memory. On the other hand, the intervening verses between the physical encounter (42.6) and the registered birth of memory (42.9) reflect Joseph’s volatile state of mind, strained between his awakening mental perception and his unkempt emotions, mostly that of anger, on the verge of bursting: ‘And Joseph saw his brothers and he recognized them but he pretended not to know them. And he spoke harshly to them: “Where do you come from?”’ (42.7). Though Joseph may have expected some memory to have been stirred in his brothers’ consciousness as well, especially after hearing his voice upon questioning them, the narrative stresses their failure to identify him just after seconding his recognition of them (v. 8). It is only after his short exchange of sorts with his brothers that Joseph is said to have ‘remembered’ his dreams ‘about them’ (v. 9).<sup>12</sup>

11. The peculiar usage of the pronoun ל after חלם (‘dreamt about/of/on/for’), not attested in other biblical instances of this verbal form, may also accentuate the ambiguity of Joseph’s unspecified memory of his dreams.

12. On the opposition between Joseph’s knowledge and the brothers’ ignorance as emphasized by the narrative structuring see Polak, *Biblical Narrative*, and on the usage of the leading root נכר, Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative* (see n. 5 above); also cf., in pre-modern exegesis, *Gen. Rab.* 91.7: ‘Said R. Levi: when they fell into his hands, “And Joseph recognized his brothers”; when he fell into their hands, “And they did not recognize him”’. For a detailed study of the consistent recurrences and special constellation of lexemes of sight, insight and oral communication in the Joseph narrative see T. Sutskover, ‘The Semantic Field of Seeing and Oral Communication in the Joseph Narrative’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 33/2 (2007), pp. 33-50. According to her analysis ‘dreaming’ is related to the semantic field of ‘seeing’ in this story, and is combined with that of oral communication at strategic points in the narrative (i.e.,

The brothers' unawareness, when juxtaposed to Joseph's act of memory, can also be construed as the trigger that creates a linkage to the trauma. For it is interpreted by Joseph (wrongly, perhaps, as he shall later learn) as a sign of their ongoing indifference, a hurtful reminder of their emotional relationship to him: one of rejection, hate and victimization. It is his understanding that he does not exist for them that awakens in him the memory and experience of his dreams. This memory is illuminated not only by the association of an image in reality to one stored in the mind, but also by other associations in the inner stirrings of his mind. The downward movement of being thrown into the pit may be one of them. The sequencing of the narrative, therefore, which creates a psychological linkage between Joseph's sense that he has been 'forgotten' by his brothers, completely annihilated, as it seems, from their consciousness, and his 'remembering' of them, points to the traumatic undertone of his memory. This sequencing also emphasizes Joseph's sense of being completely cut off from his brothers, isolated by his self-awareness and required to contain, as he does, the 'dialectic of trauma' imploding inside him. Lastly, the traumatic air of Joseph's memory is also apparent in its description as an irruption of his stream of consciousness, which is instantaneously subdued, to be immediately followed by the surprising accusation that the brothers are spies (in the space of the same v. 8, to which I shall return later). This immediacy accords with Lewis Herman's description:

Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present...for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of the trauma. The traumatic content becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding the dominant biblical (and pre-modern) interpretation of dreams as prognostications, and their alternative view in Freudian wish-fulfillment interpretation and in Jungian dream symbolism as encoded expressions of repressed desires and emotions, the folk wisdom of various societies is known to recognize in dreams, and especially in nightmares, windows to real—often traumatic—experiences.<sup>14</sup> In this light Joseph's

37.7: 'saw, recognized, spoke roughly'). On complementary aspects of the visual and the verbal in the buildup of 'perception' as a field of meaning in biblical narrative see also Polak, *Biblical Narrative*, pp. 102-106. In light of these studies, it is interesting to consider whether the theme of traumatic memory and its resolution is also underlined by the interplay of the semantic fields in the Joseph narrative—mainly since traumatic memory is distinguished by its silent visual imagery, whereas its therapeutic resolution is distinctly verbal. See further in Section 2.

13. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 37.

14. This notion growingly came to serve in the analysis of traumatic dreams as a means of recovering a person's memory of the traumatic event, see further in the

memory of his dreams, as it appears in the immediate context, can be taken at face value, primarily (or at least consciously) referring to the symbolic dreams without excluding murkier nightmarish connotations. Its significance lies not in the details of the dreams themselves, but rather in how they were received by the brothers (and to a lesser extent, by the father); and in the horrific acts of violence that ensued some time after their telling and, no less importantly, as a result of the telling. Hence, the dreams become identified with Joseph's trauma (whatever their content) and with his 'altered' state of consciousness, which is typical of the dialectic of trauma. The layer beneath layer of the dreams' memory is suggestive of the process known as 'doublethink' or 'dissociation' in which:

The psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflect from it. This is the most apparent in the way traumatized people alternate between feeling numb and reliving the event. The dialectic of trauma gives rise to complicated, sometimes uncanny alterations of consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

For what lies beneath Joseph's apparent memory is another, deeply disturbing and yet unprocessed and uncontainable memory. Its connection to the dreams is yet to be unraveled by him, still in complete denial, namely, the memory of his abuse.

The linkage between trauma and memory is also perceptible in the extended narrative context, wherein the dreams are thrice mentioned as motivating the brothers' actions.<sup>16</sup> First in their open rebuke of Joseph's sheaf dream and their inner reaction to it, as disclosed by the narrator: 'And they hated him still more because of his dreams and what he said' (37.8),<sup>17</sup> and then twice, in the frame structure of their murderous plan: 'They saw him at a distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. They said to each other, "Here comes the dreamer. Now is our chance; let us kill him and throw him into one of these pits and say that a wild beast has devoured him. Then we shall see what will come of his dreams"' (Gen. 37.18-20). In this manner Joseph's victimization is directly connected to the dreams that he boastfully 'told' (37.5-6, 10). That the actual telling of the dream has an effect on reality is a known feature of the ancient conception of dreams.<sup>18</sup> It is almost as if the brothers, in their subsequent actions, are

*Postscript.* On Freud, see n. 2 above; for Carl Gustav Jung's *Dreams* see the recent edition with translation by R.F.C. Hull and foreword by K. Raine (London: Routledge, 2002).

15. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 1.

16. This factor has been recognized in literary analyses of the story, see n. 5 above.

17. This is echoed in Jacob's taking him to task over the second dream (37.10-11).

18. On dream-telling as a form of performance of dreams (and their memory) in late antiquity see Patricia Cox Miller's work, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the*

engaged in an inverted performance of Joseph's dreams. The reader is left with the disturbing sense that other things might have happened had Joseph not 'told' his dreams, had he not released them from the unspoken visual register (of the unconscious) to the spoken verbal register (of the conscious) and so had begun to make them operable in reality.

From a psychological perspective, moreover, Joseph's distant experience of 'telling' his dreams has taught him to be wary of what he can let out into the open, expose of his inner self, despite and even against his natural inclination—once a manifestation of his confident and (un-traumatized) egocentric character to 'show off', let out, and tell. Against the wider background of the story, Joseph's momentary memory of his dreams (42.8) may be construed as adding to his self-defensiveness, by way of inner-warning and apprehension: he now must be on double guard, for as the dreams that he once told intentionally drew attention to his destined grandeur and proved destructive when released into reality, their actual fulfillment in his present standing above his brothers may do so as well. This time putting his dreams, and more precisely, the transitory memory of his dreams, into words, may draw unwarranted attention to the weakest and most fragile moment of his humiliation and despair and may destroy him, in his own eyes and those of the Egyptians. That this process of 'telling' might not prove destructive but, on the contrary, become the means of Joseph's inner and outer release, is actually a discovery the hero will make in the unfolding of the plot.<sup>19</sup>

Before the resolution of the traumatic state is enabled, however, the description of Joseph's traumatized state intensifies and thickens as the plot progresses, in that his behavior and reactions build up into a realistic psychological portrayal. The most recognizable feature that identifies him in a state of post-traumatic stress disorder is the uncontrolled oscillation of his feelings and reactions, alternating between pacified indifference or inactivity and active anger.<sup>20</sup>

This state of altered consciousness is also captured in Joseph's defensively sardonic accusation which follows immediately upon the 'memory' of his dreams (42.9): 'So he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to spy out the nakedness of the land"'. The connection between the dreams and the seemingly unexpected choice of accusation has perplexed many commentators.<sup>21</sup> However, when interpreted in the context of post-traumatic disorder, it reflects Joseph's tormented attempt to secure his denial—his oscillating reaction to the threatening content of

*Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), discussed in the *Postscript*.

19. See Section 2 below.

20. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 1; cited on p. 78 above.

21. For various solutions cf. the commentaries mentioned in the *Postscript*.

his 'unspoken' nightmarish dreams and experiences. The accusation of spying may also be construed, in this light, as a form of psychological 'dissociation' or 'projection', self-referential in nature: for it is Joseph, in fact, who is in real danger of being stripped of his defenses, of being confronted with the 'naked' truth (ערוה) of his anguished relationship with his brothers. Its abusive core lies in his being stripped by them, and then deliberately thrown into a dry pit as a dead body (or any other 'object') might be cast into a grave (37.24); it is this memory, of his most humiliating experience, the helpless sensation of his being turned into an object, dehumanized, which is on the verge of being 'exposed' or 'found out'.<sup>22</sup> And so Joseph must defer, for now, the pain and shame of recognition, buy time, suppress emerging memories so threatening to his integral sense of self, of reconstructed identity, now ruler over the whole of Egypt. With time, however, this transitory memory is bound to be self-revealing to an expert dream-interpreter such as him.

It is the accusation of spying and the reversed victimization which will ensue from it, this time directed by Joseph at his brothers, wherein they will be imprisoned, then released, then imprisoned (Simeon) again, then released, and yet again be threatened with death and imprisonment (Benjamin)—that the structural 'measure for measure' principle, prevalent in the Joseph narrative and other biblical narratives, has been recognized.<sup>23</sup>

22. The root ערוה generally denotes 'uncovering', also by way of 'emptying' or 'pouring out' (cf. Gen. 24.20; Lev. 20.18; Isa. 53.12). Cf. Rashi's comment on this verse: 'Every ערוה in the Bible is in the sense of finding out' (*Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer*, p. 132). According to the psychological interpretation offered here the accusation of spying is a form of projection onto the brothers, which inverts Joseph's inner fear of being stripped (this time metaphorically) of his defenses. On the connection of the lexeme ערוה to the semantic field of 'seeing' in the story, see Sutskov, 'Semantic Fields', p. 44; Alter (*Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 164) connects ערוה here to the possibility that 'Joseph feels a kind of incestuous violence in what the brothers have done to him and through him to his father'. In this he points to a distinctly traumatic dimension in Joseph's accusation, though, in my view, the incestuous contextualization is less convincing here. While a sexual threat may indeed be implied in Joseph's stripping by his brothers it is the survivor's deep-set fear of the truth being found out, common to victims of various forms of abuse (including sexual abuse), which offers a more comprehensive psychological explanation for Joseph's accusation and his wider behavioral pattern in the narrative sequence.

23. On the one hand an expression of vindictiveness and revenge, interpreters have recognized this is also a trial inflicted by Joseph upon his brothers, which enables the maturing process of the characters in coming to terms with the past. This understanding is already reflected in *Gen. Rab.* 91.6. For modern literary analysis see, in particular, Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 285-308; Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 155-77. On this pattern in the structuring of the Jacob cycle as well as the fashioning of Jacob's maturation, see, for example, J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen:

Yet, in the context of post-traumatic stress disorder Joseph's conduct may be analyzed as a symptom, namely, that of the repetitive and uncontrolled 'intrusion' of the trauma into the survivor's life, which is often manifested in forms of 'reenactment':

Traumatized people relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions. The reenactment of traumatic scenes is most apparent in the repetitive play of children... Adults as well as children feel impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or in disguised form.<sup>24</sup>

It is plausible, I think, to recognize in Joseph's repeated staging of his brothers' incarceration a form of 'repetition compulsion', a reenactment of his moment of terror. For in inflicting it time and again on his brothers, he is actually re-experiencing his own moment of terror, in subtle variations. Remarkably, the reader senses that Joseph is playing a game with his brothers, but one of a threatening compulsive nature, for 'there is something uncanny about reenactments. Even when they are consciously chosen, they have a feeling of involuntariness. Even when they are not dangerous, they have a driven, tenacious quality'.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond the expression of natural vendetta, Joseph's staging of the repetitive drama can indeed be interpreted as a trial he consciously inflicts upon his brothers, one of measured moral punishment for their crimes (as they themselves guiltily admit at the first instance of their confinement).<sup>26</sup> Yet, the psychological functions of reenactment appear to me no less suited to the story. One possibility is that Joseph is reenacting the traumatic moment, as traumatized people often do, with a fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter or, at least, toying with this outcome.<sup>27</sup> This sense receives daunting religious expression in his self-reflective statement at the very end of the narrative: 'As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good' (50.20), to which I shall return later. That there was indeed a different outcome to his victimization is made clear in the plot itself. In this manner Joseph's reenactment of his trauma is a rare case of

Van Gorcum: 1975), pp. 126-30; M. Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), pp. 40-62; I. Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 60-78; Polak, *Biblical Narrative*, pp. 291-92; and see the discussion in Section 4 below.

24. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 39. Freud had initially recognized 'repetition compulsion' as the recurrent intrusion of traumatic experience (see therein p. 41).

25. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 41.

26. See discussion in Section 2 and cf. n. 23.

27. '...a fantasy of magical resolution through revenge, forgiveness, and compensation' is typical of trauma victims at the stage in which they resist the mourning of the traumatic loss; *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 189.



such a fantasy which, luckily for him and all concerned, has miraculously (and through divine intervention) come true.

The more persuasive view of reenactments, developed by recent theorists, is as 'spontaneous attempts to integrate the traumatic event', or 'an attempt to relive and master the overwhelming feelings of the traumatic moment'.<sup>28</sup> This motivation is adroitly depicted in the development of the storyline, wherein the more Joseph reenacts the memory of his trauma the more he becomes emotional and vulnerable, on the one hand; yet, the more he is able to confront the traumatic experience and come to terms with it, on the other hand. This process is sketched out primarily in his position as observer of his brothers' affliction (of which he is self-aware as perpetrator), through which he relives his own trauma. The recurring outbursts of crying may also reflect, according to this interpretation, his anger and pain at experiencing anew what had originally happened to him.<sup>29</sup>

In the subsequent traps Joseph lays for his brothers, in varying mirror-reversals of fortune and outcome whence they are always 'found out' over things they have not done, there is an obvious element of disguise—one underlined by Joseph's own self-revealing (but possibly self-deprecating, in hindsight) statement: 'Did you not know that a man like me is bound to find out' (44.15). The literary and theological aspects of this disguise, and the interplay of apparent and hidden motivations in the human and divine spheres, have been discussed in various studies of the Joseph narrative.<sup>30</sup> But here it is considered as a symptom: 'Traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the trauma scene in disguised form, without realizing what they are doing'.<sup>31</sup> In a similar fashion, Joseph's behavior is portrayed as uncanny: there is a tension between his revengeful, as it were, choice to inflict measured pain on his brothers and 'watch' this pain, on the one hand; and his lack of control over his actions and reactions, on the other hand: these are also compulsive in nature, chosen at a whim.

Reliving the traumatic moment is usually dreaded by trauma survivors who do not consciously seek or welcome this process, since the emotions of terror and rage aroused by it 'are outside the range of ordinary emotional experience, and they overwhelm the ordinary capacity to bear feelings'.<sup>32</sup>

28. *Trauma and Recovery*, pp. 41-42

29. On these outbursts, see further below, pp. 87 onwards.

30. See, for example, H. Gunkel, 'Die Komposition der Joseph-Geschichten', *ZDMG* 76 (1922), pp. 55-71; D.B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (VTSup, 20; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), and the commentaries on the relevant chapters by E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1986 [1962]); C. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary* (trans. J.J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1987); and G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Waco, TX: WBC, 1994).

31. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 40.

32. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 42.



When viewed in this light, Joseph's 'reliving' of his trauma, through its reenactment, is an effort at mastering it. The fact that he takes this opportunity is a sign of his emotional resilience and vitality, which will enable him eventually to reach resolution. The game of 'hide and seek' he plays with his brothers becomes a way of restoring his sense of efficacy, a form of empowerment. Since trauma is known to shatter the inner schemata of the self and the world, Joseph's choice to confront the past, however draining or threatening this may be to his damaged self, is part of his characterization as a person of great mental courage, and as such can also be seen as the internal, spiritual fulfillment of the content of his symbolic dreams.

## *2. Joseph: Transforming Traumatic Memory*

The first part of this essay focused on the oscillating patterns of Joseph's conduct with his brothers, including the recurring motif of uncovering and concealment, as a reversal of his repressed traumatic experience. The compulsive reenactment was interpreted as a means for mastering the trauma. In clinical studies reenactment is said to follow upon remembrance. In our storyline also it follows Joseph's 'remembering' of his dreams.

Recovery from trauma has been compared to a marathon run, a prolonged and painful process which consists of several cardinal stages, including the creation of a safe environment, remembrance, mourning, reconnection, and telling. Joseph appears to undergo some of the stages described within the scene of his breaking down and confession to his brothers (45.1-16), to which most of the following discussion is devoted. Other stages are reflected in earlier parts of the narrative leading up to his disclosure as well as in later sections, not all of which can be addressed within the limitations of this essay.

Two of the scenes preceding Joseph's confession cannot go unmentioned in this context, since they constitute preliminary conditions for the resolution of Joseph's traumas as well as instances of memory. They are described briefly in what follows.

The first scene concerns Joseph's eavesdropping on the story of his brothers' memory of the traumatic event (42.21-24). The discovery that the brothers have neither forgotten him nor have been oblivious to their deeds all along, comes as something of a shock to Joseph and to the reader as well. Moreover, the unlocking of the brothers' memory occurs quite immediately at the beginning of what will become their traumatic ordeal, just after being accused of spying on the third day of their imposed captivity, having been taken completely by surprise. The surfacing of their repressed memory of their brother's suffering is triggered by the special conditions of confinement that not only recreate and so enable them to identify with Joseph's situation in the pit, but also force upon them an opportunity for

the self-reflection to which they appear to rise in vv. 21-22: ‘They said to one another, “No doubt we deserve to be punished because of our brother, whose suffering we saw; for when he pleaded with us we refused to listen. That is why these sufferings have come upon us”. But Reuben said: “Did I not tell you not to do the boy wrong? But you would not listen and his blood is on our heads, and we must pay”’.

In viewing the brothers’ confession against the background of traumatic experience, the return of the repressed is apparent in their retelling of the event, for it contains at least one ‘reconstructed’ detail which is not recorded in the third-person narrative of the event (37.18-28), namely Joseph’s begging for help. There are other aspects in which their memory differs from what ‘really’ happened, but in a way which is typical of the terseness of biblical narrative and of the selectiveness of memory: their silent and indifferent ‘sitting down to eat’ immediately after throwing Joseph into the pit might have been the time when they heard him cry out. The shameful of this behavior is left in denial; Joseph is now ‘our brother’, ‘the lad’ not the depersonalized ‘dreamer’ of the scene of the crime; yet Reuben’s genuine intention and failed attempt at saving Joseph is more or less correctly reconstructed, and this serves to authenticate the confession as a whole. This authentication is not only employed by the narrator in order to restore the brothers’ credibility (for the question of their ‘truthfulness’ is constantly raised, having ruthlessly cheated their brother and father). It is also crucial to the victim, Joseph, who is now the silent bystander in his brothers’ ordeal, taking on the precise role of instigator and witness that they had filled in his traumatic experience. Yet, whereas he was aware of their cruelty, all the more so since they did not heed his pleas (as the readers retrospectively learn), they are saved this awareness. That Joseph’s first outburst of crying when turning away from them immediately follows their confession is revealing of its immense psychological importance (37.24). In effect, the brothers tell the story of his trauma, they speak what for him is yet unspeakable.<sup>33</sup>

The brothers’ ability to verbalize this reconstructed memory is indispensable to Joseph’s recovery. Pierre Janet stressed the non-verbal nature of traumatic memory as ‘frozen’ and ‘wordless’ when compared to ‘normal’ memory, which he defined essentially as ‘the action of telling a story’. Adds Lewis Herman:

Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images... Just as traumatic memories are unlike ordinary memories, traumatic dreams are unlike ordinary dreams. In form, these dreams share many of the unusual features of

33. And will remain, in part, unspeakable even when Joseph himself confesses (see following).

the traumatic memories that occur in waking states. They often include fragments of the traumatic event in exact form, with little or no imaginative elaboration.<sup>34</sup>

Joseph's memory of the event is traumatic, rendering it—like his dreams—unspeakable. This explains the ambiguous content of his first memory of 'the dreams' (discussed above) and the silent imagery of his confession, which is to come later (see below). The brothers' memory, however, is 'normal', as their dreams might be; hence they are capable of reflecting on what happened not through fragmentary images but within a narrative context. The transformation of frozen imagery into verbal narrative is beautifully captured in their description of having seen 'the plight of his soul' (as in a visual image of sorts), when he 'pleaded with them' (now a verbal context); and they 'did not hear' (his words). The verbalization of the memory is intensified in the citation of Reuben's 'saying' at the scene of the crime, and the repetition of 'yet you did not hear'.

Through hearing his brothers' verbal construction of his own memory Joseph will be affected in due course to develop a 'narrative language' in which he can 'tell' his trauma, albeit by transforming it. As the true survivor of the events, Joseph 'is continually buffeted by terror and rage; emotions qualitatively different from ordinary fear and anger'.<sup>35</sup> That he is still far from the point of conscious remembrance is made clear not only by his crying spurt and its concealment, but by his subsequent action: 'And he came back to them and spoke to them and took Simeon from them and shackled him in front of their eyes' (42.24).

Like a window that gradually opens Joseph first remembers his dreams, then hears his brothers' verbal affirmation of his ordeal and of their guilt, and now has to confront memory on his own. Before he himself can recall, give words to what happened, he must reenact the trauma as a means of mastering it and integrating it into his life, as shown above.

On the one hand, Joseph's intended over-hearing of his brothers' testimony moves the process of self-discovery forward. There is also reinforcement in the fact that the brothers were part witnesses, part instigators of the traumatic event itself. The affirmation of a survivor's reconstructed story by a live witness to the traumatic event is known to be beneficial to the recovery process.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, Joseph's reaction to the testimony also reflects, quite realistically at this stage, his complete lack of readiness to contain

34. 'Strictly speaking, then, one who retains a fixed idea of a happening cannot be said to have a 'memory'...it is only for convenience that we speak of it as a 'traumatic memory'. *Trauma and Recovery*, pp. 37-39.

35. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 42.

36. *Trauma and Recovery*, pp. 194, 200-202.

the traumatic experience. The reenactment stage is thus set in motion, for it cannot be 'skipped' in the psychological resolution of the trauma. The second scene which stands out as a precondition to Joseph's recovery, pointedly preceding his disclosure to his brothers, is Judah's speech (44.18-34). In the limits of this essay I will only point out one aspect of the speech that is the most relevant to traumatic resolution, namely its restoration of Joseph's sense of communality. The speech has a reassuring effect on Joseph in revealing himself to his once victimizers because it stresses a lasting emotional bond, cross-generational, in Jacob's dysfunctional family. In doing so it induces a humane reconnection between Joseph, his father and brothers:

Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, worth and humanity depends upon their feeling of connection with others. Group solidarity provides the strongest protection against terror and despair; and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience... Repeatedly in the testimony of survivors there comes a moment when a sense of connection is restored by another person's unaffected display of generosity.<sup>37</sup>

Judah's emotional speech undoubtedly functions as such a display of generosity, not only by endearingly acknowledging the deep bond between Jacob, Joseph and Benjamin (44.20), but also by verbalizing yet again the traumatic event, this time through the father's eyes (vv. 27-29); and by its expression of binding commitment to Jacob and Benjamin, even at the price of self sacrifice (vv. 30-34). The augmenting psychological and rhetorical force of this display enables Joseph to form a 'reconnection'. In hearing this speech, therefore, Joseph is not only witnessing how his brothers have changed due to their experience, but in Judah's words he also recognizes hence reclaims a lost part of himself, through which he may rejoin his brothers in human communality. The turning point which allows for the therapeutic process to take place is captured in a condensed fashion in the scene of Joseph's emotional breakdown, in which Joseph 'gives voice', or 'tells', in some way, the story of his trauma. The cathartic aspects of this scene have been widely noted in commentaries and studies of the Joseph narrative.<sup>38</sup> Here I would like to point out the scene's psychological credibility as a compressed manifestation of the stages necessary for recovery from trauma, namely the creation of a safe environment, remembrance, mourning and reconnection, telling (which were mentioned before), as well as three subsequent stages unmentioned earlier: reviewing the meaning, reconstructing a system of belief, and decision upon action.<sup>39</sup> Behaviorally, traumatized

37. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 215.

38. See, for instance, the works mentioned in n. 30.

39. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 155.

people tend to follow this clinically documented sequence, though the main axis of recovery lies in the survivor's ability to verbally reconstruct the story of the trauma and 'put the story, including the imagery, into words'.<sup>40</sup> In the biblical narrative, however, Joseph appears to undergo several of the main stages here described concurrently within the scene of his breaking down and confession to his brothers. In this, as in other aspects, a work of art and poetic genius differs from a live study—the elements are dexterously woven into the narrative plot, not altogether gradual or timely as would be the case in a clinical observation. Nevertheless, the strength of the psychological portrayal, in what is so aptly described by the Qur'an (Sura 12.3) as 'the most beautiful of stories',<sup>41</sup> derives amongst other aspects from the authentic exposé of Joseph as a traumatized person, and the realistic fashioning of his resolution of the trauma, or recovery from it (in therapeutic terms).

It is admittedly only through undergoing the earlier stages of traumatic disorder and reaction that Joseph can reach the cardinal stage of confronting the past by 'retelling' the traumatic event. This ability is linked in the story to Joseph's 'memory' of his dreams and to his wider, famous acumen as a dream interpreter—aspects of his personality which contribute, in some mysterious way, to his reaching this point. As the psychological study of testimonies has shown, the telling of a traumatic event, namely that of its memory, is never an accurate reportage, but always entails a transformation of sorts of the event itself on the part of the survivor. This, in effect, is what happens in the scene of Joseph's disclosure to his brothers:

Then Joseph *could not control himself* before all those who stood by him; and he cried: 'Make every one go out from me'. *So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud*, so that the Egyptians heard it and the house of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers. '*I am Joseph; is my father still alive?* ... I am your brother, Joseph, *whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here*; For God sent me before you to preserve life. For famine has been in the land for two years; and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on the earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. *So it was not you who sent me here, but God*; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord over all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. *Make haste and go up to my father...* (45.1-8).

Whereas some of the previous scenes leading up to Joseph's momentous testimony can also be analyzed as *reflecting* the above-mentioned stages

40. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 177.

41. According to some commentators, however, this verse describes the Qur'an as a whole. See *The Holy Qur'an* (Translation and Commentary by A. Yusuf Ali; Islamic Propagation Centre International, Lahore, 1934), p. 550.

in the psychological process of recovery from trauma, this scene *contains* most of them in condensed intensity. The creation of a safe environment is mirrored in Joseph's request to remain utterly alone with his brothers. The stages of remembrance and mourning of the traumatic event find pulsating expression in the outburst of weeping which, despite Joseph's attempts to control and keep confined, is uncontrollable, magnified, as in measurement of his pain, to the extent that it reaches 'the outsiders' (those he strived so hard to keep out of its sphere), namely Egypt and the House of Pharaoh. Their 'hearing' of his crying serves as an extended metaphor of Joseph's 'outing' of his pain, which has no bounds, as well as a form of outside affirmation of his testimony. Lewis Herman describes this stage in the trauma victim's ordeal in very close terms: 'the reconstruction of the trauma requires immersion in a past experience of frozen time; the descent into mourning feels like a surrender to tears that are endless'.<sup>42</sup>

Consistent and repetitive crying is widely documented in studies of traumatic recovery as an essential accompanying emotion of the recitation of the facts. If the recitation occurs without the accompanying emotions it is considered 'a sterile exercise, without therapeutic effect'.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, Joseph's weeping is also an expression of his long-deferred mourning over what had taken place. In clinical records this stage usually follows the recitation, but in our story it is compressed into the crying that precedes the confession. According to Lewis Herman mourning is only enabled when the survivor recognizes there is no compensation for the suffering undergone.<sup>44</sup> Such recognition, which appears to have been gained through Joseph's fantasy of reenactment, gives way in this scene to a thickened expression of mourning, and is generally intimated by the scene as a whole. Joseph's repetitive crying, which is widely recognized as a *leitmotif* throughout the narrative, also accentuates the theme of trauma and recovery, for in it lies the traumatic experience itself: its *unspeakable* nature; the unbearable emotions it arouses which are 'qualitatively different from ordinary fear and anger', and hence cannot be expressed in words.<sup>45</sup>

42. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 195.

43. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 177.

44. *Trauma and Recovery*, pp. 189-90: 'During the process of mourning the survivor must come to terms with the impossibility of getting even... The fantasy of compensation, like the fantasies of revenge and forgiveness, often becomes a formidable impediment to mourning... The quest for fair compensation is often an important part of recovery. However, it also represents a potential trap. Prolonged, fruitless struggles to wrest compensation from the perpetrator or from others may represent a defense against facing the full reality of what was lost. Mourning is the only way to give due honor to loss; there is no adequate compensation'.

45. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 42. The crying in 45.2 is on the one hand represented as a culmination of previous outbursts (cf. 42.24 upon hearing the brothers' confession;

After this preparation the cardinal stage takes place: that in which the survivor puts the trauma into words and tells the transformed memory of the traumatic event in a manner that turns the story into a live testimony, one which has a private as well as a spiritual and public dimension. This stage is already foreshadowed in the narrative span by the Hebrew idiom וִיתֵן קוֹלוֹ בְּבָכִי, signaling the beginning of a 'giving of voice', not necessarily words as yet, to what had happened. The words themselves are relatively sparse, but all the more so evocative. First, the actual disclosure of Joseph's identity, his name, which has been hidden till now, and then immediately the inquiry regarding his father. In this psychological context the mention of the father is part of the traumatic experience, in that it reflects Joseph's mental and emotional suffering at being cut off from his protective home. After the record of the brothers' perplexed astonishment and Joseph's second affirmation of his identity in relation to them ('I am Joseph, your brother') reference is made to the traumatic event itself, wherein Joseph's 'selling' is mentioned twice (45.4-5):

I am your brother, Joseph, whom you **sold** into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you **sold** me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

As Lewis Herman points out, the transformed trauma story becomes a 'new story...no longer about pain and humiliation' but rather 'about dignity and virtue'.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, the stripping and throwing into the pit, the most humiliating aspects of Joseph's victimization as recorded in the third-person narrative of the event (37.23-24), are never uttered by Joseph. Rather, they are consigned to silence. As mentioned earlier, in the telling of Joseph's memory there is a static nonverbal element, what we see in his confession is the silent movie of his sale, no more. The description of the sale is the closest he comes to touching what 'really' happened—but it is enough; the unspeakable remains locked as it were in the space of visual memory; of dreams.

Jessica Wolfe describes her approach to trauma narrative with combat veterans as follows: 'We have them reel it off in great detail, as though they were watching a movie and with all the scenes included...the completed narrative must include a full and vivid description of the traumatic imagery'.<sup>47</sup> The Joseph narrative conveys an artistic expression of this 'fullness' by splitting up the reconstructions of memory. In this case we have heard

43.20 upon seeing Benjamin) and will also recur after Joseph's disclosure, yet then it appears more as an expression of release of tension, relief and even happiness than one of pain, anger and perplexity (45.14-16—just after his confession; 46.29—upon encountering Jacob; 50.17—upon the brothers' request for forgiveness).

46. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 181.

47. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 177.



the scene of the pit from the brothers (somewhat reverberated in Judah's speech), now we hear the scene of the sale from Joseph.<sup>48</sup> This sequencing of reconstructed memories suggests, in my view, that the memory of the casting into the pit is not omitted from Joseph's confession by way of its continuing denial on his part, as if it never happened to him. Rather, the omission serves the complex and masterful portrayal of his coming to terms with this memory as well, not through his own putting it into words, but through his reciprocation of the brothers' testimony and his own emphasis on the sale as a substituting, 'transformative' account of his trauma. 'This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story'.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, in Joseph's 'new' story the selling into slavery, initially described by the narrator in the record of the events themselves as a mellowing of the brothers' original plan (37.25-28), takes on a 'transformed' meaning (45.5, 7-8a):

For God **sent** me before you to preserve life... And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to **keep alive** for you many survivors. So it was not you who **sent** me here, but God.

This religious explanation is in tune with the stages in which victims of trauma, on the process of recovery, are said to be engaged in 'reviewing of meaning' and 'reconstructing a system of belief'. After admitting a form of what happened, Joseph is engaged in finding meaning and virtue in what happened. The brothers' deprecating 'selling' of him, for money, becomes a form of 'sending' (thrice repeated), intended by God. The murderous plan that preceded the selling is hinted at by its reversal, due to divine intervention, into a 'life-preserving' mission:

The traumatic event challenges the ordinary person to become a theologian, a philosopher, and a jurist. The survivor is called upon to articulate the values and beliefs that she once held and that the trauma destroyed... The arbitrary, random quality of her fate defies the basic human faith in a just or even predictable world order. In order to develop a full understanding of the trauma story, the survivor must examine the moral questions of guilt and responsibility and reconstruct a system of belief that makes sense of her undeserved suffering.<sup>50</sup>

In his emphasis on God's ultimate plan Joseph is effectively engaged in giving meaning to his trauma. He is reframing his personal trauma of survival from near death and exile within a life-affirming collective narrative

48. As mentioned above, Joseph's telling is visual, as opposed to the brothers' telling, which is intensely verbal. In this, Joseph's traumatized state is highlighted as one still imprinted with the 'traumatic imagery' of the crime even when reconstructing the scene of his sale into slavery.

49. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 175.

50. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 178.



which rearticulates a system of values and beliefs common to him and his brothers. The horrific act of individual memory is thus encompassed by collective memory. It cannot be left as a sign of human brutality, of all that is unexplained, irrational and out of our control. For this reason, amongst others, Joseph's moral reckoning will be further re-echoed, after his father's death, in the final dialogue with his brothers. It becomes part of his ongoing legacy to them, in the closure of his story and the book of Genesis as a whole: 'As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive' (50.20). It is as if only after personal ordeal has been reviewed and given meaning within the wider memory of the group that the collective history of the sons of Israel can begin. 'Finally, the survivor cannot reconstruct a sense of meaning by the exercise of thought alone. The remedy for injustice also requires action. The survivor must decide what is to be done'.<sup>51</sup> This very last stage of Joseph's 'recovery' occurs at the end of his speech (45.9-13), when he ushers the brothers (twice using the verb 'hurry') to bring his father to Egypt, and provides them with the right words to convince Jacob and move this old and suspicious man into action. This decision is not only the active expression of his existential life-affirming reasoning, but also a form of 'letting go' of the past and looking forward to the future. The frame structure of Joseph's confession, beginning with 'is my father still alive?' and ending with 'Hurry! Go up to my father!', reflects the process of Joseph's coming full circle: what was conceived for years as an insurmountable journey back to his father (at least mentally, even if physically it could have been undertaken) is now a matter for swift action, wherein the closing of distance is easily manageable, at least with respect to his father, and some measure of immediate consolation and repair is at hand in the here and now. Decisive action after a drawn out process of indecisive games, in which he reenacted the trauma time and again in different variations, signals Joseph's resolution of his trauma and is a psychological manifestation of his recovery.<sup>52</sup>

51. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 178, and further therein (p. 195): 'after many repetitions, the moment comes when the telling of the trauma story no longer arouses quite such intense feelings. It has become a part of the survivor's experience, but only part of it... It occurs to the survivor that perhaps the trauma is not the most important, or even the most interesting, part of her life story... When the "action of telling a story" has come to its conclusion, the traumatic experience truly belongs to the past. At this point, the survivor faces the tasks of rebuilding her life in the present and pursuing her aspirations for the future'.

52. It is fruitful to consider the brothers' silent listening to Joseph's confession as functioning similarly to that of the therapist who 'plays the role of a witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak the unspeakable' (*Trauma and Recovery*, p. 175). The brothers' function as affirming witnesses to the traumatic event has been noted with regard to their confession earlier on in the narrative span. The silence in this

### 3. *The Brothers: Trauma and Memory*<sup>53</sup>

The brothers did not ‘remember’ Joseph’s symbolic dreams despite their pronounced reaction at hearing them (37.6-11). In the Freudian theory of memory, which is in reality a theory of forgetting, the brothers’ memory of the dreams was recorded, as all significant experiences are, yet ceased to be available to their consciousness as a result of repression—a mechanism activated by the need to diminish anxiety. Within the narrative span of chapters 42-50 the brothers never once admit to these symbolic dreams coming true—even when Joseph reveals his identity to them and they ‘speak with him’ (45.15), even when they ask for his forgiveness and fall upon their faces before him declaring ‘we are your servants’ (50.17-18). In a final fulfillment of the symbolism of the eleven stars bowing before the sun, they are not described as ‘remembering’, nor as making a connection between the dreams and their current state. This silence is not insignificant, for they should have remembered the dreams, considering how central their ‘telling’ was in fueling their antagonism towards Joseph.

Their ‘lack of memory’ of the dreams can be interpreted as a pained, stifled admission on their part of their failure to grasp, at the time, the true meaning of Joseph’s dreams—after all they are not dream interpreters like their brother—or as a begrudging acceptance of their ultimate subjugation to their brother. Even if they have come to terms with their inferior social position they can still leave the matter of their spiritual lowliness unstated, and so undecided. Moreover, they do not ‘remember’ the dreams because, as it were, they do not share the traumatic space between remembering and dreaming, which is so specific to Joseph’s experience; after all they were part instigators of his trauma, part witnesses. He (and to some extent Jacob) are its direct victims. Yet as the narrative unwinds it provides a more generous psychological outlook on the brothers, one that portrays

scene can also be said to fulfill a similar function. In this manner Joseph’s ‘telling’ is also transforming their status from mainly instigators to mainly witnesses of the crime, affording ‘new meaning’ to their place in Joseph’s life and enabling his eventual (full) pardoning of them (as portrayed in 50.15-21).

53. As noted in the opening, each of the major protagonists, namely Joseph, the brothers (as a collective) and Jacob, copes differently with traumatic experience and its memory. This difference appears to fashion, in part, their destiny and interpersonal connections. The remainder of this article discusses some contrastive elements in the conduct of the brothers and Jacob with regard to traumatic memory, particularly in relation to Joseph’s dreams. There are ideational implications to this process as well, which more directly concern the religious aspects of the Joseph narrative and its place in the book of Genesis as a whole, which cannot be addressed in the confines of this essay. These complementary aspects will hopefully form part of a larger study, in writing, on patterns of traumatic memory and their significance in the Joseph narrative.

them as having been sensitized over the years, through perceiving their father's pain, to the traumatic experiences they brought upon their brother and father and, eventually, upon themselves. More pointedly, they have come to realize that their father's partiality towards Joseph, and not the latter's dreams, was the primary cause of their pain. The dreams have lost their emotional edge, as it were, like the special garment long since soaked in blood and forgotten (though not by their father). This is openly broached in Judah's speech: 'We have an aged father, and he has a young son born in his old age; his brother is dead and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him' (44.20). As simple as that. So, it appears that after so many years and so many trials they are able to confront the truth about their father's unrelenting love for Rachel's children, in which they have no part.

In the same manner in which they 'forgot' Joseph's dreams, the brothers appear to have repressed the memory of Joseph's victimization. The extent of this repression is evident in the contrast between Joseph's immediate recognition of them (mentioned twice in the span of the two verses, 42.7-8) and their complete ignorance of his identity despite the various clues he provides for them, almost begging for their own identification of him in his staging of their victimization, as discussed above. But, in their case as well, the repressed memory is uncovered in their confession when incarcerated by Joseph (42.21-22). As has been shown, through hearing his brothers' verbal construction of the event, Joseph's 'reenactment' stage is set in motion. The brothers' reconstruction of the events takes place at a relatively early stage in the narrative span in order to enable the main protagonist, Joseph, to confront his trauma. But what of the brothers' memory, one may ask, was theirs a traumatic memory? The answer to this question is ambivalent. On the one hand: Yes. There are aspects of the brothers' memory, especially Reuben's, as a witness (and presumably that of some of the other brothers), that can be considered within a traumatic framework. For these brothers may be viewed as intimidated by group pressure into passive witnessing of the abuse. Their repressed memory and its uncovering can be construed as akin to that of such observer witnesses, for whom it is

difficult to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen. Those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed...invite the stigma that attaches to the victims...denial repression and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand: No. The brothers' memory is not traumatic, certainly not to the same extent as Joseph's or Jacob's; for their reconstruction of the event is highly collective, revealing their shared sense of guilt and shared fear of punishment. Hence their journey into memory is not therapeutic in

54. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 2.

nature: part witnesses part perpetrators of the traumatic event, they will continually remain within its shadow.

As a result, though the brothers are portrayed as developing characters, their group reactions are 'normative' and they remain in partial denial. They are not as courageous as Joseph in confronting the past, though they too undergo a more limited process of self-understanding. Their persistent sense of guilt and continuing fear of their brother are a sign that in their case this process has not come full circle, it has not reached the resolution evident in Joseph's pardoning of them. They are never clearly depicted as crying, for instance; 'He kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and afterwards his brothers talked with him' (45.15; 50.17-18). Their emotions remain reserved, kept at bay, rendering their 'telling' partially sterile in comparison to Joseph's. In contrast, as regards their father they appear to have come the longest way. Judah's self-sacrifice in expressing willingness to exchange places with Benjamin is a sign that they have exhausted their identification with their father's suffering and atoned for it. Their relationship with Joseph, however, will remain grudging, fearful, strained and distant; they will be speaking to him through the encoded memory of their beloved father, the only memory which they appear to truly share:

When their father was dead Joseph's brothers were afraid and said, 'What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us out for all the harm that we did to him?' They therefore approached Joseph with these words: 'In his last words to us before he died, your father gave us this message for you: "I ask you to forgive your brothers' crime and wickedness; I know they did you harm". So now forgive our crime; we beg; for we are servants of your father's God'. When they said this to him Joseph wept. His brothers came and prostrated themselves before him; they said 'you see we are your slaves' (50.15-18).

Though some commentators have suggested correcting וילכו ('and they came') to ויבכו ('and they cried'), the lack of crying on the brothers' part is psychologically consistent with their newly-reckoned acceptance of Joseph. Their request for forgiveness of their crimes is spoken as coming out of their father's mouth, not theirs. It is a formal and belated request, one presented as driven out of fear, less so out of reckoning or acknowledgement. Hence they cannot fully recover from what happened by integrating the trauma story into their lives and giving it renewed meaning. Joseph's trauma has effectively become their trauma. In this final turn of the plot, memory becomes depersonalized; it has a social function as a narrative which binds collective consciousness, even forges it. The brothers' appeal to their dead father's memory accentuates their partial coping with the past and is contrasted with Joseph's loving forgiveness in coming full circle with his traumatic past. Thus the story of individual and familial memory, central to the last narrative of the book of Genesis, is ambivalently closed,

expressing, somewhat ironically in my view, the flimsiness and fragility of this form of collective memory.

#### 4. *Jacob's Traumatic Memory*

Jacob too did not remember Joseph's dreams, though more than anyone else he should have remembered. For he had made a conscious attempt at 'keeping' them: 'When he told it to his father and his brothers, his father took him to task: "What is this dream of yours?" He said. "Must we come and bow low to the ground before you, I and your mother and your brothers?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father did not forget' (37.10-11).

The idiomatic phrase שָׁמַר אֶת הַדְּבָר (here translated 'did not forget') can also be rendered more literally as 'kept the matter', not necessarily in reference to the dreams, but to the situation at large. *Genesis Rabbah*, however, also interprets it in the sense of 'remembered' or 'committed to memory' in reference to the content of the dreams: 'Said Rabbi Levi: He took a pen and wrote down in which day and in which hour and in which place'.<sup>55</sup> In interpreting שָׁמַר as a physical record of the dreams, this midrash emphasizes their predicative dimension as noted by Jacob. Moreover, the suggestion that the dreams were actually 'written down' reflects the wider rabbinic conception (also prevalent in late antiquity) that the unlocking of a dream occurs by the translation of its visual imagery into words, as noted in the famous Talmudic dictum: 'a dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read'.<sup>56</sup> In this the midrash underlines the significance of Joseph's telling of his symbolic dreams (and his later remembrance of them) as opposed to Jacob's forgetfulness of them, despite his conscious attempt to remember. It also accentuates the theme of memory (and forgetting) in the Joseph narrative which, as I have tried to demonstrate, is interlocked with that of trauma and recovery. The fact that Jacob forgot these dreams becomes part of his wider tragedy, or, as it were, his soured sensation of life. For at no stage is he described as summoning Joseph's dreams to his consciousness. Not when he is thrust with the atrocity-like proof of his son's garment soaked in blood, which he on the one hand physically 'recognized' but on the basis of which he need not have immediately concluded: 'A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces' (37.33), for he could have 'remembered' the dreams.<sup>57</sup> Neither do the dreams cross

55. *Gen. Rab.* 84.12.

56. *B. Ber.* 55a. See further on this notion of dreams in the *Postscript*.

57. Interestingly, *Genesis Rabbah* continues to ponder Jacob's lack of memory of the dreams, which could have served as a source of comfort and guidance when confronted with the garment. The theological solution offered therein (namely, that Jacob did remember but sensed that Joseph's fate was sealed) emphasizes the problematic nature of Jacob's reactions, attempting to 'correct' his spiritual shortsightedness in this respect.

his mind upon being told that his son is alive and seeking him (45.26-27). Here Jacob is ironically portrayed as the kind of person who 'only believes what he (physically) sees'—as if the brothers recognized this streak in his character when they had shown him the garment, just as Joseph knew to send proof of his status with the brothers; for it is only upon witnessing the wagons sent by Joseph that he is convinced by the brothers' report (45.28): 'It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive; I will go and see him before I die'. Had he remembered the dreams he might not have been so stunned by disbelief only to be elevated by physical proof. Finally, there is also no acknowledgement of the dreams upon his reenounter with his beloved son, in which he is again mostly preoccupied with his own death; 'I have seen your face again, and you are still alive. Now I am ready to die' (46.30).

Jacob's character is altered in the Joseph narrative. Whereas in the Jacob cycle (Genesis 25–36) the forefather is portrayed as a developing character, capable of change and growing the emotional and spiritual insight for which he is solemnly rewarded,<sup>58</sup> in the story of Joseph his character is almost underdeveloped in as much as emotional insight is concerned, especially when compared with his beloved son. This may be explained as the result of his different pattern of coping with traumatic experience and memory. At first it appears that his most evident trauma is the one incurred by his sons, namely what he believes to be Joseph's horrible death, which is conveyed to him so shockingly, taking him completely by surprise. His inability to 'be comforted' over this death is indicative of the intrusion of traumatic experience, which bars him from normatively resuming his life (37.31-35). Jacob is not only traumatized, but also bound to relive his trauma, as a victim of recurring abuse: 'You have robbed me of my children. Joseph has disappeared; Simeon has disappeared; and now you are taking Benjamin. Everything is against me... If he comes to any harm on the journey, you will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave... why have you treated me so badly? Why did you tell the man you had yet another brother?' (42.36-38; 43.6) According to Lewis Herman, 'piecing together the trauma story becomes a more complicated project with survivors of prolonged, repeated abuse'.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, Jacob's ability to confront his trauma is impaired. The growing anxiety over the repetitive disappearance of his sons, and especially Benjamin, turns him into one who cannot grasp the end of a rope by which to climb out of his traumatized sense of self. In his self-consciousness he is a complete victim: 'everything is against me' (42.36); 'If I am bereaved than I am bereaved' (43.14). His passivity, incessant blaming of his sons and lack of self awareness reflect his sense of disempowerment, as a post traumatic aspect of his psychological characterization. 'The core

58. On Jacob's developing character within the Jacob cycle see n. 23 above.

59. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 184.

experiences of psychological trauma are disappointment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based on the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation'.<sup>60</sup> In Joseph's eavesdropping on his brothers' confession there is the beginning of a possibility of a new connection, which further unfolds in the reenactment, in Judah's speech and in Joseph's disclosure; Jacob, however, is unable to cut through his turbulent feelings—not only since he is beyond 'piecing together' his trauma story, but also because he cannot create a new connection with his 'present' sons; hence, there is no precondition to his recovery. Unable to engage with 'the other' he remains focused on his own pain, constantly reliving his abuse as in a living nightmare.

Consistent with his current psychological makeup, Jacob's spirit is only momentarily lifted when he hears Joseph is alive (45.27). He can only find momentary relief, remaining, as it were, ensconced within his traumatic experience, as in a living grave from which he can only enter a real grave. This is why, after all that has happened, he cannot draw close to Joseph's enlightened reaffirmation of life and its meaning, but can only summarize his years, in an answer not apparently warranted by Pharaoh's question regarding his age—'few and bad', he says (47.8-9).

A more profound understanding of his traumatized state of mind, wherein there is also reached some level of relief, is found in the context of his blessing to Joseph's sons (48.1-9):

Jacob said to Joseph, 'God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in Canaan and blessed me... Now, your two sons, who were born to you in Egypt before I came here, shall be counted as my sons... Any children born to you after them shall be counted as yours, but in respect of their tribal territory they shall be reckoned under their elders brothers' names. As I was coming from Paddan-aram I was bereaved of Rachel your mother on the way, in Canaan, whilst there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there by the road to Ephrath, that is in Bethlehem'. When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said 'Who are these?' Joseph replied to his father, 'they are my sons whom God has given me here'.

The traumatic memory of Rachel's death is masterfully interwoven into the scene. This is the first and only time since the event of Rachel's death, which is described by the narrator in the third person as a death in childbirth (35.16-20), that Jacob describes his memory (and experience) of her death. The emphatic phrase 'died upon me', and the reference to death's occurrence 'on the road', at a distance from the destination of a town (in which one can presumably procure help), as well as her hasty burial 'on the road', imply its traumatic nature. The fact that it was in childbirth of Benjamin

60. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 133. See also pp. 196-207.



goes unmentioned by Jacob, while what persists is the sense of his helplessness in face of her death. In the pronoun 'upon me' there is also captured his sense of the unexpected; for Rachel was relatively young and though childless for years had what is described as a normal birth once before (30.22-25). Being taken by surprise, as noted earlier, is a central feature of traumatic experience. In Jacob's life it is a continuous thread in his recurring traumas, first hinted at by his surprise over the turning out of his wedding night with Rachel (29.25); later, more gravely, in her death; and further in Joseph's 'disappearance'. In all these cases Jacob functions as one internally as well as externally oblivious to what is happening. The traumatic experience of Rachel's death is captured by the static imagery, which stands out in the narrative context of the blessing. Wordless visual imagery has been recognized as one of the features that distinguish traumatic memory from ordinary memory (see in the above discussion of Joseph's memory of being sold). As in a silent movie no words are spoken: what we see is a hasty burial on the way. This imagery is contrasted with the immediate context of the blessing, which is 'all words', as well as with the narrator's record of the event itself, which is intensely verbal: Rachel is told by the midwife not to fear for she has a son, and she names him with her last breath (35.17-20). In the narrator's account there is a sacred pillar erected on the site of her grave, yet in Jacob's reconstructed memory there is only the image of a hasty burial 'on the road' (with no time to grieve), highlighting Jacob's unconscious sense of guilt that it was the journey and the lack of appropriate conditions that killed her.<sup>61</sup> Hence, in Jacob's memory of this experience, there lurks some sense of an atrocity. It is only now, however, on his deathbed, that Jacob is able to 'let out' in some way that his experience and response to Rachel's untimely and unprepared for departure, and the way and place he buried her, have haunted him. It is his experience of Rachel's death, therefore, more than that of Joseph's 'devouring' that can be retrospectively identified as the most traumatic moment of his life, his worst trauma; as if all the deaths or near deaths he would experience after that are merely recurring instances of the same trauma, an aspect even his other sons have come to realize, with time.<sup>62</sup>

In Jacob's 'telling' of the story of Rachel's death he comes as close as he can to confronting the trauma. This memory surfaces only when Jacob is alone with Joseph, in the context of a trusting relationship, by way of 'creating a safe environment'. The difficulty in reconstructing the memory is

61. These were incurred by his decision to depart Aram. Jacob's involuntary cursing of Rachel (31.32) does not appear to me as underlying his traumatic memory in this scene.

62. See the discussion of Judah's speech above, and his description of Benjamin (44.21) as: 'his mother's only (son), and his father loves him'.



captured by its displaced, disjointed appearance within the blessing, spoken out of context (see especially 48.6, 8). Though this feature can also be attributed to Jacob's characterization as senile in old age, his clarity when referring to his grandchildren's heritage does not suggest lack of concentration, but rather the surfacing of a repressed memory which brings with it some consciousness, of the kind revealed or glimpsed by Jacob finally, at the end of his life, helping him make some sense of its bitterness. Since recovery can only take place in the context of a restored relationship, this moment of seeming self-understanding has only been reached due to his closeness of mind and heart with Joseph, a moment of converging memories between him and his beloved son. Nonetheless, it is too late for any piecing together of the story of the trauma to fully take place. In this lies the tragic sense of Jacob's life. In disclosing something of his unbearable pain at Rachel's death, Jacob may also be unraveling something of his indifference towards Lea's sons. He is broaching the unspeakable as to what happened as a consequence, the envious relationship between the sons of which he is also partly to blame. His only acknowledgement of Lea is to come shortly after, in his request to be buried in the family burial site of Machpela, where she had been buried. This request is voiced to all his sons (50.31), while of Rachel's haunting death he tells Joseph alone. This also hints at its traumatic (and shameful) significance, as if he were revealing to Joseph a deeply hidden secret.

Every form of memory is selective, but Jacob's appears as particularly so, for when he chooses to remember he comes back to the only memory that counts, as far as he is concerned, after which there is no memory: that of Rachel's death, undoubtedly a traumatic death—in childbirth, at a young age, on a journey. It is only at the end of his life that Rachel's death is so poignantly recounted by him. Upon the recounting, however, there is neither 'reviewing and reconstruction of meaning' that fully 'integrates' the traumatic experience into his life story, nor decision upon action, as experienced in Joseph's recounting of his traumatic experience. Nonetheless this can be seen as a moment of disclosure on Jacob's part, a glimpse of self-recognition which enables him some kind of peaceful release from life, to be 'gathered to his father's kin' (49.33).

In the twilight of Jacob's saga one cannot escape the sense that he was unable to recover from the traumatic experience of Rachel's death. In his case, repression proves fatal to himself and his children for in his unacknowledged, perhaps even unconscious favoring of Joseph, Rachel's first-born son, the family tragedy is fully triggered. Despite the divine meaning Joseph's final wording will attribute to this tragedy, in the case of Jacob's character the sense of a soured life, of something missed, prevails:

Reliving a trauma may offer an opportunity for mastery, but most survivors do not consciously seek or welcome the opportunity... Because reliving traumatic experience provokes such intense emotional distress, traumatized

people go to great lengths to avoid it. The effort to ward off intrusive symptoms, though self-protective in intent, further aggravates the post-traumatic syndrome, for the attempt to avoid reliving the trauma too often results in a narrowing of consciousness, a withdrawal from engagement with others, and an impoverished life.<sup>63</sup>

Jacob, as it appears, is not continually blessed with the healing powers of self-understanding and insight of the kind afforded to his son. He lacks the internally therapeutic strengths of ‘the dreamer’—though he was once quite capable of dreaming himself (as in Genesis 28 and elsewhere) and, no less importantly, of interpreting his dreams. Interestingly, this feature, which enabled his development in the Jacob cycle, is completely absent in the Joseph narrative. In Jacob’s inability to confront memory lies his inability to recover, contrastively juxtaposed with that of his son’s. Jacob has recoiled, as it were, into a more limited psyche, leaving this kind of ‘development’ to his son. Perhaps it is this factor that intuitively lies behind his unique love for him. After Rachel’s death Jacob dreams no more or, in other words, is no more able to reach the internal vision, the self-understanding, which is withheld in a dream. It is left to Joseph the ‘dreamer’ to reach self-revelation through dreams and the memory of them, to give meaning to the familial trauma and transform it into a new narrative of collective memory and historical consciousness.

### *Postscript*

‘Trauma’ has various definitions. In psychoanalysis ‘any totally unexpected experience which the subject is unable to assimilate’ and, by extension, ‘any experience which is mastered by the use of defenses’ is considered traumatic.<sup>64</sup>

The study of psychological trauma began in the late 19th century by the pioneers of modern psychology and psychiatry, especially Charcot, Janet and Freud, who first recognized hysteria as a condition caused by psychological trauma. However, it was only in the late 1960s, when the systematic, large-scale investigation of the long-term psychological effects of combat veterans of the Vietnam war converged with the feminist movement’s demand that society take seriously the domestic and sexual abuse of women and children, that modern systematic study of psychological trauma began. Judith Lewis Herman was amongst the first psychiatrists to conduct a detailed and comparative group study of traumatic disorders and stages of recovery in

63. *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 42.

64. ‘Trauma, in this sense, produces anxiety, which is followed either by spontaneous recovery or the development of psychoneurosis’ (C. Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* [London: Penguin Books, 1972], pp. 170-71).

victims of captivity (war veterans, prisoners and Holocaust survivors) and abuse (children, battered women, incest and rape victims). The results of her clinical work, which was conducted throughout the 1970s, were published in her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). The first study to bridge the gap between the worlds of domestic abuse and political terror, it has since become the classic point of reference on the subject. I have found this illuminating work most helpful in providing a framework from which to consider traumatic aspects in the Joseph narrative, even though from a non-professional perspective.

For a detailed survey of research history on psychological trauma, Lewis Herman's introduction (pp. 7-32) is helpful, with further rich bibliography in the notes. Chapters 2 and 9 of the book are of the most relevance to this paper. In chapter 2 ('Terror') Lewis Herman defines and analyzes trauma as 'an affliction of the powerless' which, though once believed to result from uncommon events 'outside the range of human experience', is now considered common human experience. Domestic abuse, of the kind reflected in the Joseph narrative, is defined as amongst the most common causes of trauma. Her discussion of the three main categories of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in this chapter, as encodings of the traumatic experience itself, were of particular relevance to the Joseph narrative, in particular the symptom of 'intrusion', as one 'reflecting the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment'. In this context Lewis Herman also explains, in light of Janet's earlier work, the wordless and passive quality of traumatic memory and traumatic dreams as opposed to the verbal, narrative essence of regular memory. This differentiation was especially helpful to me in distinguishing between Jacob's traumatic memory and that of the brothers.

The connections between traumatic experience and dreams, and the patterns of post-traumatic nightmares, have been widely researched since the 1980s. See, for instance, the introduction and articles assembled by D. Barret.<sup>65</sup> There it is claimed that though the folk wisdom of people in centuries past reflects the understanding that dreams can have a special relationship to traumatic events, serving as a unique window to remembered or unremembered horrors, it was, ironically, the influence of Freud and Jung that turned wish fulfillment, metaphor and symbolic interpretation into the focus of modern dream psychology, diverting interest from dreams as representing repressed memories of trauma—even though both thinkers were well aware that real traumas (such as sexual abuse or the shock of war) could show up quite realistically in dreams (see 'Introduction', pp. 1-6).

It was only with the systematic study of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder of the victims of captivity, atrocity and abuse, given rise and legitimization

65. D. Barret (ed.), *Trauma and Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

by 20th-century social developments and movements, that the connection between trauma and dreams was fully developed as a field of research. Chapter 9 of Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* ('Remembrance and Mourning') was also very helpful in highlighting the role of the interpersonal telling-out loud of traumatic memory within a safe environment as an essential stage of healing and recovery, and also as a means of uncovering unconsciously repressed aspects of the traumatic event, thus coming closer to what actually happened.<sup>66</sup>

This type of psychoanalytic approach to Joseph's dreams, their memory and relation to past traumata, departs from the general conception of symbolic dreams in ancient Near Eastern and biblical thought, which usually conceived of dreams as forms of predication, hinting at the dreamer's future or destiny (cf. the other pairs of symbolic dreams in the Joseph Narrative, i.e., those of Pharaoh's ministers [40.5-20] and Pharaoh himself [41.1-36]). For detailed comparative studies and surveys of the literature see Diana Lipton's book, *Revisions of the Night*.<sup>67</sup> Lipton also emphasizes the distinctiveness of the conception of dreaming in the Joseph narrative in comparison to the dreams of the patriarchal narratives, which form the main topic of her book (p. 9). It is also worth consulting the works by Husser,<sup>68</sup> Lanckau<sup>69</sup> and Ruth Fidler.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, some notions of dreams in Antiquity have relevance to the present outlook. I thank Athalya Brenner for drawing my attention in this regard to Patricia Cox Miller's work, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*,<sup>71</sup> which has an illuminating discussion on 'Dreams and Therapy' (chapter 4). Here, Cox Miller shows how 'in crisis of physical disease and mental distress, many people in the Graeco-Roman era turned to dreams for the healing of

66. Some other general works consulted are: T.M. Alston *et al.* (eds.), *Dream Reader: Psychoanalytic Articles on Dreams* (Madison, CT.: International Universities Press, 1993); H.T. Hunt, *The Multiplicity of Dreams: Memory, Imagination, and Consciousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); J. Gollnick Lewiston, *Dreams in the Psychology of Religion* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987). See also S. Rimmon-Kenan (ed.), *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature* (London: Methuen, 1987), for articles bearing on this study.

67. D. Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 9-33.

68. J.M. Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical world* (trans. Jill M. Munro; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

69. J. Lanckau, *Der Herr der Traume: Eine Studie zur Funktion des Traumes in der Josefsgeschichte der hebräischen Bibel* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006).

70. Ruth Fidler, 'Dreams Speak Falsely'? *Dream Theophanies in the Bible: Their Place in Ancient Israelite Faith and Traditions* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2005 [Hebrew]).

71. P. Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

their ailments...the ill could seek oneiric remedies from religious institutions, in the temples and shrines that had special “incubation” chambers, where sleepers sought healing dreams’ (p. 106). The fascinating cases she studied, some of which suggest ‘dreams were viewed as vehicles of a very material kind of metamorphosis’ (p. 113), do not disclose a pre-Freudian, as it were, understanding of the connection of dreams to repressed memories of traumatic events. Nonetheless, in the view that dreams, when processed in some way, can heal an emotional as well as mental or physical pain a therapeutic function for dreams is nevertheless recognized. This idea, I think, may also have been shared by the biblical writers, at least when it comes to the specific function of Joseph’s memory of his symbolic (or other) dreams. Another Graeco-Roman notion discussed by Miller (see chapter 3, ‘Interpretation of Dreams’), which has more relevance to the psychological reading offered here, is the importance attached to giving verbal expression to a dream by way of its interpretation. This idea is also found in later biblical literature and post-biblical Jewish sources. More specifically, the aspect that concerns us here is that in order to understand the dream’s meaning it is necessary to move from ‘the visual image to the linguistic register of the textual word’ (p. 74). The same can be said of memories in general, since these are also encoded in the register of the visual image. In the recognition that images have to be ‘transformed’ into words in order to enable recovery, there lies a basic tool which anticipates the modern psychoanalytic approach to dreams as vessels of traumatic memory. This tool is also reflected, in a wider sense and as I have tried to show, in the biblical portrayal of Joseph’s character.

This having been said, this article is by no means an attempt at a full scale or in-depth psychoanalytical study of the Joseph narrative, nor does it imply that the story was composed with such consciousness in mind. The point underlined here is that in the literary characterization of the main protagonists—and in the underlying themes and imagery of the story—the notion and process of trauma and recovery (or lack of recovery) is at work, and that it is fashioned, in a psychological realism of sorts, through the appeal to the characters’ memory. A therapeutic process of sorts is undergone by some of the protagonists, wherein they are released in some way from the grip of the past, although not by others.

To the best of my knowledge such a reading, focused on traumatic memory, has not yet been offered in relation to the Joseph narrative, although as the history of its interpretation and critical study has become so immense I may have overlooked previous attempts in this direction. Psychological aspects of the story have engaged commentators since ancient times, and various psychoanalytic readings of biblical literature have of course served as the focus of modern studies. I cannot exhaust the relevance of those to my discussion, nor of the enormous exegetical and literary analyses of the

Joseph narrative. At the advice of the editors, I have only touched upon these selectively in the notes.

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## EXODUS–COVENANT: HISTORICAL EVENTS AS MYTH ABOUT ORIGINS

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In the following essay<sup>1</sup> I claim that stories about the exodus from Egypt and about covenant making form a *myth* that in the religion of Israel replaced the *creation myths* that religions of the neighbouring countries were based on. Even if in Scripture these are described as two distinct events, I consider them as one *foundational myth* that presents two complementary aspects of the God-human relationship, forming the basis for a doctrinal, cultic and ethical structure.<sup>2</sup>

My aim is to sketch the plan describing on what conditions the *Exodus–Covenant* concept could be recognized as a *foundational myth* for the religion of Israel. The inspiration for such an understanding of those stories comes from three areas: (1) within the Bible the *Exodus* and *Covenant* appear as the most significant and interrelated themes permeating the whole Scripture; (2) the idea of *Exodus–Covenant* remains the *foundational event* in Christianity and Judaism;<sup>3</sup> (3) exegetical traditions, at least in part, consider the *Exodus–Covenant* concept as a foundation of the religion of Israel.

In the Bible, the *Exodus* and *Covenant* motifs are described in multiple interpretations with the aim to present the sense of each and both, treated with great freedom regarding historical accuracy.<sup>4</sup> The way they were

1. This article is based on research done for a book: T. Stanek, *Dzieje jako teofania: Wewnątrzbiblijna interpretacja i jej teologiczne konsekwencje* [History as Theophany: Innerbiblical Interpretations and Theological Consequences] (Poznan: WT UAM, 2005), and partly follow Chapter II.1 (pp. 58–77) thereof.

2. By the term ‘foundational myth’ I understand a *story* (metanarrative) that—being the source of archetypes—underscores the religious and social structure of a certain society. *Foundational myths* are different for different societies. I do not touch on the problems of their origins and interdependence of culture.

3. Christianity recognises baptism (as an analogy to crossing the Sea) and the Eucharist (renewed covenant) as basic rites of initiation. Judaism is based on the observance of *mitzvot*, perceived as a sign of the covenant; and its fundamental feasts follow the story of the Exodus: the escape from Egypt (Passover), receiving the law (Shavuot) and wondering in the desert (Succoth).

4. I assume that some actual experiences hide concealed behind those descriptions;

described presents not so much the tangled meanders of human memories but, rather, a variety of theological interpretations related to various historical circumstances. Although they were put in chronological order and situated in a concrete geographical area, the language used to describe them and the particular perspectives from which they were viewed, show deep ideological (theological) bias.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, understanding of the *Exodus–Covenant* concept is a matter of finding out how some experiences were perceived within the religious history of Israel, and of identifying how those memories built Israel's self-understanding.

The biblical analysis that will be developed below should illustrate the significance of those events for the community, revealing areas where they were recalled in religious life, and the nature of the archetypes they formed. The aim is to find the thread that ties together various texts, moving them to the level of myth. The work must be done in comparison with the myths of neighbouring countries, forming the natural environment of the origin of the *Exodus–Covenant* myth. Such a perspective points to the principles of theological interpretations of historical experiences and presents the faith underlying them.<sup>6</sup>

The analysis of the way that the *Exodus–Covenant* event is perceived in Scripture will be undertaken in four steps:

1. *Exodus–Covenant* as a *foundational myth*.
2. Presentation of *Exodus* memories within the Hebrew Bible.
3. Presentation of the *Covenant* idea within the Hebrew Bible.
4. *Exodus–Covenant* as a *foundational myth*—summary.

### 1. *The Exodus–Covenant as a Foundational Myth*

Religious questions seem to arise from the experience of insecurity, suffering and death.<sup>7</sup> In a majority of religions the fragility of human life

however, it is impossible to recognise what exactly had happened. From the perspective of sacred texts, the reality of events behind the narratives is irrelevant.

5. U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967); W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Y. Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 115–25.

6. The next step would be to recognise the specifics of Israel's religion in connection to the originality of her own myth, and to point to the religious consequences of choosing historical experiences for foundational narratives. This subject will not be dealt with in this essay; it was the theme of my work *Dzieje jako teofania...* [*History as Theophany...*], cited above.

7. The transition from the experience of death to religion goes *inter alia* through questions about God as a source of hope. In a most simple way the problem was formulated as a question: What is god?, by M.S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*:

was contemplated against the stability of cosmic order, with its changing rhythm of *death and resurrection*; therefore, the *foundational myths* that present and preserve archetypes were generally set at the beginning of the world.<sup>8</sup> Cosmic and natural beings were recognized as manifestations of the divine and formed the resource for religious language (metaphors for naming gods, cultic symbols).<sup>9</sup> Such conditions enable building a solid structure for religiosity (beliefs, ethics and cultic behaviour) related to the observed cosmic order. Archetypes (both personal and structural) created that way achieved deep stability, grounded as they were in the firm order of cosmic rhythm that allowed constructing human societies according to the recognized law of nature. Thanks to that, cosmic religions achieved deep integration between the cosmic order and the order of human societies.<sup>10</sup>

Since the basic function of religious archetypes is to answer existential problems and create a space for cultic structure and behaviour, it is necessary to find out how the biblical description of *Exodus–Covenant* fulfils this condition. In order to present the analogy of *Exodus–Covenant* narratives to the *Creation* stories, it is necessary to consider three aspects:

- the time and place of events
- the subject of events
- the rhetorical strategy for recalling them, which enabled the building of an archetypal structure.

*Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 27–80. See also G. van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1977), and a vast literature on the subject of phenomenology of religions.

8. D. Adams Leeming and M. Adams Leeming, *Encyclopedia of Creation Myths* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1994); J.D. Evers, *Myth und Narrative: Structure and Meaning in Some Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995).

9. Generally about religious language: I.T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1967); G.S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Th.J.J. Alitzer, W.A. Beardslee and J.H. Young (eds.), *Truth, Myth and Symbol* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1962); D.S. Lopez (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); W.O. Hendricks, 'The Semiotics of Myth', *Semiotica* 39 (1982), pp. 131–65; P. Hernadi, *Cultural Transactions: Nature, Self, Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

10. M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); D.J.W. Meijer (ed.), *Natural Phenomena: Their Meaning, Depiction and Description in the Ancient Near East* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Art and Sciences, 1992); A. Hausleiter and H.J. Nissen (eds.), *Material Culture and Mental Spheres: Rezeption archäologischer Denkrichtungen in der vorderasiatischen Altertumskunde* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002).

Such an analysis must illustrate the similarities as well as differences between the biblical stories as against the myths of neighbouring peoples, and allow to grasp the specifics of the religion of Israel.

Comparison between the biblical description of the exodus and Sinaitic events versus myths of neighbouring peoples was already done within the *Myth and Ritual School*, but that research always applied to chosen texts that describe the *Chaoskampf*.<sup>11</sup> The aim of the following analysis, however, is to present a complex vision of the idea of *Exodus–Covenant*, as it is inscribed into Scripture. Since the answer must point to the role that this ‘event’ fulfilled in Israelite religious life, it is therefore necessary to explain its role in creating the idea of their god (doctrine) as well as the cultic and social structure (ritual and ethos). I start from a question about the presence and significance of events described in those stories within the whole Scripture, ways and circumstances in which they were recalled, asking about the idea of the God they depict. In order to achieve this, the following questions should be formulated:

- What experiences were remembered (places, times, persons described; circumstances recalled)?
- How were they narrated (rhetorics employed and relation to the historical circumstances)?
- What can be said about the concept of God that is inscribed into those stories?

### 1.1. *Time and place of events*

Asking about the historical time and place of events described in biblical stories is a late tradition that appeared only under Hellenistic influence and was developed in the Roman and Byzantine era.<sup>12</sup> In Semitic culture the settling of events in sacral writings was quite relevant—even if, placed in certain spatial circumstances, that accentuated their irrelevance.<sup>13</sup> The quest for knowledge about places and times of biblical events was guided

11. F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); H.W.F. Saggs, *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel* (London: Athlone Press, 1978); B.F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

12. G.I. Davies, *The Way of the Wilderness: A Geographical Study of the Wilderness Itineraries in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

13. Worth mentioning is a short article: H. Vanstiphout, ‘Rethinking the Marriage of Martu’, in K. van Lerberghe and G. Voet (eds.), *Languages and Cultures in Contact: At the Crossroads of Civilizations in the Syro-Mesopotamian Realm* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp. 461–74. See also W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998). The temporality is always related to the archaic *tempus illud*; ‘at the time of the friends of Horus..., at the time of wise Enki’.

by a desire *to touch* the places connected with the extraordinary presence of God. The concept of finding and marking those places emerged within European culture, particularly in the Christian world.

Together with the historical trend in biblical studies, interest in such questions and possibilities to confirm the authenticity of events in biblical stories largely lost ground. At first researchers approached those stories with a great sense of confidence in their basic reliability, and controversies applied only to some particulars. Within the last three decades this confidence deteriorated, and contemporary interpretations basically represent two opposite attitudes—either attempting to prove the authenticity of those events;<sup>14</sup> or presenting them as stories with a completely different background.<sup>15</sup> The impossibility of confirming the one or the other theory indicates that the answer does not lie in asking about the historical background of those narratives.

Since the Bible is a sacral canon, the question about *time and place* must be inspired by religious thinking and considered in the hermeneutics of myth, not within historiography. From this perspective the basic question should be formulated as follows: *How did the Exodus–Covenant story achieve such ‘reconciliation’ of human experiences and their oversimplification that could serve as the source of archetypes?* In other words: *What enabled the transformation of historical events into mythical timelessness and place?*

### 1.2. *The subject of events*

‘Israel’ appears as the subject of events and this has never been called into question. The contemporary problem emerged with the question—*what is Israel?* The biblical version about a community that: (1) arose from one human pair; and (2) walked out of Egypt as a united group, has always been questioned. But contemporary research points to yet another problem—the impossibility of defining *Israel* at all.<sup>16</sup> If so, the second partner

14. E.g. J.K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); C.J. Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus: A Scientist’s Discovery of the Extraordinary Natural Causes of the Biblical Stories* (London: Continuum, 2003). The last entry is a particularly curious example, as it uses scientific methods in order to mark places as connected to the exodus.

15. E.g. I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001); J.W. Rogerson, R.W.L. Moberly and W. Johnstone, *Genesis and Exodus* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001), settle it in the events of the 8th century BCE.

16. B.S.J. Isserlin, *The Israelites* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); K.W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 2002).

in this story—the God of *Israel*—must also be questioned. Archaeological data leave no doubt as to the existence of a multiplicity of cults in Canaan, and all of them show basic similarities—iconicity, veneration of ancestors, sexuality, etc. If Yhwh was also venerated in that area, he definitely was one of the great multiplicities of gods and goddesses.<sup>17</sup> Then what about his *great deeds* that *Israel* narrates?

In order to see the archetypal status of *Israel* it is necessary (as above) to compare the subject of biblical stories to cosmic myths. This comparison points to two basic differences: (1) biblical narratives set human persons in place of gods and heroes; (2) the whole community, and not just the king, was perceived as the subject of relationship to the god. This approach illustrates the basic message of Scripture that the *God of Israel* is neither described from the viewpoint of his nature, nor in relationship to other cosmic powers (gods), but always (exclusively) in relationship to *his People* and through his deeds on their behalf.

Therefore, the questions about the archetypal status of the subject should be formulated as follow: *How was the Exodus–Covenant event exploited in creating the religious structure? What can be said about its presence in national memories? What were the conditions for the existence of a historical and ethnic entity as a subject of foundational myth? What is the nature of the relationship between Yhwh and Israel?* Only against this backdrop Yhwh—the main hero of those stories—could be presented.

### 1.3. *Rhetorical strategy in recalling historical experiences*

The theology of ancient Near Eastern religions was constructed in descriptive and symbolic language, and this way of expression constitutes biblical writings as well. In order to find out the message of a text it is necessary to recognize: (1) what sort of expressions are used; (2) how they are related to common symbols; (3) what areas of life those recollections apply to; and (4) what goal they intend to achieve.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the events of the exodus from Egypt and the covenants are described in the main narratives as well as in their recollections in other texts. With this aim in view, I formulate the following questions: *How were those events remembered and narrated through generations? In what circumstances were they recalled? What area of human existence (personal and social) did they apply to? What symbols and metaphors were used to express them, and how are they related to the*

17. K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

*myths of neighbouring people? What can be said about Yhwh—his nature, abilities, and so on?*

## 2. Exodus in Scripture

The basic text, Exodus 1–14, presents a complex story about events preceding the flight from Egypt, and the flight itself. The composition depicts confrontation between Yhwh and the pharaoh (god of Egypt<sup>18</sup>), effected through Moses, in front of Israel as a witness. The story, created around the main message (to present the overwhelming power of Yhwh and his care for Israel), uses fine rhetorics and seems to be considered an introduction to the story about Covenant making on Sinai.<sup>19</sup> The events described are recalled many times in the Prophets and Hagiographa, in a variety of circumstances. The recollections that appear in Scripture can be divided as follow:

- Concise references mentioning Israel's stay in Egypt and escape from there.
- Description of Yhwh's fight with hostile powers in order to save (or protect) Israel.
- Theological interpretation of the idea that Yhwh brought Israel out of Egypt.

### 2.1. Concise references

Although extremely brief in reference to the experiences mentioned, the texts of the first group are the most numerous.<sup>20</sup> Many of them recall only the sojourn in Egypt (e.g. 1 Sam. 2.27; Isa. 52.4; Hos. 12.10; Amos 3.1, 4.10; 9.7); some others present in a kerygmatic zoom the events that occurred between leaving Egypt and reaching Canaan, mentioning the stay in Egypt, the exit (being taken) from there, wandering through deserts, conquering Transjordan and Canaan. However, none of those texts recalls all of those elements all at once: this will appear only in the third group (e.g. Jos. 2.10, 5.6, 24.4–18; Judg. 6.13, 11.13; 1 Sam. 2.27, 4.8).

18. In exegesis, the so-called *plague narratives* are usually perceived as confrontations between Moses and the pharaoh. However, it is necessary to remember that the pharaoh in Egypt was understood as a real god: '...the world was ruled by partnership of the sun as netjer aa, "great god" or "senior partner" and the king, netjer nefer, "(youthfully) perfect god" or "junior partner" ' (S. Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* [London: British Museum Press, 1992], p. 38). In the Jewish tradition Moses is perceived as a prophet.

19. Cassuto, *Exodus*, pp. 87–125; E.W. Nicholson, *Exodus and Sinai in History and Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).

20. Within the corpus of Leviticus–Deuteronomy the exodus is recalled over 90 times; in the Former Prophets, about 40 times. A similar number appears in Isaiah and Ezekiel each, and around 30 times in the Minor Prophets. The recollections in the Writings are much greater in number.



The goal of recalling those memories could be described as follows:

to admonish and present moral demands (e.g. Jos. 5.6; Judg. 2.1; Jer. 7.22, 25; Hos. 8.13, 11.5);

to effect joy and gratitude (e.g. 2 Sam 7.23; Hos. 11.1, 12.14; Am. 2.10; Mi. 7.14-15);

to bring hope in distress (e.g. Jos. 2.10-11; Judg. 6.7-14; 1 Sam. 2.27; Isa. 10.24-26, 11.10-16; Ps 81.7-10);

to recall Yhwh's might and point to its actuality (e.g. Hos. 13.4; Jer. 11.4, 32.20-22; Zech. 10.11-12);

to provide justification for cultic and administrative enterprises (e.g. 1 Sam 2.27-29, 8.9-16, 10.17-19, 12.6-15).

Texts of this group recall the experience of Egypt, and the escape and conquest of the land, as a fact existing in people's memories—a fact so obvious that it does not demand any explanations, justification or even an account of the events. Such texts usually take for granted the question, How did the listeners get from Egypt to the present settlement? The texts were recalled in situations that revealed God's faithfulness and his firm commitment to help Israel in her distress, and served as an introduction to the contrast shown between God's goodness and Israel's infidelity. Their brevity and variability suggest consistency of some memories among people.

Looking from the viewpoint of the episodes recalled, they prove the selectivity of memories that eliminated information concerning topographic and temporal particulars while stressing and protecting anything that proves the caring presence of God. It has to be emphasized that those texts speak neither about the experiences in Egypt nor of the sojourn, but serve as a starting point for the call to an appropriate attitude towards current circumstances, namely, trust in Yhwh and his steadfast love for Israel. Since they function as reference point for religious demands, they can be understood as an experience that reveals an ever open possibility of God's redeeming acts.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.2. *Yhwh's fight with hostile powers*

To this group belong the great poems—Exodus 15; Habakkuk 3; Psalms 18, 68, 77. The hymns of Exodus 15 and Habakkuk 3 present Yhwh as a warrior, and their language is deeply rooted in the metaphorical milieu of neighbouring myths. The motifs of *mighty waters* and *tremendous sky*, the *triumphal walk* of the hero and his *victorious fight*, revoke (common to the whole region) thinking about the existence of the world as consequence of the victory by the positive, creative power over chaos.<sup>22</sup> Those texts lack not

21. That was in fact the role of myth.

22. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*; Batto, *Slaying the Dragon*; N. Wyatt,

only any references to the place and time of the *battle* (which strengthens their connection to the primordial battle) but also to the current situation. All they point to is the situation of emergency and lack of security on the one hand, and—on the other hand—the existence of a power that is able to overcome the dangerous situation.

The Psalms approach the question about God's ability and willingness to help from the existential and personal point of view. In accordance with the Hymns, they also abandon any interest in historical circumstances, giving witness to faith in God's might that is able to change the unwanted situation. Mythical metaphors prove their universal bias. Reference to primordial events allows perceiving some experiences as part of a universal milieu, indicating its analogy to the creation myths. The power behind those events is recognized as a cosmic god, ever open to give help to those in need, both on the national and on the personal level.

Contrary to the previous group (§2.1), these texts do not provide any information about the historical circumstances of their origin; therefore, they plainly expose their mythical features. Superficially they appear as quite similar to the *Chaoskampf* stories. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between them: (1) The God of Israel always fights on behalf of his People, not for the protection of the cosmic order; (2) his victory is celebrated by people, not by other gods; and (3) the goal is to create hope in distress, not to present God himself.

### 2.3. Theological interpretation

The texts of the third group present theological reflection on some experiences, as remembered through religious tradition. The leading motif is, *Yhwh has chosen Israel—took her out of Egypt—gave her the land of Canaan*. This motif functions as a profession of faith. It is usually settled within a wider context—the call of Abraham, Patriarchal promises, and even the creation of the world. The texts draw the picture of God who is totally dedicated to shape Israel, both in her history as well as in social life (relationships within society and position among nations).

Some of those texts recall events in order to evoke gratitude and praise (Pss 78, 81, 105, 106, 135, 136); others recall them as an introduction to prayer for help in current distress (Mic. 7.14-20; Ps. 80.9-12; Neh. 9.9-25; Jdt. 5.6-16 and Greek Est. 5). Generally, they emphasize the motif of Israel's election, most of the time absent in the former groups of texts, in this way establishing a connection between the *Exodus* and the *Covenant*.<sup>23</sup> While

*Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996).

23. R. Rendtorff, 'Nehemiah 9: An Important Witness of Theological Reflection', in M. Cogan and M. Greenberg (eds.), *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honour of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 111-18.

recalling some events from the past they form a sort of saga whose theme is the *history of Israel* as a *deed of creation by Yhwh*. The message is to present the history of a certain people as a ‘place’ of Yhwh’s epiphany.

#### 2.4. *Summary*

Biblical description of events in Egypt, during the flight and on the way to Canaan points to two facts:

- living memories of some experiences; and
- their archetypal status.

The factual existence of living memories is confirmed by the form of evoking them—the prophet did not feel obliged to explain any circumstances (places, time, personal details), but claimed their existence as well as their obligatory nature. The sense of evoking them subsists in reminding people of the *Mighty Power* that revealed itself *once upon a time* and that is able to intervene in human affairs in every place and every time.<sup>24</sup> And those who became the subject of this revelation are obliged to: (1) remember; (2) turn towards it—both, in gratitude and in summoning help.

The references point mainly to those areas of life where people experienced existential ‘turning points’—to such experiences of life that one expects and receives help from God. Some also serve as justification for cultic and ethical issues. Such features reveal their meaning in religious life—the point of reference in existential turmoil, particularly in the face of death (national and individual). The way some memories were nurtured and recalled allows for creating a picture of God who is faithful to his own promises and to people needing help.

### 3. *The Covenant Idea within the Hebrew Bible*

Within Scripture the *Covenant* idea is presented quite often in a variety of contexts. Its nature is so complex that it is impossible to separate one unit in the biblical text that describes it. While some scholars want to see two basic units in Exod. 20.1-18 and 24.1-11 (or even 24.1-3, 8-11), others prefer the whole composition of Exodus 19–24. Sometimes Exod. 34.10-26 is added. And if the retrospective stories in Deut. 4.10-20 (or 4.10–28.69) and Deut. 29 (or maybe even Jos. 24; Gen. 15 and 17) are added, we are already at the start confronted with a multiplicity of versions.<sup>25</sup>

24. M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959).

25. For the history of interpretation see E.W. Nicholson, *God and his People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 3-120; T.D. Alexander, ‘The Composition of the Sinai Narrative in Exodus xix 1–xxiv 11’,

The impossibility of marking off any particular narrative as applying to the event (like in the case of the exodus) suggests that it was never understood by analogy to the exodus story, but as different—or rather complementary to the *Exodus*—in its very nature.<sup>26</sup> Therefore it is necessary to find out what idea was inscribed into stories that describe the *Covenant*.

This concept could be bracketed in four groups:

1. Descriptions of a unique relationship with the term *b<sup>e</sup>rît*.<sup>27</sup>
2. Descriptions of a unique relationship with the formula: *I will be their God, they will be my people*.
3. Summoning of the unique relationship between Yhwh and Israel in turmoil and troubles.
4. Covenant between God and king.

### 3.1. Relationship as *b<sup>e</sup>rît*

The texts of this group present the relationship in analogy to the covenantal treaties between clans or kings using the concept of formal bonds, existing in political and social life.<sup>28</sup> This underlines the judicial character of the covenant, allowing consideration of mutual obligations in categories of reward and punishment. The terminology used to describe this type of relationship contains words that express personal attitudes—love, fear, and nearness—but also justice, transgressions, and retaliation. Generally, those treaties existed as a mutual obligation, based on the precepts given by

VT 49 (1999), pp. 2-20. In exegetical tradition this idea has a long history. Wellhausen, who first raised this problem, was convinced that that it was a fairly late idea in Israelite religious tradition; contrary to him, Gressmann perceived it as the oldest one. Gunkel ascribed that event to Moses, who might have made the covenant between Israel and the Midianites. Eichrodt's concept, that the covenant idea was the real turn off from natural religion, impacted the research of following generations.

26. For arguments for such attitudes, see, e.g., I. Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 94-138.

27. In exegesis most of the time only the first group is considered as a description of covenant. Since in the ancient Near East the covenant idea always appears in contexts of kinship or kingship, it is necessary to consider also those texts that do not contain this particular word, but suggest this type of relationship.

28. Analogy applies to the very nature—mutual obligation of non equal partners—but not to the form of treaty in most cases. About the analogy in form, see D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963); P. Kalluveettil, *Declaration of Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1982); Nicholson, *God and his People*; G. Mendenhall, 'Covenant', in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 1179-1202; F.M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 3-52.

the suzerain, and confirmed by the vassal party. *B<sup>e</sup>rît* is obligatory for both parties to the contract, although their status is not equal.

In Scripture the term *b<sup>e</sup>rît* is applied to three archetypical figures: *Noah*, *Abraham* and *Israel*. Each one of these figures is the subject of different conditions of the *b<sup>e</sup>rît*.

In the first instance, the *b<sup>e</sup>rît* with Noah appears in two stages and is connected with the renewal of the whole creation. In the first stage it is addressed only to Noah and the commandment connected to it is to enter the ark with the family and chosen creatures (Gen. 6.14–7.4). In the next stage of this *b<sup>e</sup>rît* the precept—not to shed blood—was addressed to Noah and to the animals (Gen. 9.8–17).<sup>29</sup> God, as the suzerain, blessed Noah, his progeny and all the creatures with him, and obliged himself not to destroy the earth ever again.

In the second case the subject of *b<sup>e</sup>rît* is Abraham. This *b<sup>e</sup>rît* too has two stages, both connected to the promise of progeny. The first stage (Gen. 15.18) holds only the promise of land and progeny, without laying any obligation on Abraham; the second stage confirms the promises from the previous one, adding two precepts: (1) ‘walk before me and be blameless’ (Gen. 17.1);<sup>30</sup> (2) the obligation of circumcision. Neither of those two *b<sup>e</sup>rît* events is verbally confirmed by the human partner, and their validity is presented as acting in obedience to God’s commandment. The suzerain is presented as dedicated to the wellbeing of the vassal (blessing for progeny and for land).

For the third time this term appears in connection with *Israel*—first as a recollection of the Abrahamic covenant (Exod. 2.24; 6.4–5) and then as a proclamation of the unique bond with Israel herself (Exod. 24.7–8; 34.10, 12, 15, 27, 28; Deut. 5.2, 3; 9.9, 11, 15; 28.69). This covenant involves a set of precepts, governing social and cultic behaviour. The original assent in this *b<sup>e</sup>rît* is the response (the verbal acceptance) made by *all Israel*. The idea of *Covenant*, as described in those texts, reveals a strong, irrevocable bond that allows formulating strict obligations for both partners, based on the free will of each. The verbal response of *all Israel* allows the presentation of this particular covenant as obligatory beyond definite time and circumstances.

The three stages of making the *b<sup>e</sup>rît* reveal its comprehensive nature, embracing the picture of a multiple relationship of God towards the world, as well as various kinds of human responses.

### 3.2. *I will be their God, they will be my people*

The texts of the second group—where the legal term has been replaced by a descriptive formulation—can be viewed as complementary to the first. There is a great bulk of texts that contain this phrase, both as a whole as well

29. In this second passage the word *b<sup>e</sup>rît* is repeated 7 times.

30. NKJV. This term is used 10 times in Gen. 17.1–21.

as one part of it.<sup>31</sup> The use of possessive pronouns allows expressing the depths and complexity of the bond between God and people.<sup>32</sup> The context in which Scripture uses those phrases points also to one more aspect—it allows moving the core of the relationship from the *reward—punishment* attitude towards the idea of *mercy—repentance* (e.g. Exod. 29.45-46; Lev. 11.45, 26.12-13; Deut. 6.4-5; Jer. 7.23).

While the first group emphasized the formal aspects of the treaty (mutual obligations), bestowing the frame for the cultic and moral structure, the second group underscores the depths of personal relationship, beyond the *reward—punishment* idea. Such a shift led to understanding the relationship between God and Israel within the terms of mutual love (e.g. Deut. 4-9; 11), finally describing it as a  *betrothal* concept (e.g. Hos. 1, 3; Ezek. 16).

### 3.3. *Recollection in turmoil and troubles*

There is a multiplicity of texts revealing a consciousness of the existence of a relationship of Israel towards her God that might have been recalled in actual distress. Circumstances described in them disclose an understanding of the *Covenant* idea in various historical experiences. Those texts bring to mind not only the Sinai covenant but also the covenants with the Patriarchs and King David. Sometimes they recall also the memories about the exodus or conquest of Canaan, linking three leading motifs: (1) election and promises; (2) recognized power of Yhwh and help received from him; and (3) mutual obligation and responsibility of Israel. Quite often they have the form of a prayer (e.g. Deut. 29; Mic. 7.14-20; Pss 33.27, 89, 99.4; Judg. 5.6-16; Neh. 9.9-25; Lamentations).

In this group the references to covenantal obligation emphasize the infidelity of Israel and the promises received. They strengthen the ideas—revealed in the previous group—about *repentance* and *forgiveness*, creating the picture of a God merciful to human weakness and human ability to recognize one's own failures and repent from them. This concept introduces a new framework of religious attitude—repentance as a way to restore damaged cosmic order—completely unknown to the surrounding religions.<sup>33</sup> In consequence, it not only introduces substantial personalisation

31. The pronouns of this phrase—both possessive and personal—are used both in the singular and in the plural.

32. The frequent use of the generic term *elohim* with possessive pronouns of the first and second person is unique for Israel, and expresses the specific understanding of God in this religion; see R.P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 154-58.

33. In the thinking of ancient people any wrong deed influenced the cosmic order and, therefore, needed ritual restoration. W. Van Binsbergen and F. Wiggermann, 'Magic in History: A Theoretical Perspective and its Application to Ancient Mesopotamia', in I.T. Abusch and K. Van der Toorn (eds.) *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual,*

of the God–people relationship (which underlies the religion of Israel), but also lay down the foundations for a humanistic culture.

### 3.4. *Covenant between God and king*

In their wording those texts recall the second group of covenantal narratives—*I will be father to him, he will be my son*—and present the idea of a unique, personal relationship between God and the king. This idea refers strongly to the regional tradition, where the king was considered the subject of a unique bond that made him the *son of god*.<sup>34</sup> The formula of the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) recalls the well-known formulas from Akkadian texts (both Babylonian and Assyrian). Elements of this formula appear in the appointment of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11.38-39) and Jehu (2 Kgs 10.30), proving that the concept of kingship was understood partly within the frame of general perceptions—the king as a proxy for God.

Scripture presents great ambiguity concerning kingship. On the one hand, it conforms to the generally perceived religious value of this institution, as it appears in the blessings for the land (Ps 72), in the establishment of temple and cult (2 Sam. 6.17-19; 1 Kgs 8.62-66) and in the connection between the fate of the people and the king's conduct (2 Sam. 24; 2 Kgs 23.11-15). On the other hand, a great number of deviations from the general perception are observed, particularly on the level of rhetorical structure in the Former Prophets. While the covenant with a king belongs to the basics of religious activity within the ancient Near East, in scriptural description it reaches its unimaginable limitations. Whereas in religions of the neighbouring people this bond served as a source of vitality and well-being for the land and its citizens, in Scripture it was never recalled in existential turmoil but only during political trouble. In the course of history the institution itself was dropped and the idea was raised to the eternal frame, to the *Messiah* concept, the ideal proxy between a transcendent God and earthly order.

### 3.5. *Summary*

The concept of *Covenant* brought a new idea to the religious mind—while the *Exodus* theme allowed formulating expectation for help, the *Covenant* allowed the underlining of personal and communal responsibilities. Scripture testifies that the concept of *Covenant* was recalled and reconsidered in a variety of circumstances, with the aim to present it as a free, but irrevocable obligation—of God and of Israel. The characteristic trait of those

*Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives* (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999), pp. 1-34; G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994).

34. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, pp. 52-104; Wyatt, *Myths of Power*.



recollections is the idea of election and establishment of a particular bond. Accounts of this bond are set within various periods and apply to various events and figures in order to show its uniqueness. Memories about it, as presented in Scriptural narratives, functioned as a basis of expectations and obligations. The concept of *Covenant* served as an excellent frame to express mutual (albeit not symmetrical) responsibility that bound together Yhwh and Israel.

The texts of the first and second group are complementary in character, and describe the scriptural concept of relationship to God. While the concept of *b'rit* is convenient for creating the picture of solid cultic and social structures, the idea of *I-You* allowed bringing in personal feelings and commitment. Because of this, the religion of Israel (as well as Judaism and Christianity) reveals a constant tension between a firm structure of religious rituals (sacred precepts, sacraments) and flexibility of language that expresses them in ethics and cultic institutions.

The texts of the third group emphasize the concept of dual responsiveness: (1) fidelity and mercifulness of God towards the weak and unfaithful partner; and (2) Israel's perceptive responsibility for being the covenant partner. While linking together prayer for help and reflections on transgressions against promises (e.g. Ps. 106; Neh. 9.9-25) they emphasize human ability to judge one's own conduct and take appropriate measures. Such a picture reveals the biblical concept of human beings as subjects of free and responsible acts.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, it presents the image of a merciful and ever faithful God. Covenant with a king—even if quite distinct from covenants with the people—was linked through rhetoric of the Bible to the Patriarchal covenants.<sup>36</sup> Because it resulted in reflection on the *perfect mediator* between God and people, it should also be reconsidered as a necessary link to the reflection on the human condition.

The concept of *Covenant*, as a description of relationship between God and people, primarily applies to the cultic sphere. Since the idea of a personal relationship to God lies at its core, it allows departure from rituals grounded in magical perception of reality, and moves the cultic response towards the intellectual sphere, guided by personal (individual and collective) responsibility. This understanding marks the starting point for the concept of replacing rituals by *teshuvâ* (repentance) that eventually becomes the basis of relationship to God in Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. The Yhwh-Israel relationship became a fundamental place for describing the nature of the God of Israel and building the space for cultic structure. Those

35. The concept of human freedom, dignity, and self has its roots in the biblical conception of a human being and its relationship to God and to the nature.

36. D. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

texts should be considered as particularly important in research that concerns the significance of precepts such as cultic behaviour.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. *Exodus–Covenant as foundational myth: Summary*

The descriptions of the *Exodus* experience reveal the power of Yhwh that exceeds any other, and such an exposure of his *justice* that guarantees not only the existence of Israel but also of *world order*.<sup>38</sup> *Covenant*, on the other hand, is perceived as a paradigm of mutual relationship and sphere of human responses towards God. Each of those experiences fulfils a particular religious role and therefore—in particular situations—could be recalled separately. However, only when considered together, the *Exodus–Covenant* idea creates such an understanding of God that made space for religious life in its complete form—in doctrinal, moral and cultic aspects.

The aspect of *Exodus* provided a framework for understanding human history as a place where God could be met and named (doctrine); the aspect of *Covenant* provided a scope for understanding human nature (personal and social) where the relationship to God could be fully settled (ethos and cult). This ‘event’ not only became a point of reference in situations of personal and common danger, but also created a basis for cultic structure and moral behaviour. In the religions of neighbouring peoples those aspects were deduced out of contemplating nature, with the event of the *creation of the world* as the centre.

The event of *Exodus–Covenant*—as it is presented in Scripture—appears as the fundamental point of reference in situations of distress and turmoil, on both the individual and communal levels, thus revealing its meaning as an archetypal story. Biblical description was done in the typical language that characterizes the myths of neighbouring peoples; and the only difference lies in the places, times and figures that those stories depict. While the myths of neighbouring peoples set the action beyond space and time (heavens, time of creation), and their heroes are gods and giants, the Israelites’ myth places the whole story within the scope of human perception (Egyptian dominion, second and first millennium BCE), exclusively choosing human figures as heroes. Because the nature of God was recognized through contemplation of events in human history, namely, in his deeds for

37. Since in Judaism obedience to the precepts and studying the texts replaced the rituals that formed the core of religion during the biblical period, it would be worthwhile to trace the origins of such change. The new shape of religious behaviour that the religion of Israel received in rabbinic Judaism points to a sense of responsibility to God, which must have existed already in the consciousness of biblical Israel—responsibility that lies at the bottom of creation of such original religion.

38. The world existed by *maat*, *me*, *misharu*, and *šedeq*.

the sake of Israel, the *Exodus–Covenant* fulfilled in the religion of Israel the same role as *creation myths* in the religions of neighbouring countries. Therefore, this narrative should be understood as a *foundational myth*.<sup>39</sup>

Placement of the *foundational myth* at the point of *creation* (religions of neighbouring people) resulted in placing archetypes in the cosmic order and organising the cult along the rhythm of nature. Therefore, in cosmic religions the core of religious life was perceived as participation in the cosmic structure, and functioned as rituals that embraced every aspect of human existence. Advancement and improvement of the means of relationship to God—which arose from the contemplation of nature was limited to the ability to know its laws. Those religions lay foundations for the sciences but were not able to cross the boundary that came with history; with the new political and cultural order (Persian, Hellenistic and Roman empires) the Mesopotamian and Egyptian gods were doomed to die, together with the empires they had controlled. Yhwh, the God of Israel, was able to sustain not only the fall of his first ‘empire’ but also (in Christianity and Judaism) the radical changes of cultural paradigms.

Such incidence as changing the religious cultic structure, which occurred with the rise of Second Temple Judaism and later in Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, was possible because the Israelite *foundational myth* was set in worldly space. Since its heroes were human beings, presented in situations that revealed God’s goodness and his caring attitudes, the core of religious life was the *‘mūnā*, the commitment *to listen and to obey* (cf. Deut. 5.1). Consequently, the core of religious life was moved from rituals to the free, personal response that was set in two areas: (1) keeping God’s deeds and promises in community memories (telling the stories), and (2) pronouncing obedience to the law (perceived as given by God) as a place of the relationship. The *Exodus–Covenant* event can be understood as such a *place* that reveals the nature of God and forms the basis for religious life.

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39. On how the idea of *creation* is placed and understood in Hebrew Scripture, see M. Fishbane, ‘The Sacred Center: The Symbolic Structure of the Bible’, in M.A. Fishbane and P.R. Flohr (eds.), *Text and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday by his Students* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 7–27.

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# LEXICAL FIELDS AND COHERENCE IN THE JACOB NARRATIVE

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## 1. Introduction

The narrator of the Genesis stories rarely displays the deep thematic meaning of the narratives, or characters' personality and motivations, in an explicit manner. In this article the theory of Lexical Fields is applied to the Jacob Narrative of chs. 25-36<sup>1</sup> in order to elucidate the overall theme of the unit. My claim is that the narrative as a whole is dominated by the lexical field of Sight (= SF), although in the episode of the deception of Isaac (ch. 27) the SF is intertwined with the lexical fields of Speech, Touch, Taste, and Smell.

The SF in the Jacob stories is foregrounded as the dominant field since SF lexemes consistently occur at key points; at the beginnings of episodes, at their endings and at turning points. In several instances place names also contain SF lexemes, for example Mizpah ('Watchtower', Gen. 31.49), and Peniel (32.30-31). The names of Jacob's two chief rivals—Laban and Esau—may be interpreted in Hebrew with reference to the colours white (לבן) and red (אדום). Since colours are a phenomenon of visual perception, they, too, are connected to the unit's dominant lexical field. I suggest that these unique and consistent appearances of SF terms at significant points in the plots of chapters 25–36 serve to underline the macro-plot, and to create a sense of a tightly structured and coherent narrative.

A basic term that requires definition at this early stage is 'Lexical Field'. By this term I refer to a group of lexemes that are linked by their main semantic relations, such as synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy; but also by other, more complicated semantic relations, such as instrumentality, the causation of the act or process which stands in the field's centre, or an

1. I follow Westermann's delineation of the Jacob Narrative, extending from 25.19 to 36.43, and following the *Toledot* formula (Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* [trans. J.J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1985]). Fishbane suggests that the Jacob Cycle extends from 25.19 to 35.22 (Michael Fishbane, 'Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle [Gen. 25.19-35.22]', *JJS* 26 [1975], pp. 15-38), while Agyenta is of the opinion that it extends from 25.19 to 35.29, mainly because Jacob no longer appears afterwards (Alfred Agyenta, 'The Jacob Cycle Narratively Speaking: The Question of the Extent of the Jacob Cycle in the Book of Genesis', *JNSL* 31 [2005], pp. 59-74).



act/process that is close to the field's centre via a semantic connection of abstract schema.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the field's centre is comprised of verbs that denote the act of seeing, such as רָאָה, רָאָה, רָאָה; the instrument of seeing, 'eye' (עֵינַי); the necessary condition for seeing, 'light' (אֹר), and its antonym 'darkness' (חֹשֶׁךְ, חֹשְׁכָה). Lakoff's notion of the image schema is used to include the lexeme 'dream' (חֲלוֹם, חָלַם), since the schema 'the perception of images by the brain' holds equally true for visual sight and for the dreaming process.<sup>3</sup>

The term 'Sight' includes lexemes of visual perception, but also lexemes denoting cognitive perception. Sweetser discusses the connection between these categories;<sup>4</sup> and the English verb 'to see', which denotes both visual and cognitive perception, may elucidate this connection. Malul, for example, deals with the connection between these categories in Hebrew,<sup>5</sup> and Sjöström in Swedish.<sup>6</sup>

Before analyzing the main episodes of the Jacob Narrative from the SF viewpoint, I shall elaborate my vision over the connections between lexical field, plot, coherence and theme.

## 2. *Lexical Field, Theme and Coherence*

When using the term 'cohesion' I refer to the ways lexical elements in the text 'are linguistically connected within a sequence. That is, how one sentence is

2. Lakoff introduces the term 'image schema' that can lead to the inclusion of a word in a certain category. He illustrates his point by reference to the Japanese classifier *hon*, which applies to long narrow objects such as sticks, pencils and ropes. But *hon* can also be attached to less representative cases such as hits in baseball. Lakoff explains that this linguistic phenomenon occurs because the baseball ball forms a trajectory in the air when hit. The long narrow path along which the ball travels accords with the *hon* image (George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987], pp. 104-105).

3. For an extended description of the SF in Genesis see T. Sutscover, 'The Semantic Field of "Seeing" in the Book of Genesis and the Coherence of the Text' (PhD thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2006 [Hebrew, with English summary]); for a general description of SF lexemes see Meir Malul, *Knowledge, Control and Sex: Studies in Biblical Thought, Culture and Worldview* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 2002).

4. Eve Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 32-33.

5. Malul, *Knowledge, Control and Sex*.

6. S. Sjöström, 'From Vision to Cognition: A Study of Metaphor and Polysemy in Swedish', in J. Allwood and P. Gardenfors (eds.), *Cognitive Semantics: Meaning and Cognition* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999), pp. 67-85.

linked to the next and how the elements in one part of the text are connected to those in others'.<sup>7</sup> 'Coherence', on the other hand, is a matter of semantic and pragmatic relations in the text<sup>8</sup> and can be a product of a number of factors, some of which are outside the text itself,<sup>9</sup> such as the knowledge of the subject, logical connection between the text's parts, and plot. In a given text words belonging to one lexical field form a network connected mainly by semantic relations. This network contributes to the cohesion between the text's sentences and paragraphs, thus manifesting itself in the text's micro-structure. In addition, when items in a given lexical field keep appearing at key points in the narrative, this field also contributes to the plot and the articulation of the theme as macro-structure. This connection between the concrete word level and the abstract theme level stands at the centre of the present discussion.

Because sight lexemes consistently appear at key points, I consider this dominant lexical field (the SF) as a mediator between the two levels. That is, because of this special pattern of SF lexeme occurrences, this specific field may be viewed as the dominant field of the Jacob narrative, and as such one of the main designers of the theme, i.e., the entity which Hasan defines as the deepest level of meaning.<sup>10</sup> For Hasan, some words function as symbols and they are part of the 'symbolic articulation' according to which a text should be interpreted. Words consistently highlighted by means of a certain pattern may function as symbols, leading the reader to the highest generalization that can be made of the text, and to its theme. This is the pattern I choose to focus on—the highlighted pattern of the lexical SF, the consistent occurrence of which allows me to follow its lexemes and interpret them as thematic markers. This larger view of sight lexemes would lead me to consider the character name Laban, for instance, as not only alluding to the Akkadian lexeme *lapnu(m)* meaning 'poor', but also, as mentioned above, to the Hebrew meaning of the word, 'white'.

Sight lexemes create cohesion and thematic coherence even between paragraphs that often are not considered inherently related to the Jacob Narrative. Such is the case of Genesis 26, describing episodes from Isaac's life. As I will show further on, since sight lexemes occur at significant plot junctions, this chapter too can be connected to the overall sight theme.

7. Adele Berlin, 'Lexical Cohesion and Biblical Interpretation', *Hebrew Studies* 30 (1989), pp. 29-30. See also M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 274-92, and Rachel Giora, 'Notes towards a Theory of Text Coherence', *Poetics Today* 6 (1985), pp. 699-715.

8. Tanya Reinhart, 'Conditions for Text Coherence', *Poetics Today* 1 (1980), p. 163.

9. Berlin, 'Lexical Cohesion', p. 29.

10. Ruqaiya Hasan, *Linguistics, Language and Verbal Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 80.

Finally, another aspect of method needs to be clarified. While analyzing the occurrences of sight lexemes at strategic points, I will allude to two separate spheres, the divine and the human. As to the human sphere I suggest a gradual development of human sight depending on the object being seen: (a) When humans participate in visual perception of concrete objects, I speak of low sight level (Gen. 29.10). (b) When human visual perception involves cognitive insight or when terms of seeing carry the meaning of cognitive insight, I speak of an intermediate level of sight (30.1). (c) High-level sight is reached by humans whose sight involves the perception of God in a concrete-visual manner, but at the same time the person expresses recognition that an event involving the seeing of God has taken place (28.16-17).

Next, I will survey principal episodes of the Jacob Narrative from the viewpoint of the SF and the sight theme.

### 3. *Analysis of the Jacob Cycle*

#### 3.1. *Sight in Gen. 25.19-34: The Birth of Esau and Jacob and the Sale of the Birthright*

The episode of Esau and Jacob's conception and birth involves more oral communication than sight on the part of the parents and of God. Isaac *prays* to God for a son (וַיַּעֲתָר, 25.21); Rebekah feels the struggling children within her and *says*. 'If it is to be this way, why do I live?' (25.22).<sup>11</sup> The divine blessing for the children (25.23) is another act of oral communication.

The description of Esau in his birth tale includes the lexeme 'red', from the SF. 'The first came forth *red*, all his body like a hairy mantle' (אֶדְמוֹנִי כָּלֹ, בְּאֶדְרַת שֶׁעַר, 25.25). Visible colouring, Brenner explains, is the phenomenon whereby 'Energy distribution reaches the eye of the observer, is then transmitted through the observer's vision and interpreted and turned into a sensation'.<sup>12</sup> Since colours are visually accessible they are connected to the SF.

The red colour follows Esau further on when he comes of age, and in the future he is depicted as a representative of the nation of Edom (25.30). This too is the colour of the red stew that Jacob prepares for him, causing him to lose his birthright. The narrator explains that the name 'Edom' is given to Esau because of his request of the red stew, highlighting the sound resemblance between Edom and the Hebrew word *'ādōm* (red). Hence, the colour 'red' is connected with Esau's hairiness (25.25) and his strong drive to satisfy his hunger. In other words, not only sight, but also touch and taste senses, are closely linked in the description of Esau's character.

11. All translations from the Hebrew biblical text are from the RSV.

12. A. Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup, 21; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), p. 3.

### 3.2. Genesis 26: Isaac Episodes Connected by SF Lexemes

Although Jacob is not mentioned in Genesis 26, the chapter has many SF lexemes at key points. God *appears* (וִירָא) to Isaac (26.2), and tells him to remain in Gerar. Meanwhile the men of Gerar show interest in Rebekah, since she is beautiful. Her external attributes are depicted by lexemes from the SF, כִּי טוֹבֶת מְרֹאֶה הִיא (26.7).

Additional SF lexemes occur as the tale continues. Abimelech happened to *look out* (וַיִּשְׁקֹף) of the window and *saw* Isaac fondling his wife (26.8).

Verses 12-22 tell of the digging of Abraham's wells, filled with earth by the Philistines. The Hebrew verb מִצָּא (to find) is mentioned twice (vv. 12, 19); it links with the SF since the act of finding presupposes the act of looking for, or the process of seeing something and recognizing it.<sup>13</sup>

God appears before Isaac once again (v. 23) at *night*. In a discussion between Isaac and Abimelech and his advisors, the latter tell Isaac that they *see* that God is with him (וַיֹּאמְרוּ רְאוּ רֵאיוֹנוֹ כִּי הָיָה ה' עִמָּךְ, v. 28), and wish to perform an oath with him. When morning comes the parties take an oath with one another, and on that same day Isaac's servants tell him about the well they had dug and in which water was *found* (v. 32)—once again (cf. vv. 12, 19).

Hence, although ch. 26, describing episodes in Isaac's life, seemingly deviates from the main storyline, it contains the recurrence of SF lexemes (see, look out, find, beautiful) at key points significant to plot development, thus connecting it to the overarching theme of sight.

### 3.3. Genesis 27: Deceiving Isaac

Deceiving Isaac has a great impact on Jacob's life, since consequently he is forced to leave Canaan, fleeing from Esau and finding a temporary secure home with his uncle Laban. The story opens with a significant SF item. 'When Isaac was old and his *eyes were dim* so that he *could not see* he called his elder son Esau and said to him...' (27.1). Once again in the Jacob cycle an episode opens with a sight act, just as the preceding chapter opened with God revealing himself to Isaac's eyes. This is not only a sight-connected rhetorical device that helps to create coherence between the episodes, but also a critical detail for the success of the deception described afterwards. Rebekah and Jacob succeed in their trickery because Isaac's sight was not as clear as before.

13. The verb מִצָּא in Gen. 26.12 is translated here 'reaped' (RSV). In *HAL* it is translated 'to obtain, achieve'. Other senses of the verb according to *HAL* are 'to reach', 'meet accidentally', 'to find what was sought' (L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [HAL; revised by W. Baumgartner, J.J. Stamm *et al.*, trans. M.E.J. Richardson; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–1999], p. 620). All these senses presuppose looking at the object and recognizing it, and hence the verb is considered an SF item.

Rebekah tells Jacob to bring her a goat from the flock so that she could prepare his father's favourite dish. She has overheard a conversation between Isaac and Esau and learned that Isaac is expecting Esau to bring him game, so that he would bless Esau before his death. Jacob twice shows his deep understanding of human nature: just as he has known that the red stew would tempt his brother, he now understands his father's nature. Jacob assumes that it would not be simple to carry off the scheme, since he suspects his father would probably want to feel him. Since Esau is hairy and he himself is smooth-skinned, he fears his father would know the difference. This is exactly what happens. Jacob is right. Isaac does ask to feel his son.

All the other senses compensate for Isaac's inability to see. Isaac sends Esau to prepare him savory food, in Hebrew **מטעמים**, a lexeme based on the root **טעם** ('taste', 27.4).<sup>14</sup> The savory food is mentioned many times: when Rebekah tells Jacob what she has overheard (v. 7), when she orders Jacob to bring her two goodly kids to prepare savory food for Isaac (v. 9), and also in vv. 14 and 17.

While Isaac focuses on touch and taste, Rebekah's actions continue (as shown in §3.1) to be dominated by lexemes from the field of oral communication. Rebekah 'overhears' **שמעת בדבר יצחק** (Isaac's request from Esau, and orders Jacob to 'obey my word as I command you' (**שמע בקלי לאשר אני מצוה אתך**, 27.8).

When Jacob reveals his worry that his father will feel him and understand his deceit, she is willing to take the curse on her (27.13) and presses him to *listen* to her and *obey*.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from sight, all Isaac's other senses are highly alert, i.e. he feels, touches, tastes, smells, and hears. When Jacob enters Isaac's room wearing the hairy mantle Rebekah has prepared for him, Isaac asks to *feel* him, ... **גשה נא ואמשך בני**. (27.21). While feeling his son he declares, **הקל קול יעקב והידים ידי עשו** ('The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau' [27.22]). The voice is the instrument of speaking, and the hands the instrument of touching. Here the fields of oral communication and touch intertwine at a high point of the plot, calling attention to the objects which the characters focus on, and the way they perceive them. This leads to a better understanding of the characters' personality and motivations.<sup>16</sup>

14. HAL, p. 377.

15. *Genesis Rabbah* (65.15) tells that Jacob brought the two kids his mother had requested (Gen. 27.14) 'under constraint, bowed down, and weeping' (*Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* [trans. H. Freedman; London: Soncino Press, 1939]). Hence, the Midrash stresses Rebekah's instructive tone.

16. Polak analyses the contrastive semantic fields of motion-towards and motion-away-from and revelation via vision vs. auditory revelation in the Narrative of the Burning Bush (Exod. 3.1-6). Polak concludes that this intertwining of semantic fields

Apart from taste and touch, Isaac's sense of smell is activated as well. After Isaac eats and drinks he asks Jacob to get closer to him, so that they can kiss (27.26-27). At this stage Isaac senses the *smell* of the field coming out of Jacob's garments, as prepared by his mother, *וירח את ריח בגדיו* ... *ויברכהו ויאמר ראה ריח בני כריח שדה* (27.27). Then Jacob receives Esau's blessing.

In keeping with Isaac's failing eyesight, his perceptive abilities are described as negative. In the beginning of the episode Isaac *does not know* the day of his death (*לֹא יָדַעַתִּי*, 27.2), and as the story unfolds he does not recognize Jacob (*וְלֹא הִכִּירוּ*, 27.23). To sum up the description of Isaac in his old age, neither visual nor mental perception is as sharp and effective as his other senses. This will stand in opposition to Jacob's developing sense of sight in the broader sense, but at this stage of the plot he is still not active in this area. At the end of this scene Rebekah orders Jacob to run away from Esau and go to her brother Laban in Haran (27.42-43). If metaphorically interpreted, and considering that in the Hebrew Bible the colour 'white' often represents a pure and sinless state (Isa. 1.18; Ps 51.9; Job 9.30), an allusion may be made to the Hebrew sense of the name 'Laban', 'white' in this context. Thus it can be inferred that Jacob is sent to Laban to repent and purify himself of his sins.

### 3.4. Gen. 28.1-9: Jacob is Sent to Laban—Esau's Sight is Directed toward his Father

In the beginning of Genesis 28 Isaac orders Jacob to go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, his mother's father, and find himself a wife from among Laban's daughters. The narrator mentions Esau's *seeing* (*וירא*) that Isaac has blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to take a wife (28.6). We are also informed that Esau *sees* that Canaanite women as daughters-in-law do not please Isaac, and goes to Ishmael to take a wife (28.8). Speiser remarks that this section 'differs from the preceding narrative in style, phraseology, motivation, and timetable'.<sup>17</sup> He ascribes it to P, whereas ch. 27 is ascribed to J and the ladder dream of 28.10-22 to J and E. Von Rad comments that one must read this section without relating it to the preceding story of the deception.<sup>18</sup> But from the SF perspective, a development in Esau's personality is observed, since here for the first time the narrator explicitly notes Esau's *sight*. It is important enough for Esau's sight to be mentioned in the sense of cognitively understanding his father's view on the

in a narrative calls the reader's attention to their contrastive meanings and roles (Frank H. Polak, *Biblical Narrative: Aspects of Art and Design* [Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1999], pp. 102-104 [Hebrew]).

17. E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), p. 215.

18. G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. J.H. Marks; London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 276.

subject of Canaanite women. Esau, in taking a wife from Ishmael's house (Gen. 28.9), acts according to what he has seen.

Esau's occurrence of sight should not be underestimated. Attention is drawn to a development in Esau's insight. He achieves sight at the intermediate level—seeing in the sense of understanding another human being. In the following section we shall examine if there has been any development in the stages of sight that Jacob now experiences.

### 3.5. *Gen. 28.10-22: The Ladder Dream*

The story of Jacob's dream is delimited by place and time of day details, and these are meaningful for the sight factor. The lexemes 'stayed for the night' (וַיָּלֵךְ) and 'sun' (שֶׁמֶשׁ) (28.11) are SF meaningful since 'light' (or lack of it, in the case of וַיָּלֵךְ), the necessary condition for sight, is a constituent in their basic meaning.<sup>19</sup>

The scene continues to describe how Jacob falls asleep and dreams about a ladder set on earth with its top reaching the sky and God's messengers ascending and descending it, while God himself stands above the ladder and blesses Jacob (28.12-15). The lexeme וַיַּחְלֶם (dreamed), which describes the channel through which God reveals himself to Jacob, belongs to the SF (see my Introduction), thus connecting the episode to the overall sight theme. This is the first explicit information about Jacob's engagement in the act of seeing, which happens when he leaves home. He *sees* God in a *dream* and *acknowledges* God's presence when he wakes up (28.16-17). Therefore he may be defined as experiencing a high level of sight. Jacob has come to a very close relationship with God, but has yet to develop his ability to perceive his family members visually and cognitively.

### 3.6. *Gen. 29-31: Jacob, Leah and Rachel*

From ch. 29 on seeing between human beings is emphasized. To interpret the development of personalities, it is essential to compare the levels of sight each individual—Jacob, Leah, Rachel and Laban—achieves in this text unit. Significantly, the setting of this episode is Laban's household, and the symbolic meaning of Laban's name (white), as representing a state of purity from sins, should be taken into account. It is the house in which Jacob will have to atone for his wrongdoings to his brother,<sup>20</sup> and

19. Sutskov, 'The Semantic Field of "Seeing"', pp. 62, 80.

20. Spero reminds us that the blessing of Abraham expressed in 28.4, which designates Jacob as the successor to the Abrahamic covenant, 'was the only spiritually significant element possibly involved in either the bechora or the bracha'. The blessing, says Spero, was 'never contemplated by Isaac as something to be given to Esau'. Therefore, from the point of view of Isaac he doesn't regard the cases of the bechora and bracha as cases of deception (Shubert Spero, 'Jacob and Esau. The Relationship Reconsidered', *JBQ* 32 [2004], p. 247).



generally turn into a better man with regard to his relations with other human beings.

Once again the scene opens with a statement regarding sight of the main character, this time with the use of a few fixed formulas:<sup>21</sup> וַיֵּשָׁא יַעֲקֹב 'Then Jacob went on his journey, and came... As he looked, he saw...' (29.1-2). This instance illustrates the consistency of the appearance of SF lexemes at key points. Further on Jacob *sees* Rachel, and immediately rolls the stone from the well (29.10). Both Leah and Rachel are depicted in SF terms. 'Leah's eyes were weak' (וַעֲיִינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת), while Rachel was *beautiful and lovely* (יָפֶת הָאָדָם וַיִּפֶּת מְרָאָהּ, 29.17). The lexeme עֵין (eye) belongs to the SF, in addition to the lexeme מְרָאָהּ, which derives from the root רָאָה (to see), the central verb of the SF.

With her first son as a mediator, Leah develops a relationship with God. God *sees* that she is unloved and opens her womb (29.31). Leah, in return, calls her first child *Reuben* (See! A son!), thanking God for *seeing* her distress (29.32). Leah names her second son Simeon, which in Hebrew contains the verb שָׁמַע (to hear), referring to God hearing her distress as the spurned woman (29.33).

Further on, Rachel *sees* that she is barren and envies her sister (30.1). The tense relationship between the two sisters is also expressed by the interpretation of the name Naphtali, the second son of Rachel's maid, Bilhah. When giving an explanation for his name Rachel alludes to her wrestling with her sister as 'a mighty wrestling' (נַפְתָּלִי אֱלֹהִים) in which she had prevailed (30.8).<sup>22</sup> Immediately after this we are informed of Leah's perception as she *sees* she has stopped bearing children (30.9). The two continue in their dispute, this time over the mandrakes Reuben found in the field. The sight of both sisters is directed to each other and involves cognitive perception, thus they both attain the same intermediate level of sight that Esau reaches.

Right after Rachel gives birth to Joseph, Jacob approaches Laban and demands to take all his belongings and return to Canaan (30.25-26). Using their sense of sight Jacob manipulates the flock, encouraging them to mate and multiply by gazing at the *white* streaks he peels in fresh rods of poplar,

21. On fixed formulas in the Hebrew Bible and their development from oral tradition see Frank Polak, 'Linguistic and Stylistic Aspects of Epic Formulae in Ancient Semitic Poetry and Biblical Narrative', in S.E. Fassberg and A. Hurvitz (eds.), *Biblical Hebrew in its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Magnas Press and Eisenbrauns, 2006), pp. 285-304.

22. The analogy between Jacob's wrestling with the man of God and prevailing in ch. 32, and Rachel's wrestling with Leah and prevailing, is to be developed in another article. Gunkel, however, omits עִם אָחִוָּתִי ('with my sister') of 30.8, thus strengthening the analogy further (Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966], p. 334).

almond and plane trees, then places them in front of the flock coming to drink at the watering troughs.

The lexemes used to describe the appearances of the flock in this unit—‘striped’, ‘speckled’, and ‘spotted’—are also connected to the SF since, like the phenomenon of colour, they too depend on energy distribution that reaches the observer’s eye (§3.1 above). The colours ‘white’ and ‘brown’, for example in vv. 32, 37, 40, are constituents of the SF, as are ‘setting’ (וַיָּצַג) of the rods ‘in front of’ (לִנְכַּח) the flock (30.38), and ‘before the eyes (of the flock)’ (לִפְנֵי, 30.41).

Up to this point Jacob has seen God, explicitly acknowledged his presence, and also shown sensitivity and understanding of the visual perception of his flock. However, he has yet to develop his sight in the human sphere. Jacob now proceeds to use his own perception in order to understand his relationship with his family members. ‘And Jacob *saw* that Laban did not regard him with favour as before’ (31.2). As if he has noticed the positive development in Jacob’s attitude toward his family members, God immediately responds by giving Jacob specific guidance, commanding him to go back to Canaan, and promising protection (31.3).

Jacob shows sensitivity and consideration to his wives when he assembles them to announce what he has *seen* in their father’s face, רָאָה אֲנִכִּי, אֵת פְּנֵי אֲבִיכֶן (31.5). He tells them of his dream, in which a divine messenger appears and promises him success with the breeding of his flock. Here Jacob quotes the messenger’s words: ‘for *I have seen* all that Laban is doing to you’ (31.12). Thus, an additional instance of sight in the divine sphere is displayed: the messenger, God’s representative, *sees* Jacob.

Another dream, this time seen by Laban, connects the next paragraph too to the theme of sight. Laban pursues Jacob, who has taken advantage of Laban’s absence to run away, taking all his belongings—women, children, and property. God warns Laban in a *dream at night* to be careful and say nothing to Jacob, either good or bad (31.24). We might say that Laban achieves sight at a high level, but when approaching Jacob and speaking to him harshly he ignores God’s message as delivered in the dream. There is no recognition of divine providence on Laban’s part at this stage of the story, thus he does not yet reach a high-level sight.

Next, Laban starts searching Jacob’s tent and the tents of his daughters and their maids to find the idols Rachel has taken from him. The lexeme מָצָא (to find), an SF constituent, occurs in vv. 32, 33, 34, 35 and 37. Another constituent, הִפֵּשׁ (to look for), occurs in v. 35.

Jacob confronts Laban (31.36-42), mentioning God’s *seeing* his misery the night before, probably referring to Laban’s dream (31.42). Laban answers that everything Jacob *sees* in front of him actually belongs to him, to Laban (וְכָל אֲשֶׁר אֵתָּה רֹאֶה לִי הוּא, 31.43). However, he offers to make a covenant with Jacob. The pile of stones gathered by Jacob’s kinsmen is

called ‘Galed’, but also ‘Mizpah’ (Watchtower), with the explanation given by Laban: ‘The LORD watch (צִיָּר) between you and me, when we are absent one from the other’ (כִּי נִסְתֵּר אִישׁ מֵרֵעֵהוּ) (31.49). Although Laban does recognize God’s providence, he still does not trust Jacob.

And so the Laban-Jacob connection ends here, with the covenant between the two parties, both admitting God’s crucial role in preserving the peace between them, while the name of the place where the covenant is made contains a SF lexeme. Metaphorically speaking, Jacob is now ‘white’, i.e., he has made amends for all his sins in the human sphere. This accords with Polak’s description of Jacob as a developing character. According to this view, Jacob starts on his way in the world by deceiving, but gradually learns to attain his goals through hard work and diplomacy.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.7. *Gen. 32.24-32: Jacob’s Encounter with the Divine Being at Penu’el*

When Jacob struggles with the man of God, the latter *sees* (וִירָא) that he cannot prevail against Jacob (32.25), and injures Jacob’s thigh. Their wrestling takes place at *night*, the time when there is no light and conditions for seeing are poor, and continues until the breaking of day (עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר, 32.24, 26). Jacob names the place of the wrestling Peniel, explaining: ‘For I have *seen* God *face to face*, and yet my life is preserved’ (32.30). Again Jacob’s sight is invoked, specifically, by the sight of the face. In this instance God’s face is mentioned, whereas previously it was the sight of Laban’s face; and later, the sight of his son Joseph’s face will be mentioned several times (e.g. 46.30, 48.11). This episode, then, opens at night, and closes with sunrise (וַיִּזְרַח לֵוִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ, 32.31). Conditions for sight, depicted by SF words, define its boundaries, and the place name explained by SF lexemes underlines the theme of the unit—Jacob’s recognition of his ability to see God face to face.

### 3.8. *Genesis 33: The Brothers Reunite*

The next episode opens with the mention of Jacob *lifting up his eyes* and *seeing* Esau approaching, escorted by four hundred men (33.1), another instance in which an episode opens by mentioning the sight of the main character (§3.6.). When the brothers finally meet, Esau lifts up his eyes and notices Jacob’s women and children (33.5). Jacob compares the meeting between them to seeing the face of God (33.10): ‘...just to *see your face* is like *seeing the face* of God’, he says. In my opinion, this is the most significant point in the development of Jacob’s character, as depicted in SF terms. At this stage Jacob compares the sight of his brother to the sight of God, as if from now on giving God and family the same amount of respect.

23. Polak, *Biblical Narrative*, p. 292.

Up to this point we have learned about Jacob's special ability to see and understand human and divine nature. We have done this by tracing SF lexemes at key points of the individual episodes. Analyzed from the angle of seeing, the variety of topics treated in the different scenes of this cycle has been shown to display a certain narrative unity.

### 3.9. *Lexemes of Sight in Genesis 34, 35 and 36*

Now that the main issues concerning the Jacob–Esau and the Jacob–Laban relationships have been resolved, the question as to whether the SF still prevails in the following text units still remains to be answered.

In ch. 34, it is immediately apparent that the act of sight triggers the entire episode. 'Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land (וַתֵּצֵא דִינָה... לְרִאוֹת בְּנֹת הָאָרֶץ) (34.1). The Hebrew has the verb 'to see', although it is translated as 'to visit' (RSV). Then Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite *saw* her (וַיִּרְא אֶתֶּהּ) seized her, lay with her and humbled her (34.2). In the eyes of the narrator Dinah has probably done wrong when going out, literally 'to see' the women of the land, since while doing so Shechem sets his eyes on her, then is driven to rape her. Sight, in ch. 34, once again appears at a key position.

Chapter 35 opens with God's command to Jacob to go to Bethel, dwell there, and make an altar to the God who *appeared* to him (לֵאמֹר הִנֵּרְאָה אֵלַיךְ, 35.1). The condensed scene is rounded off by another mention of God's sight, 35.7: '...and there he built an altar, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had *revealed* himself to him'. God reveals himself to Jacob again at the beginning of the next scene, in 35.9.

Each time Edom is mentioned in the genealogies of ch. 36 the SF is echoed (e.g. 36.9, 21, 31). The appearances of SF lexemes in chs. 35–36 seem to combine into creating an overall lexical cohesion with the preceding narrative units.

## 4. *Conclusions*

The diverse and consistent usage of Sight lexemes at key points in the individual episodes creates a coherent network that covers the entire Jacob cycle, or narrative, thus contributing to the description of the gradual development in Jacob's personality, as well as to the development detected in the surrounding characters. The overarching theme of the Jacob Narrative is how Jacob and the other characters develop their ability to see and perceive each other and God. Surprisingly, Jacob and Laban are the only characters in this narrative cycle who achieve a high level of sight, that is, God reveals himself to both, and both admit his providence. However, while Laban lacks the sensitivity to see and perceive his family members, Jacob gradually develops his ability to see in the human sphere. Jacob starts off with no sign of sight

directed toward God or his brother, but as the narrative unfolds he shows awareness of God, continues to develop the sensitivity to observe and perceive his wives, his flock, Laban, and finally his brother—in that order.

This ability to see the Other is not always developed by the other characters who surround Jacob. Rebekah is strictly characterized by a speech style, i.e. the SF does not dominate in her story. Isaac's sight dims in his old age, which gives space for the senses of touch, taste, smell, and some hearing to take place. Esau's sight is directed towards his father; although at the end he sees Jacob's women and children, and hugs and kisses his brother; yet, there is no sign of Esau reaching a high level of sight. This is also true of Leah and Rachel, who direct their sight almost exclusively toward each other.

Jacob, then, is the only character in this narrative to experience sight both in the human and in the divine sphere. Moreover, and uniquely, he succeeds in combining the two sight modes when, upon uniting with Esau, he sees the face of God in the face of his brother.

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## Part II

### POST-BIBLICAL JEWISH-TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES



‘OF MAKING MANY BOOKS THERE IS NO END’  
(QOHELETH 12.12): THE HISTORY OF COMMENTARY  
FROM PROHIBITION TO LEGITIMATION

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1.

The accumulated interpretation of Qoh. 12.12 throughout the history of Jewish thought is one of many microcosmic illustrations of how creative generations of commentators could be in negotiation with biblical verses, interpreting them to serve their needs and to legitimize their own views just as if those were divine revelations. The extensive body of commentary on this particular passage is central to the long-enduring argument over the justification for writing and studying texts outside the recognized twenty-four canonical books, and had widespread influence on the acceptability of what are variously called ‘external’ or ‘Greek’ or ‘general’ studies. While the normative midrashic commentary opposes writing about or studying works outside the canon in no uncertain terms, later scholars rejected the prohibition and did not hesitate to give the words of Qoheleth an entirely opposite meaning. In fact, the body of commentary carries us from midrashic prohibition against, to philosophical justification of, writing about and studying these same extra-canonical works. This corpus, then, is an excellent illustration of the great historical confrontation between scholars who justified studying general knowledge and those who opposed it, beginning with midrashic literature and concluding with Jewish thought from late medieval to early modern times. The fact that the same text could be expounded in diametrically opposed ways—one forbidding and the other justifying—shows not only how flexible biblical commentary can be, but also the extraordinary ingenuity of the commentators seeking theological legitimacy for their own intellectual inclinations.<sup>1</sup>

1. This article is based on matters somewhat tangential to my two most recent books: A. Melamed, *Al Kitfei ha-Anakim—Toledot ha-Pulmus bein ha-Aharonim le-Rishonim be-Mahshavah ha-Yehudit ba-Et ha-Hadashah* (Hebrew; hereafter *On the Shoulders of Giants* [Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press 2003]), and *Rakahot ve-Tabahot: ha-Mythos al Makor ha-Hokhmah* (hereafter *Myths on Sources*) ([Hebrew]; Jerusalem and Haifa: Magnes Press and Haifa University Press, in press). A lecture

## 2.

In full, the verse that is our point of reference reads (in the King James Version, like my other Bible quotations): ‘And further, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study (לִהְיוֹת)<sup>2</sup> is a weariness of the flesh’ (Qoh. 12.12). The literal text is both ambiguous and enigmatic, and in any case does not categorically forbid the making of many books, but rather exhorts caution.<sup>3</sup> One should notice that the text does not say מַעֲשֵׂוֹת (from making), but עֲשׂוֹת (making), and commentators throughout the ages had to deal with the ramifications of this textual fact. As for its context, there is a long history of interpretation and commentary for the preceding verse: ‘The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd’, alluding to commitment to the divine source of the Sages’ words. Our verse, by contrast, proposes caution in the case of all additional knowledge from human sources.<sup>4</sup> It can be understood in different ways: as a warning that writing about, studying and reading the books of non-canonical authors bring only weariness, or as a warning against writing too many books, since

on this subject was given at a seminar at Haifa University on November 25, 2003, concerning contemporary and medieval biblical commentary. As I noted then (*On the Shoulders of Giants*, p. 24): ‘Traces of the radical interpretation of *Ecclesiastes* are visible along the entire course of medieval Jewish thought’. The present article clarifies these traces. A Hebrew version was published in *Da’at* 62 (2007), pp. 51-69.

2. The ambiguous term לִהְיוֹת can be understood in various ways; see in the following.

3. See the discussion of this verse in G.H. Wilson, ‘The Words of the Wise: The Intent and Significance of Qohelet 12:9-14’, *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 175-92; A.M. Shields, ‘Re-Examining the Warning of Eccl. xii 12’, *VT* 50 (2000), pp. 123-27. See also the discussion of the various interpretive possibilities of this verse at the beginning of F. Rosenthal, ‘Of Making Books There Is No End’, in G.N. Atiyeh (ed.), *The Book in the Islamic World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 33-55; and H.A. Ginsberg’s *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: M. Newman Press, 1961 [Hebrew]), p. 135: ‘The meaning of the entire passage is: writing endless books causes endless weariness’. In any case, the question that interests us here is not the original intent of this text’s writer, whoever he was, not the original meaning of the words עֲשׂוֹת and לִהְיוֹת, and not the question which kind of literature it relates to, questions that interest Biblical scholars, but the interpretive history of this verse and its implications. We should also note that the expression בְּנִי (my son) can be understood variously as the biological son, the student or subsequent generations. See in this context M. Breuer, ‘Min‘u Bneikhem min ha-Higgayon’, in I. Gilat and E. Stern (eds.), *Michtam leDavid: A Volume in Memory of the Late Rabbi David Ochs* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1968 [Hebrew]), pp. 244-64.

4. On the connection between the two verses and its meaning see the discussion in Wilson, ‘The Words of the Wise’, pp. 176-77.

not everything can be written in books and the vain effort to do so produces endless books that are wearisome to read. Note that the verb 'make' (עָשָׂה) can be interpreted in different ways,<sup>5</sup> and we are to find that it has been variously understood as writing, reading, lending, buying and printing books, all taking into account the operative context of the commentator, his world-view and cultural surroundings.

We should notice that in the interpretive history of this verse—from the Midrash through later medieval Jewish culture—one can identify two different contexts which occasionally coalesce. The first context relates to the internal debate among the Sages concerning the proper way of transmitting tradition: should it be continuously transmitted orally, as the term *Tannā'im* demonstrates, or should it be put in writing, thus perpetuating certain traditions and obliterating others?<sup>6</sup> This internal debate preceded the debate concerning the so-called 'external wisdom'. As we shall find in the following, besides the instance of *b. Eruvin*, most discussions of this verse, in the aggadic Midrash and later literature, deal with the attitude towards the so-called 'external wisdoms', in whatever way it is understood, and not towards the earlier internal debate concerning oral vs. written transmission of the Torah. Thus this article will concentrate on this context of the debate.

The midrashim in *Numbers Rabbah* 14.4 and *Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) Rabbah* 12.12 explain the passage bluntly as an absolute prohibition. While *Qoheleth Rabbah* is an ancient Palestinian Midrash, *Numbers Rabbah* was edited much later, probably in 12th-century Provence. The materials this Midrash is made of are surely much older, and the similar attitude of both Midrashim can also attest to the antiquity of the midrash in *Numbers Rabbah*. In any case, medieval scholars believed that it was composed by the Sages.<sup>7</sup> However, the blunt criticism of the multiplicity of books which appears in this midrash probably also attests to the attitudes of the 12th-century editors of the text, and in the following we will discuss the debate concerning books in this period.

*Numbers Rabbah* links this warning directly to the prohibition against reading 'apocryphal books', whether books excluded from canonical Scripture, or in the broader sense of the works of gentile philosophers that oppose Jewish principles:

5. On the biblical meaning of this word see in Wilson, 'The Words of the Wise', p. 177.

6. See *b. Eruvin* 21b. On the problems concerning the oral transmission of the Torah, see Y. Susman, 'Oral Torah Literally', in Y. Susman and D. Rosenthal (eds.), *Mehkarei Talmud* 3 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005 [Hebrew]), pp. 209-384., for Susman's reference concerning our verse (p. 284 n. 9).

7. H. Mack, 'The Times, Place and Circulation of Midrash *Numbers Rabbah*', *Teudah* 11 (Tel Aviv, 1996 [Hebrew]), pp. 91-105.

‘And more than these, my son, be careful’. The Holy One, blessed be He, says: ‘I have given you in writing twenty-four books. Be careful, and do not add to them’. Why? ‘Of making many books there is no end’, and if one reads a verse that does not belong to the twenty-four books of the Bible, it is as though he had read profane books. This explains the significance of the text, ‘Be careful of making many books’, for whoever does so has no share in the World to Come...<sup>8</sup>

This midrash expounds the passage from Qoheleth as an unequivocal prohibition against ‘making many books’ in the sense of reading them. The midrash in Qoheleth *Rabbah* even reads מְהִמָּה (‘from them’) as מְהִמָּה (‘confusion, disturbance’), meaning that disturbance is created by reading anything other than the twenty-four books, not only confusing a man but also putting his family at risk:

And furthermore (מְהִמָּה), my son, be admonished: Of making many books there is no end: [Read the word as] מְהִמָּה (confusion), because whoever brings into his house more than the twenty-four books [of the Bible] introduces confusion into his house, as, e.g., the book of Ben Sira [Ecclesiasticus] and the book of Ben Tagla. And much study (לְהִגֵּד) is a weariness of the flesh: [these apocryphal books] are given to talk about (לְהִגֵּד) but are not given for weariness of the flesh.<sup>9</sup>

Here, differently, the reference is not simply to reading, but to actually bringing books into one’s home, that is, buying them. The caveat against making books other than the twenty-four books of Scripture is identified with offenses that lead to losing one’s portion in the world to come, as attributed to R. Akiba in *m. Sanhedrin* 1.1. A clear expression of this phenomenon can also be found in the famous midrash concerning Elisha ben Abuya, called ‘the other’, ‘They said concerning the other, when he stood up in the house of study, many heretical books fell from his lap’ (*b. Hagiga* 15b). This can be read almost as a paraphrase on our verse. This drastic prohibition creates the impression that an attempt is being made to confront a cultural reality in which scholars frequently bought, read and perhaps even wrote what was called ‘apocryphal literature’, in whatever sense of the word, since one does not so severely castigate what is not actually taking place. The severer the ban, the more reasonable it is to assume a widespread practice. We should also notice that unlike the previous midrash, the present one explains the expression which appears at the end of our verse: ‘and much study is a weariness of the flesh’, in a mitigating sense, concerning the prohibition to read

8. *Num. Rab.*, in J.J. Slotki (trans.), *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers* (London: Soncino Press, 1961), vol. 2, p. 583.

9. *Qoh. Rab.* 12.2; see L. Rabinowitz (trans.), *Midrash Rabbah: Ecclesiastes* (London: Soncino Press, 1961), pp. 314–15.

apocryphal books: 'They are given to talk about, but are not given for weariness of the flesh'; It means that one may read them like popular literature, but only the twenty-four canonical books should be seriously studied.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.

By contrast, medieval Jewish culture uses this verse continually<sup>11</sup> in a completely opposite sense that fully legitimizes studying, reading and buying books in the category of 'apocryphal learning'. Those scholars, in particular those tending to rationalist views, assumed that all scientific knowledge is concealed in the hidden esoteric layers of the Torah, and consequently believed that learning and science would help them understand the Torah correctly. Nevertheless, they still had to cope with this type of verse. Its literal meaning at the very least admonishes against 'making many books' that are not based on divine authority, while the midrashic interpretation categorically forbids the study of such books. Accepting the ban would destroy the basis for any philosophical activity. Indeed, Maimonides in his 'Introduction to Chapter Helek' (one of the three introductions to his commentary on the Mishnah) carefully and deliberately restricted the ban on 'apocryphal books', those designated by R. Akiba and the midrash in our own text in *Numbers Rabbah* as causing those who study them to lose their portion in the World to Come. These would be 'books of apostasy' like the book of Ben Sira, mentioned as well in a midrash in *Qoheleth Rabbah* (apparently not the text now in our hands). These he describes as 'frivolity...with no sense and of no use, just vanity and wasted time'. He includes as well 'the books of Arabs with tales of history, the deeds of kings, the genealogies of the Arabs, and their books of music and poetry, and such books that offer no wisdom and no bodily benefit, but simply waste time'.<sup>12</sup> Note that Maimonides's list of forbidden books contains only texts he defines as degraded literature, such as poetry, historical tales and the like.<sup>13</sup>

10. See also in *m. Yad*. 4.6. on the distinction between these two types of literature see also in Maimonides, nn. 13-14 below.

11. Rosenthal (above, n. 2) argued that the usage of this verse in pre-modern times was very limited, surely so in comparison with modern times (p. 34). Rosenthal only refers to a few Muslim and Karaite examples, and was not conscious at all of the popularity of this verse in pre-modern Jewish culture. In any case, his argument is surely erroneous. As for the Karaites, since they accepted only the authority of the written Torah, they naturally interpreted our verse in a strictly prohibitive manner. See, for example, G. Vajda (ed.), *Deux commentaires sur l'Ecclésiaste* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), pp. 18-58.

12. Maimonides, *Introduction to Commentaries on the Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Ha-Rav Kook Institute, 1961), 'Introduction to Chapter Helek', p. 135 (Hebrew).

13. See also *The Guide of the Perplexed* (hereafter *Guide* [trans. S. Pines; Chicago:



Not by chance are works of science and philosophy excluded, for what is not specifically forbidden is permitted. Thus, in the famous bibliographical guidance Maimonides includes in his letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, translator of the *Guide* into Hebrew, he strongly recommends that he read the true up-to-date philosophic and scientific literature, mostly the Aristotelian tradition and its authoritative commentaries. As far as he is concerned, these last are not 'apocryphal' works at all, since he makes the accepted assumption that they include true knowledge stemming from revelation, imparted to the sages among the gentiles.<sup>14</sup> Thus in their case prohibition is necessarily changed to legitimating, and the verse is thus interpreted not only as permission but also as obligation to read those books.

Perhaps the strongest anchor for such scholars was the identity of our biblical text's author. The text was attributed by tradition to King Solomon who, according to medieval sources, wrote many books and had a large library. The literal text says no more than that Solomon 'spoke' and that sages among the gentiles came to 'listen to' his wisdom (1 Kgs 5.9-14), that is, he transmitted knowledge orally. While three books of wisdom are traditionally attributed to Solomon (Proverbs, Qoheleth, Song of Songs), it is never claimed that he committed them to writing. The book of Qoheleth itself begins with 'The words of Qohelet' (Qoh. 1.1 and see also 1.2; 12.8), that is, the words that he spoke and not necessarily wrote down himself. Moreover, 'the book of the acts of Solomon' (1 Kgs 11.41) is declared to include Solomon's words and wisdom, but here again it is not said that Solomon himself wrote them down. Hence an injunction against 'making many books' could indeed be attributed to him. This was consistent with the traditional belief that sacred knowledge should only be transmitted orally. By contrast, in traditions coming down through medieval culture, Solomon is consistently described as one who *wrote* many books and had a great library. Here is significant evidence of the change from oral to written transmission of knowledge. In the introduction to his *Book of Degrees* (*Sefer Ha-Ma'alot*), the 13-century scholar Shemtov Ibn Falaquera describes Solomon as a maker of many books:

It is known that in the days of Solomon, peace be unto him, from the four corners of the earth people came to hear his wisdom [...] and Ptolemy remembered this, sending to the priests in Jerusalem asking them to set down in his language the books of wisdom that were there. And it is impossible that Solomon, peace be unto him, did not write divine books of wisdom

University of Chicago Press, 1963]), 1.2, vol. 1, p. 24: 'O you who engage in theoretical speculation using the first notions that may occur to you and come to your mind and who consider withal that you understand a book that is the guide of the first and the last men while glancing through it as you would glance through a historical work or a piece of poetry...'

14. See the detailed discussion in Melamed, *Myths on Sources*.

about nature, these having been lost in [our] exile. For what is said, 'and he spoke to the trees...' shows that he wrote books about the powers and uses of plants. And when it is said 'And he spoke to the beasts...' it shows that he wrote books about all the powers and the nature and structure of all the animals, all of which is the wisdom of nature.<sup>15</sup>

Note that Ibn Falaquera is not referring to books about religious law or theology, but to purely scientific works, i.e. what are called 'external books' or 'apocrypha', the books expressly forbidden in the midrashim for our verse. Further, in the introduction to his commentary on the Torah, Nachmanides was the first to set forth the tradition that Solomon wrote 'a book on medicines' and that he himself 'saw' this book called 'The Wisdom of Solomon'.<sup>16</sup> Traditions that Solomon wrote books had a long history in medieval culture in general, and not exclusively in the Jewish culture of the time, according to whom Solomon's books of wisdom were lost to us. Thus Emanuel of Rome of the 14th century:

Of all the books composed by King Solomon, peace be unto him, of whom it is said 'and he spoke to' and the like, only three books have remained in our hands [...] and all the other books, and his wisdom regarding nature have we lost at the time of our exile, for he who goes into exile with his hands bound and his feet shackled, his home and city and all therein on fire, cannot take his books with him.<sup>17</sup>

These books in various versions and translations are now in the hands of the gentiles, so that studying them is not, heaven forbid, the study of apocrypha, but the restoration of what was lost or even pillaged. Moreover, this includes not only the many books that Solomon wrote, but also the great scientific library he established in Jerusalem. The passage quoted above from Ibn Falaquera mentions Ptolemy, initiator of the Septuagint translation, who sent scholars to copy, i.e. to translate the books of wisdom in Jerusalem. In his *Epistle on Morals (Iggeret ha-Musar)*; Joseph Ibn Caspi, of the 14th century, even states that Aristotle stole his knowledge from the books of Solomon.<sup>18</sup> Meir Eldabi, of the same period, tells a fantastic tale to the effect that after conquering Jerusalem Alexander the Great deposited Solomon's library with Aristotle. Aristotle is described here as not only receiving and studying the books from Solomon's library; he is said to have translated them, attributed them to himself and concealed their true source:

15. Shemtov Ibn Falaquera, *Book of Degrees* (ed. A. Venetianer; Berlin 1924; facsimile, Jerusalem, 1970), p. 11.

16. Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* (ed. Shevel; Jerusalem, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 5-6.

17. Emanuel of Rome, *The Book of Proverbs with Commentary* (Naples, c. 1487; facsimile, Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 166-67.

18. Joseph Ibn Caspi, *Epistle on Morals*, in I. Abrahams (ed.), *Jewish Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1948), vol. 1, pp. 141-42.

I found it written that Aristotle, whom all scholars follow and all draw from his books, who was the teacher of Alexander of Macedon, conqueror of the whole world, and when Alexander conquered Jerusalem, the ruler set his teacher over the treasury of Solomon, peace be unto him. He [Aristotle] then investigated the books of Solomon, took them and had them copied [= translated] as his own works [...]<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, at the end of the 15th century, Yohanan Alemanno referred to ‘the books of wisdom attributed to him [Solomon] in the Hebrew, Christian and Arabic languages’.<sup>20</sup>

Assuming this to be true, one cannot possibly assume that Solomon, to whom tradition attributes such ideas in Qoheleth, would have had any reservations about making many books, and certainly not about studying them. Thus, when the author in *Sefer Hasidim* (13th century) strongly criticizes writing many books, he refers critically to king Solomon as one who wrote many books:

And if a sage wrote many books (כתב ספרים הרבה)—such as *Tosafot*, he should not give himself too much credit and say that this will save him from Hell, since King Solomon heard, investigated and put in good order (Qoh. 12.9) the principles of the Torah (*b. Eruvin* 21b) but they still wanted to list him with the three kings who have no share in the world to come.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that the expression ‘many books’ relates to our verse. However, in this case the context does not relate to legitimating writing, reading and purchasing so-called ‘apocryphal books’, but to the internal debate concerning the written transmission of the oral Torah. Thus, in contrast with the more philosophical literature, where Solomon was positively presented as a philosopher-scientist who transmits knowledge through writing books, as we found in Ibn Falaquera, Nahmanides and others, here he is presented as

19. Meir Eldabi, *Sefer Shvilei ha-Emunah* (Warsaw, 1887; facsimile, Jerusalem, 1987), p. 163. See the detailed discussion of these matters in Melamed, *Myths on Sources*, chapter 6, and also recently Y. Shavit, ‘Stolen Libraries—The Transmission and Role of the Aggadic Tradition on the Library of King Solomon and Aristotle as its Main Hero’, in M. Slohovski and Y. Kaplan (eds.), *Books and Book Collections* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2006 [Hebrew]), pp. 413–46.

20. Yohanan Alemanno, ‘The Song of Solomon’s Ascents’ (ed. and introduction A. Lesley; PhD dissertation, Berkeley, 1976), vol. 2, p. 334.

21. *Sefer Hasidim* (ed. Y. Wistinetzky and Y. Freimann; Frankfurt a.M.: Wahrmann Press, 1924), section 741, p. 189. One should note that Solomon is not mentioned at all in the list of the three kings who have no share in the world to come (e.g. *b. Sanhedrin* 104b, where Ahab, Manasseh and Jeroboam are mentioned). The author of this section connected Solomon to this tradition in order to strengthen the criticism of writing many books. See in general the discussion of matters concerning books in *Sefer Hasidim*, esp. pp. 171–89, 417–20, which are very interesting but beyond our subject matter here.

a halachic Sage, and in this context the traditional reservation concerning writing down oral traditions is preserved.

Halachic scholars thus continued to deal with the internal debate concerning the written transmission of oral traditions, and in this context they had strong reservations concerning making many books. Medieval scholars who dealt with the justification of the study of 'apocryphal' literature, by contrast, viewed positively writing, reading the purchasing of these books, both for the sake of the advancement of scientific knowledge *per se*, and as a necessary tool for deciphering the secrets of the Torah, so as to give it halachic and theological justification. Moreover, they had to deal with the contention of the gentile sages that their culture was superior to Jewish culture since they had many books and the Jews only the twenty-four canonical books, for in their cultural mentality the mastery of many books was seen as proof of much knowledge, i.e. of intellectual superiority. Already Flavius Josephus in the first century dealt with this contention in *Contra Apionem*, but he reasoned that the difference in quantity proved quite the contrary. Agreeing with the factual claim that the Jews had few books while the Greeks produced many, he asserted that the Greek books lacked value because they contradicted one another, while the Jews preserved only those twenty-four books (twenty-two by his count!) whose truth was beyond doubt.<sup>22</sup> Precisely this would be the argument of Judah Halevi in *The Kuzari* 1.13, that the Jews have a single credible tradition, but as to the philosophers, '[...] they do not agree on one action or on one principle'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in medieval traditions concerning the Septuagint (I quote from the version in Abraham Zacut's *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*), King Ptolemy had 'three hundred thousand books of wisdom', but his philosophers told him that 'All the books you have are [mere] tales and vanity, and the most important thing is for you to copy [= translate] the divine wisdom of the Jews'.<sup>24</sup> The medieval

22. Flavius Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.8, 38-42. See on this matter T. Rajak, 'Josephus and the "Archaeology" of the Jews', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982), pp. 464-77 (470-77). See also on the entire subject M. Haran, *Ha-Asufa Ha-Mikrait* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1996 [Hebrew]), p. 149.

23. Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari* 1:13, translated by I. Heinemann in *Three Jewish Philosophers* (Cleveland: Meridian Press, 1969), p. 134. Compare Abarbanel, *Commentary on Exodus*, Parashat Jethro (ed. A. Shotland; Jerusalem: Horev Publishers, 1987-1989), p. 292: 'And here is the first theoretical approach, there is no doubt that while it contains perfections, flaws can also be found. There are differences of opinion, one says thus and another thus, and there is no one to rely on. For if we follow Plato and his opinions, along comes Aristotle and contradicts him. If we rely on Ibn Sina the commentator, along comes his colleague Averroes who contradicts and annuls his words'.

24. Abraham Zacut, *Sefer ha-Yuhasin ha-Shalem* (ed. Z. Filipowsky; facsimile edition with introduction by A.H. Freimann; Frankfurt a.M.: Wahrmann Press, 1925), p. 12, and in short form on p. 241.

scholars, by contrast, assumed that many books were incontrovertible proof of abundant knowledge and cultural superiority.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly they had to act, even for the sake of apologetics, in the spirit of ‘Anything you can do I can do better’. Thus they contended that besides the twenty-four sacred books there were many others in Solomon’s library, an entire treasure house, far more than among the gentiles, which was why even Aristotle, the greatest gentile philosopher, was so eager to appropriate them.

Hence throughout medieval Jewish culture there are statements to the effect that the possession of many books is a necessary condition for learning and proof of cultural superiority. In R. Judah Ibn Tibbon’s famous will to his son Samuel, who first translated *The Guide of the Perplexed* into Hebrew, there is a classic text whose entire purpose is to increase guilt feelings. It was composed in the latter half of the 12th century, and is an outstanding example of this phenomenon:

I have honored you by providing an extensive library for thy use, and have thus relieved thee of the necessity to borrow books. Most students must bustle about to seek books, often without finding them. But thou, thanks be to God, lendest and borrowest not. Of many books, indeed, thou ownest two or three copies. I have besides made for thee books on all sciences.<sup>26</sup>

25. In the ambience of other cultures too, within which Jewish culture functioned, the issue of many books arose, see e.g. the Latin proverb: *Egregios cumulare libros praeclara supellex/ast unum utilius vovere saepe librum* (A library of select books furnishes a splendid room, but to read one book frequently is more useful). Pliny the Younger preferred to study quality literature in depth rather than read many books: *multum, non multa*. Cicero draws an analogy between a stomach upset by ingesting numerous dishes and a mind upset due to reading numerous but not quality books: *Fas-tidientis stomachi est multa degustare*. See also the ambivalent attitude in Ibn Khaldûn, *Akdāmūt le-Mada ha-Historiah* (ed. A. Kopelovitz; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1966 [Hebrew]), 6.27, p. 349: ‘An increase in works of science interferes with learning [...] but the disease is hard to uproot because such customs are so ingrained that they are second nature and impossible to change’. The flooding of the market in recent years makes the problem more relevant now than ever before. On this see Rosenthal, ‘On Making Books’. Available in English: Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967 [1980]), 3 vols; and also as Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Abridged edn; trans. and intro. Franz Rosenthal; ed. N.J. Dawood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967 [2004])).

26. R. Judah Ibn Tibbon, ‘Will for his son’; in Abrahams, *Jewish Ethical Wills*, vol. 1, p. 57. See also the comment of Moses of Rieti of the mid-15th century in the postscript to the copy of Averroes’s commentary on the Hebrew translation of Plato’s *Republic* that he prepared for his sons: ‘And I, Moses son of Isaac, may he rest in Paradise, from Rieti, copied this book, despite the flaws of the copy I had, in the 70th year of my earthly life [...] Neither shall my sons lack this book among the rest of the books that I copied and dictated and acquired for them in my youth’. See *Averroes’ Commentary on Plato’s Republic* (edited and with introduction, translation and notes

Note the expressions Ibn Tibbon uses: 'providing an extensive library for thy use' (בהרבות לך ספרים) and 'I have besides made for thee books' (עשיתי לך ספרים) which are deliberate paraphrases of our verse, although making books now appears in a completely positive sense in diametric opposition to the scriptural literal meaning and to the Midrash. Moreover, his subject is not merely reading books but acquiring them, ordering copies (even several copies!) from professional scribes, in order to build a large private library, a unique phenomenon in medieval culture. Ibn Tibbon stresses his son's superior position to other readers in that he owns the books and can lend them to others, while they must borrow from him. Note also that books are to be made 'on all sciences'. This differs entirely from the midrashic interpretation of our verse.

R. Isaac Kanfanton, greatest of the Castilian yeshiva heads in the mid-15th century, writes in the same spirit but even more radically in the conclusion of his little book, *Way of the Talmud* (*Darchei ha-Talmud*). Here he stresses the direct connection between many books and greater wisdom. For the first time we encounter the saying: 'Increase books and increase wisdom' (מרבה ספרים מרבה חכמה):

A man's wisdom reaches no further than his books, so that a man should sell all that he has and buy books. For example, a man who does not have the books of the Talmud cannot possibly be versed in it, and one who has no books on medicine cannot be versed in it, and all the more anyone who does not have the books of logic and of wisdom cannot be versed in them. On this have our Sages said, 'Increase books and increase wisdom' and the commentators 'Get thee a friend', an actual friend and some say books, because a book is a good friend (כִּי הַסֵּפֶר חֵבֶר טוֹב) and one who reads borrowed books is entirely as 'thy life shall hang in doubt before thee' (Deut. 28: 66), and when one has books they lead him to wisdom and knowledge, for this is thy life and thy length of days.<sup>27</sup>

We note that Kanfanton does not relate only to holy books but to scientific and philosophical literature in general. Like Judah Ibn Tibbon before him, he stresses buying and owning the books, not merely reading them. According to him, one cannot be well versed in any field if one merely reads books and fails to acquire them. Hence the saying 'Let a man sell

by E.I.J. Rosenthal [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969], p. 108). As for the private nature of medieval Jewish libraries, and matters concerning lending books, see M. Beit Arie, 'Were There Jewish "Public" Libraries in the Middle Ages?', in M. Slohovsky and Y. Kaplan (eds.), *Libraries and Book Collections* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2006 [Hebrew]), pp. 91-103, and in Beit Arie's many other papers on these subjects.

27. R. Isaac Kanfanton, *Darchei ha-Talmud* (ed. I.S. Lange; Jerusalem, 1981 [Hebrew]), p. 72. See also the reference in A. Blankenstein, *Mishlei Israel ve-Ummot ha-Olam* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1964 [Hebrew]), pp. 377-78, §680.



all he has and buy books'.<sup>28</sup> It seeks to stress the great importance of buying and owning books, but also relates to an economic reality of costly manuscripts, which before the invention of printing required a significant investment to create a private library in any field at this time. The conclusion to be drawn is 'Increase books and increase wisdom'. Kanfanton refers to a saying of the Sages, but its source is unknown and it may well be just a paraphrase.<sup>29</sup> As far as we now know, this is the first appearance of that saying, subsequently so popular, in our literature.<sup>30</sup> Transforming the Mishnaic saying, 'Get thee a friend' to acquiring a book because a book is a good friend may possibly derive from *Avot d'Rabbi Nathan* 8.3, which bases the saying in *m. Avot* 1.6 on the fact that to study one must have a friend, as one must have a book. Two words in this saying served Kanfanton's purpose: 'get' refers to his contention that books should not only be read but bought and owned, and 'friend' to the pupil of the Sages, that is, one who learns from books. It is noteworthy that in the paraphrases of the sayings of the Sages the book replaces the wife in one case and the friend in the other. Since the wife here is the daughter of a Sage and the friend is a pupil of a Sage there is logic in replacing them with a book, all of which stresses the need for many books, not only for reading but also for acquiring them. In fact, Kanfanton declares further on that to base one's reading on borrowed books is to have one's (spiritual) life hang in doubt. This too brings to mind Judah Ibn Tibbon, quoted above, who prided himself on making sure that his son would own books and could lend them to others rather than having to borrow from them. One concludes, then, that owning books, presented here as a precondition for reading them, leads man to wisdom and knowledge. Thus Kanfanton concludes his booklet with the

28. This is clearly a paraphrase of *b. Pes.* 49a, 'Let a man always sell all he has and marry the daughter of a scholar' (trans. I. Epstein; London, 1960, p. 236); here the book is substituted for the Sage's daughter. See below.

29. It sounds like a paraphrase of *m. Avot* 2.7: 'The more study of the Law, the more life; the more schooling, the more wisdom', etc. This may be his source, since Kanfanton subsequently uses the saying 'Get thee a friend', which comes from *Avot* 1.6 and 2.9: 'He said to them: go forth and see which is the good way man should cleave [...]. R. Joshua says: a good companion' (*The Mishnah* [trans. H. Danby; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933], pp. 448-49).

30. See editor's note, *Darchei ha-Talmud*, p. 72 n. 9. See, for example, the Responsa of R. Isaac ben Emanuel of Latash of the 16th century (Vienna: F. Ferster Press, 1880). He used the saying in response to the ban against printing the *Zohar*: 'Envy of writers increases knowledge but [I have seen] an opposite world and their hatred and their envy extinguishes wisdom, although the Sages were right when they said that increasing books increases wisdom and without doubt that those who decrease [them] detract from wisdom' (p. 124). By the 16th century Kanfanton's new saying became popular among scholars, and see more examples in the following.



blessing: 'May God grant us His wisdom and our [own] books, Amen'.<sup>31</sup> In any case the foregoing, especially the saying 'The more books, the more wisdom' is a blunt antithesis to our biblical text. The great irony is that despite his enthusiasm for writing and buying books, and despite his wide-ranging activity in Torah studies, nothing is left to us of his work save this one little book.<sup>32</sup>

In the spirit of 'Without flour there is no learning', Kanfanton's pupil R. Joseph Hayyun, the last rabbi of Lisbon before the expulsion of 1492, maintained that the purpose of material wealth is to allow man to acquire many books, as a necessary condition for acquiring wisdom:

And it is known that material wealth is the condition for the very existence of the Torah, [...] and hence also a man can busy himself with the study of Torah, after he has enough for his needs and can acquire many books (וְיִכָּל רַבּוֹת סְפָרִים רַבִּים); many books [are] much wisdom (מְרַבֵּה סְפָרִים מְרַבֵּה חִכְמָה).<sup>33</sup>

Here Hayyun establishes the direct link between the new saying Kanfanton formulated, 'The more books, the more wisdom' and the radical interpretation of making many books.

Another example, in the same vein, can be found in the next century in the commentary by Abraham Gavishen (died 1578) on Qoheleth, *Sheaf of Forgetfulness* (*Omer haShikheha*):

Whoever makes many books increases wisdom [...] since the entire desire and hope and wish of the sage is to buy nice and beloved books so as to fill up his house with them [...] and to this he [Solomon] added seeker of righteousness and mercy, since seeking means buying books or studying from them or lending them.<sup>34</sup>

We should notice that contrary to the plain meaning of our verse and its midrashic interpretation, Gavishen also calls one to fill up one's house with books; not only to read them, but also to appropriate them. The word עָשָׂה (make) acquires here the multiple meaning of purchasing, studying and lending, and purchasing comes first.

The same attitude can also be found in the writings of R. Shim'on Frankfurt, born in western Poland, who was active most of his life in Amsterdam in the

31. *Darchei ha-Talmud*, p. 72.

32. *Darchei ha-Talmud*, 'Introduction', p. 9. Probably this is all that was left from his writings, due to the tribulations of time, and maybe Kanfanton followed the tradition that restricted putting knowledge in writings, and thus this is all he wrote.

33. R. Joseph Hayyun, *Millei d'Avot* 4.11. Quoted in A. Gross, *R. Yosef ben Avraham Hayyun, Manhig Kehillat Lisbon vi-Yzirato* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1983 [Hebrew]), p. 22.

34. Abraham Gavishen, *Omer haShikheha* (Livorno, 1748; facsimile, Jerusalem: Kedem Press, 1973), p. 72b.

late 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century. In the introduction to an unpublished manuscript he interprets *m. Avot* 4.4. However, unlike Kanfanton who based himself on the saying 'acquire a friend', Frankfurt relates to the saying 'make a Rabbi', and his radical interpretation clearly illustrates the proliferation of the printed book in his period:

Who is the Rabbi?—It is the book which is the Rabbi of a person (זהו הספר שיהיו רבו של אדם), who will read and study it before making a judgment, then he will not err and will not embarrass himself.<sup>35</sup>

The written text, thus, becomes now the true Rabbi. It should be noticed that the author does not deal here with the legitimation of the study of apocryphal literature, but relates to the still ongoing discussion concerning the publication of the halachic discussion. On this background R. Shim'on also creates a connection between our verse and the saying which appeared for the first time in Kanfanton, thereby also giving the verse a clear meaning not only of permission to make many books but literally a commandment to do so:

It is known that whoever has no books lacks knowledge (מי שחסר ספרים), since a man's wisdom reaches no further than his books. And there is no artisan without tools [...] and whatever is allowed in one book is forbidden in another. All this follows 'making many books there is no end'. Therefore we should not count on a verse from one book, even that of a great halachic authority, but we should 'take the side of the majority' (Exod. 23:2). Therefore every teacher of halacha should have enough books to use, so he could count on the majority concerning all the laws which are current now in these countries. And God benefited me in the access to many books [...]<sup>36</sup>

Typically, the legitimation of making many books also became legitimation for him to do the same.

This position was based on the myth of the authority of books, according to which the very fact of committing words to writing made them credible and augmented their authority. That myth was very powerful before the invention of printing, when producing a manuscript was complex and expensive, and it was difficult to preserve it. Moreover, the manuscript's economic value increased its authority. But there were scholars who ridiculed this myth. So Judah Elharizi maintained in his *Tahkemoni*:

And I made [them] for a man who buys many books, and he is among the stupid and the ignorant [...] and he keeps on buying volumes of documents among which he is like an ass carrying books.<sup>37</sup>

35. The manuscript was studied by Avriel Bar Levav. See excerpts in his 'Between the Consciousness of the Library and the Jewish Literary Republic', in Slohovsky and Kaplan (eds.), *Libraries and Book Collections*, pp. 210-11 (Hebrew) and the discussion there.

36. Bar Levav, 'Between the Consciousness of the Library', p. 211.

37. Judah Elharizi, *Sefer Tahkemoni* (Tel Aviv: Mahabarot leSifrut, 1942), p. 412.

By using the verb עשיתי (I made) Elharizi alludes directly to our verse. Also he relates mainly to purchasing books, not just reading them. However, Elharizi viewed this phenomenon negatively, calling those who buy many books 'stupid and ignorant' (כסילים בוטרים) and likens them to 'an ass carrying books' (חמור נושא ספרים).<sup>38</sup> It is clear, however, that he did not identify with the midrashic prohibition. Elharizi does ridicule those who treat books as property to be boasted of, and are enslaved by the myth of the authority of books, but he surely viewed positively the broadening of the mind which results from continuous study of books.

Maimonides likewise criticized the myth several times, seeing it as the basis for human prejudices, because instead of examining opinions *per se*, people examine them in the light of whose they are, how ancient and widespread they are, and whether they have been written down. See for example his 'Epistle to Yemen':

It is essential for you to know that these and similar assertions are fabricated and mendacious. Do not consider a statement true only because you find it in a book, for the prevaricator is as little restrained with his pen as with his tongue.<sup>39</sup>

Criticism so sharp of the mythical authority of the written book goes to show how deeply that myth was ingrained.

#### 4.

If this was the trend, and King Solomon was perceived as its prototype, it is inconceivable that in Qoheleth he should have prohibited the making of many books! Indeed the first significant instance of the radical interpretation of our verse came from the introduction of a 10th-century commentary on Qoheleth, attributed to R. Sa'adia Gaon, where he declares:

And since He promoted the scholars, and exalted the Sages, and imparted of his own splendor and intellectual powers, their strength and radiance influenced this accumulated abundance, and they of their own clarity brought abundance and attained what they could not imagine, and could not feel with their senses, that is, opening all obstructions, clarifying every doubt and expounding every difficulty [...] And behold the abundant grace

38. On the history of the saying 'an ass carrying books', see Melamed, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, pp. 175-76, and p. 296 n. 39.

39. See *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (trans. A. Halkin; discussion by D. Hartman; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), *The Epistle to Yemen*, p. 119. For other examples, see my *On the Shoulders of Giants*, chapter 3.7, and Melamed, 'Maimonides on the Authority of Books', in A. Ravitzky (ed.), *Maimonides, Conservatism, Originality, Revolution*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2008 [Hebrew]), pp. 95-107.

of God and the power of His providence put into their hearts to write down their knowledge and gather it into treatises and in books, so that it be preserved and remain for the most distant and the most learned, now and in the generations to come [...] And for that reason the man of wisdom, out of concern and fear for learning, to guard it for scholars, and out of doubts lest it be forgotten or lost or come to an end, said 'make many books without end'. His purpose was to gather the sciences according to their branches and subjects in the books to be made, so people would study them and they would exist for all generations, and remain through passing time. On such is it said in the Torah: 'Write this for a memorial in a book' (Exod. 17.14) and 'Therefore write ye this song for you' (Deut. 31.19) and to one of the great prophets it was said 'Now go, write before them in a table, and so on' (Isa. 30.8) and one of the righteous said in his sickness 'Oh that my words were now written' and so forth (Job 19.23-24), and all because of concern lest these be lost.<sup>40</sup>

We should notice that these references appear in the introduction to the commentary, as a means of legitimization, since the author felt the need to justify, first of all, his own action of writing. It is no coincidence that the radical interpretation of this verse frequently appears in introductions, which became a specific literary genre in medieval culture, in which the authors supplied endless, rhetorical apologies for their act of writing, insisting that they did not deserve to write, they have nothing new to add, or would not dare to criticize ancient authorities, God forbid, but still were forced to do it.<sup>41</sup> Undoubtedly the radical interpretation of our verse could be used as an effective legitimating vehicle.

The author insists that all whom divine grace has granted intellectual powers have a sacred trust to preserve and spread the knowledge they have acquired by writing it down. Making many books is presented here as a truly sacred trust and as an essential means of passing on knowledge to future generations. King Solomon is depicted as he who in his overriding concern to preserve knowledge and pass it on 'said of making many books there is no end'. Sa'adia Gaon removed the opening caution from the verse ('And further, my son, be admonished [...]'), which the midrash interprets as the start of a prohibition, and thus reversed the meaning completely. The blunt warning against making many books takes on the meaning of

40. Sa'adia Gaon's *Introduction to Qoheleth, Hamesh Megillot [Five Scrolls]* (trans. into Hebrew by Y. Kapach; Jerusalem: ha Agudah le Hatzalat Ginzei Teman, 1962), pp. 163-64. On the discussion concerning the identity of the author see S. Pines, *Between Jewish Thought and General Thought* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1976 [Hebrew]), pp. 82-83. See also in the same vein in Sa'adia's contemporary Shabtai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakmoni* (ed. A. Davidowitz; Rosh Pinah: Midrashah le Moreshet Israel, 2002), p. 36: 'And I was careful to make many books'.

41. See the discussion of this cultural phenomenon in Melamed, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, pp. 16-17, with additional bibliography.

a command to do precisely that. It derives from the fear of totally losing of ancient wisdom hitherto passed on by word of mouth. To reinforce this radical view, diametrically opposed to midrashic tradition, Sa'adia Gaon introduced scriptural documentation to prove that the order to write matters down, i.e. to make many books, is firmly anchored in the Bible, and that it was the midrashic commentators who distorted the true meaning of the Qoheleth text. The fact that he sees the need for scriptural documentation shows clearly that he is well aware that his interpretation not only deviates from the literal text but also contradicts the scriptural meaning. Both means serve to oppose the ban in the midrashic interpretation: one identifies the author with King Solomon as the Middle Ages saw him, writer of many books and owner of a great library. The other brings in scriptural texts in favor of writing, all to legitimize Sa'adia Gaon's own writing of books.

The quotation above comes from the introduction to the Qoheleth commentary. In the body of the work, when Sa'adia Gaon explicates this verse word by word, he repeats and develops his argument, reinforcing its radical significance. In the prohibitory explication, the word מִהֶמָּה (from them) refers to knowledge from a divine source in the previous verse, meaning that nothing else should be committed to writing. In the midrashic interpretation with a slight vowel change מִהֶמָּה becomes מִהֶמָּה (commotion) which will spring up in the home of him who brings many books into it. By contrast, in Sa'adia Gaon's opinion the word refers to 'the [works of] wisdom he wrote and the [works of] science he collected'. As to 'Be admonished' (הוזהר), in his opinion it is no rejection and certainly not a ban, but the contrary: 'Admonishing in this sense relates to study and preserving [knowledge], in the sense of "show them the way" (Exod. 18.20), in essence clarification and revealing, i.e. be careful, clarify for yourself and explain'.<sup>42</sup> While in the introduction Sa'adia Gaon resolved the issue by dispensing with the problematic word, here he goes even further and interprets it positively. 'Be admonished' changes from rejection to endeavour. Additionally, Sa'adia Gaon expounds 'there is no end' not as the vanity or hopelessness of making and reading endless books, but as the endless human search for knowledge that has no bounds:

Since there is no limit to the knowledge that he can reach, so he must not be satisfied with what he has attained and think it is the limit. Rather he must continue learning into the evening of his life, and write books without end, that is what is meant by 'there is no end'.

The true meaning of the saying 'And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making books there is no end' is that one should continuously and endlessly strive to put all one's knowledge down in writing. Thus too

42. Sa'adia Gaon, *Qohelet*, pp. 294-95. See also a similar interpretation in Abraham Farissol (see below).

Sa'adia Gaon consistently interprets the end of the verse, 'weariness of the flesh' positively: 'Studious application that wearies the body is the finest of all weariness, because it is a restraint from contemptible pleasures and prevents base desires'. The singular לִדְרֹג (study) he interprets from the Arabic to mean endeavor, effort, persistence. The conclusion is:

We have learned that one must [devote] much study to the writings of the Sages and learn from what they say and behave accordingly and compose new works derived from them and apply oneself to study.<sup>43</sup>

The controversy between the conservative interpretation of this verse following the midrashic interpretation, and the radical view as expressed by Sa'adia Gaon, continued through the Middle Ages and was part of the dispute over the writings of Maimonides. Those opposed to the study of science and philosophy used it to limit their studies, as we find in the collection *An Offering of Zeal* (*Minḥat Qannā'ūt*) by Abba Mari Moses bar Joseph Ha-yarhi:

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books with no end, and how good is the explanation of Ibn Janah: my son be admonished of, as be admonished from, as beware climbing the mountain (Exod. 19.12) is beware not to climb the mountain, and the meaning is not to examine [much] and to write books about matters that have no end, which are things that the human intelligence cannot fathom [...] from what is said in the midrash 'and more' (וְעוֹד), anyone who brings into his house more than the twenty-four Books brings discord into his house, and as I see it though the word should have been מִהֶם [from them] he said מִהֶמָּה; the implication is מִהֶמָּה (commotion). As the Sages said, whoever brings more than the twenty-four Books, meaning them (הֵמָּה) and the commentaries on them, and Solomon comes to warn him that a man should not enter a place where Torah has not permitted him to go.<sup>44</sup>

'Be admonished of making' is explained conservatively as refraining from making. The rationale is that one should not deal with matters that human intelligence cannot comprehend, when such work could lead to apostasy, heaven forbid. The writer accepts the midrashic interpretation of מִהֶמָּה as מִהֶמָּה, although he extends the range of the permissible somewhat, maintaining that 'more than twenty-four Books' in *Qoheleth Rabba* means not only the books themselves but the commentaries on them, albeit certainly not broader philosophical literature. In fact we have considerable documentation of rejection by more conservative circles of various types of

43. Sa'adia Gaon, *Ha-Perush le-Kohelet*, p. 295.

44. Abba Mari Moses bar Joseph Ha-yarhi, *Minḥat Qannā'ūt* (Pressburg, 1838; facsimile, New York: M.P. Press, 1958), p. 18. While Abba Mari contended that עֲשׂוֹת, 'making' means מַעֲשֵׂוֹת, 'not making', Abraham Farrisol argued later that the verse says purposely עֲשׂוֹת and not מַעֲשֵׂוֹת, since it means to imply a positive attitude towards making many books.

external literature. In the Responsa of R. Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba) from the early 14th century, which categorically reject preoccupation with philosophy, there is a rhyme repeated in several different contexts that criticizes the prominence of Plato and Aristotle in the Jewish scholar's library:

Aristotle and Plato with no prayers at all/Fill each chamber large and small.<sup>45</sup>

And Judah del Bene, even in the 16th century, still warns:

Be diligent in learning this Torah, and have no need for a home filled with Arabic and Chaldean and Greek books.<sup>46</sup>

Del Bene still disapproves of a home full of Arabic, Chaldean and Greek books, that is, full of science and philosophy books by the wise men among the gentiles, since according to *Qoheleth Rabba* whoever brings more than the twenty-four Books into his house brings in discord. Again, this repeated disapproval and rejection proves that the phenomenon was widespread; its presence confirmed by lists of books in the private libraries of Jewish scholars of the time;<sup>47</sup> and criticizing a phenomenon is proof that it exists.

By contrast, a relatively conservative scholar like Abarbanel did accept Sa'adia Gaon's radical interpretation. He writes as much at the end of the introduction to his commentary on Jeremiah. Here Abarbanel distinguishes three means of expression in which the Prophets and the Sages surpassed all others: thought, speech and writing. The order appears to be not only chronological, but in ascending importance. Qoheleth is cited as an outstanding example of speech committed to writing. Solomon wrote down his words because: 'he was not content with the perfection of his own mind, but wanted to perfect his generation and those who would follow him in the study of his books'.<sup>48</sup> This is much like the well-known passage in Maimonides's *Guide*: 'And sometimes the measure of the overflow [on the prophet-philosopher's theoretical soul] is such that it moves him of necessity to compose works and to teach'.<sup>49</sup> From this background comes Abarbanel's interpretation of our text:

45. *Responsa of the Rashba*, vol. 1 (ed. H.Z. Dimitrovsky; Jerusalem: Ha-Rav Kook Institute, 1990), pp. 324, 337, 341).

46. Judah del Bene, *Kisaot le-bet David* (*Seats for the House of David*) (Verona: Rossi, 1646), p. 10b.

47. See discussion, with extensive bibliography, in R. Bonfil, *Ha-Rabbanut be-Italia bi-tkufat ha-Renessans* [The Rabbinate in Italy during the Renaissance] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979 [Hebrew]), pp. 174-90.

48. R. Isaac Abarbanel, *Perush al Nevi'im Aharonim* [Commentary on the Latter Prophets] (Jaffa: Torah ve-Da'at, 1956), introduction to the commentary on Jeremiah (p. 297).

49. *Guide*, vol. 2, p. 375.



And from his [Qoheleth's] words the correct understanding of 'And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books', and so on, is not that he should be careful not to make them, but that he should be diligent and careful in making them, and not say those gone before have written [so] much and why should I grow weary writing other works, for our fathers left us a field to till.<sup>50</sup>

Here Abarbanel argues with whoever interpreted the text as 'be admonished from making them'; indicating a protracted argument about the right interpretation, every commentator drawing the argument in the direction that suits him. For Abarbanel as for Sa'adia Gaon, 'be admonished' meant 'be careful'—not abstain from it.<sup>51</sup> Abarbanel confronts the familiar argument between the earlier and the later Sages, namely that since the former composed so many books, it is pointless for the latter to weary themselves in doing so. He replies with the familiar saying of the Sages, 'our fathers left us a field to till' (*b. Hullin* 7a), a saying much used in the argument between the two groups in late medieval Jewish thought, the later group finding in it halachic authority directly from the ancients, for their freedom to comment and to compose new works.<sup>52</sup>

Directly following in Abarbanel's footsteps, Shlomo Almoli of the 16th century gave his own radical interpretation of the verse in the introduction to his uncompleted encyclopedic work, *Me'asef le-Kol ha-Mahanot*, again confronting the question of whether later scholars are entitled to add to the works of the earlier ones, and if they are capable of doing so. According to Almoli, the fact that they write additional books in every generation is positive proof that they have something to add, because if they did not, they would not write. He does not present the books of succeeding generations as mere commentary, as medieval thought usually does, but explicitly as expressions of legitimate differences of opinion and scientific innovation. Hence the justification for writing them. As he states:

Sometimes a man may write a new book about a book [...]. As new ideas have come to him that the other writer did not imagine and did not know, so the later one can add and provide details from whatever new ideas he has.<sup>53</sup>

That later scholars can not only interpret earlier ones but even add to them is typical of Renaissance thinking. To reinforce this, Almoli introduced

50. Abarbanel, introduction to the commentary on Jeremiah.

51. See also the same interpretation in his commentary on *m. Avot*, *Nahalat Avot* (Venice: di Cavalli, 1567), p. 85a.

52. See also Melamed, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, pp. 181, 225, 297 n. 50.

53. Shlomo Almoli, *Me'asef le-Kol Ha-Mahanot* (Constantinople: Astruc Press, 1531), p. 40.

the radical interpretation of our verse as enunciated from Sa'adia Gaon to Abarbanel:

[...] The meaning here is not what the commentators expounded that seems to mean, 'from making many books'. Rather it was reversed and became with careful efforts to make and to write them [...] And although this interpretation does not fit the actual words and grammar of the text as written in its time, it seems good to use it for a purpose worthy in itself, as noted.<sup>54</sup>

Consider the innovation in Almoli. Unlike his predecessors who interpreted the passage in keeping with their own interests but offered this as the correct and legitimate interpretation of the Torah, Almoli does not deceive himself. In the spirit of the new humanist methodology in textual criticism, he is quite aware that his own interpretation does not fit the literal meaning of the verse, but he nonetheless uses it because it expresses what in his view is the correct opinion. The literal meaning of the text is rejected, then, in favor of the radical interpretation that reverses the meaning, and justifies making many books as an essential means of advancing human knowledge.

Likewise also Abraham Farissol, who lived in Italy at the beginning of the 16th century. Farissol also noticed the textual fact that the word עָשׂוּת (make) appears in our verse without the prefix מְ (mē), and concludes, like in the commentary attributed to Sa'adia, that the text does not mean to advocate prohibition but only carefulness:<sup>55</sup>

'And further, it is possible to say that if one means something additional to what the sages said, 'my son, be admonished: of making books there is no end', and the word עָשׂוּת (make) lacks the מְ (mē, from) which means to say be careful of making them, lest you sin in [using] useless words of no value, and in wearying the flesh by additional words, especially should the words be indecent. Or that a man should hasten to make many books because there is no end to much speaking that springs from words of wisdom, and human knowledge can only be [cautious] with them when writing and speaking about plants and the like.<sup>56</sup>

54. *Me'asef*, p. 6. See also p. 2: 'And I have seen infinitely many books, all similar to each other, and agreeing with each other; there is no saying which is not written in them a thousand times. Each one wrote it in his book, without any difference from others, but with slight changes in interpretation and order. What is written in this book is also written in another, and in some cases one says so and so and the other so and so, only in order to demonstrate his abilities. Thus it is impossible to know which is proper and which is not'. It is typical, as noticed above, that such an expression appears in the introduction, while in the body of the work his comments are much more positive concerning the writing of many books. See also S. Regev, 'On Shlomo Almoli's Philosophic-Religious Thought', *Da'at* 62 (2008), p. 73 (Hebrew).

55. This unlike Abba Mari ben Yosef ha-Yarhi, who interpreted עָשׂוּת as מְעָשׂוּת. See above, n. 44.

56. Abraham Farissol, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (ed. S. ha-Levi Bamberger; Jerusalem: Mekizei Nirdamim, 1930), p. 73.

Considering the fact that Farissol was a typical Renaissance Jewish intellectual and his interest in philosophy and science was vast,<sup>57</sup> he definitely could not accept the traditional reading of this verse. He understood it as a warning not to write useless or indecent books, but not as a prohibition of writing scientific books, as king Solomon did when he wrote about the trees (1 Kgs 5.13). Thus, in the introduction to his commentary, Farissol specifically argues that Qoheleth deals with all branches of philosophy, from the 'natural' [physics], 'political' [politics], 'possibilities of knowing reality [metaphysics], and even to 'the nature of divine providence [theology].<sup>58</sup> This attitude infuses the whole commentary.

In early modern times, then, more and more use was made of this text to justify free inquiry and making more books. R. Judah Ariele of Modena, of the early 17th century, mentions in a letter in an entirely personal context in connection with his involvement in printing enterprises: 'All my life I have longed to print books without end, and no one has this heart's desire more than I [...]'.<sup>59</sup> With the advent of printing, we move from concern for justifying the writing and reading of books to the question of printing them. On the eve of the Enlightenment, Mordecai Gumpel Schnaber maintained in his essay, *On the Torah and on Wisdom*, that the Jews should learn from the gentiles who make many books and publish them in their own languages, while the scholars of Israel neglect the language of their fathers. Our text now becomes a weapon in the Jewish wars of the Enlightenment:

We see the nations around us, near and far, never resting for a moment in making books without end. Each and every one writes and speaks in the language of his people, to develop it; why then should we diminish the language of our fathers and abandon our holy tongue?<sup>60</sup>

In the traditional perception, making books without end expressed abandoning the Torah. Now in the proto-Enlightenment era a totally opposite view prevailed: making books became a return to the Jewish cultural tradition and its continuous development.

57. B.D. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981).

58. Farissol, *Commentary*, p. 11.

59. Rabbi Judah Ariele of Modena, *Iggrot Rabbi Yehuda Ariele mi-Modena* (Letters of Rabbi Judah Ariele of Modena) (ed. Y. Buchsbaum; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University School of Jewish Studies, 1984), p. 74. See also A. Melamed, 'The Art of the Homily of R. Judah Ariele of Modena: Rhetoric, Esthetics, Politics', in D. Malkiel (ed.), *Ariele Yish'ag, R. Yehuda Ariele Modena ve-Olam* [*The Lion Doth Roar; R. Judah Ariele Modena and his World*] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003 [Hebrew]), pp. 107-30 (127-29). On problems in controlling the spread of knowledge in the printing era, see Melamed, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, ch. 7.

60. Mordecai Gumpel Schnaber, *On the Torah and on Wisdom* (London, 1771), p. 5.

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## THE ERETZ ISRAEL NARRATIVE IN THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

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In his commentary on *Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah*, Hanoch Albeck has this to say about the editor of that collection of midrashim: 'The system here is to set forth everything he knows about every verse...he places the different commentaries one after the other...'. Different midrashic comments on a single verse, sometimes by the same author, placed side by side in the collection makes one wonder, since each commentary gives the verse a different meaning. How, then, do they all live together, as it were, without any of the usual discussion over differences of opinion, with a view to ascertaining which opinion is preferable? Were not the collection's commentators and the compiler trying to get at the truth?

In his *Darchei Ha-aggadah (Ways of the Aggadah)* Isaac Heinemann describes this as a question of principle. He describes the midrash as 'philology, not philological' and the description of the facts based on the commentaries as 'historiography, not history'. He asks: 'How can we explain this divergence from the truth inherent in the very method of our Rabbis, who regarded the Scriptures as the living word of God?'<sup>1</sup>

In reply, Heinemann quotes the response of the scholar Yehiel Michel Zachs to Geiger, who accused the commentators of 'lacking an exegetic sense'. Zachs wrote, 'The Aggadah is not a systematic work...but nonetheless and maybe precisely because of that it should be regarded as the fruit of a serious and successful effort to set forth a truth in scripture that escapes the eyes of the rationalists'. He sees the Aggadah as combining free composition with a striving for the truth. Heinemann explains this special quality at length as he distinguishes between rational thinking whose ideal is to be clear and unambiguous, and between 'organic thinking that is the result of our feelings no less than of our intelligence'.<sup>2</sup> He adds: 'Organic thinking does not distinguish between the product of the imagination and facts of experience, between what was actually said and what was left unsaid'.<sup>3</sup>

1. Isaac Heinemann, *Darchei Ha-aggadah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1970 [Hebrew]), pp. 1-2.

2. Heinemann, *Darchei Ha-aggadah*, p. 12.

3. Heinemann, *Darchei Ha-aggadah*, p. 187.



‘The Aggadah does not work towards “historical truth” or “philological truth”. There is in it something of the game, but it is a serious game. It appears, then, that dry learning is inadequate for understanding the creative activity of the Sages, and may even be a liability’.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Heinemann<sup>5</sup> claims that the rationalist Sages of Babylon lacked understanding of the Aggadot. They saw the Aggadah as an attempt to establish facts, so that they tried to explain contradictions between parallel midrashic sources. By contrast, The Aggadists themselves were well aware that each work was true in itself and in its place and no law of contradictions applied here.

An Eretz Israel Sage voices severe criticism of the Babylonians when Rabbi Shamlai emigrates from Babylon and asks to be taught Aggadah. ‘It is the tradition of my fathers not to teach Aggadah to Babylonians and not to southerners because they are crude and unlearned’, the Sage replies.<sup>6</sup>

According to Joseph Heinemann, the incorrect perceptions of the Babylonia Sages vis-à-vis the Aggadah, and the fact that unlike their Eretz Israel counterparts they were not in constant confrontation with alien beliefs, and factionalism, all led to a situation where ‘Sufficient for them (the Babylonians) is the Halakhah, little and meager is their contribution to Aggadah’.

Joseph Heinemann’s next thesis is the point of departure for my article. He states, ‘If the Aggadah is a significant part even of the Babylonian Talmud (*BT*), in most cases it is because the Eretz Israel Aggadah was thoroughly familiar to the Sages of Babylon’. He adds that even if Aggadot were cited by the Babylonian Sages only, we must posit an Eretz Israel source that has not been preserved.

I wish to discuss those commentaries and aggadot where the Eretz Israel sources were preserved, and to point out a paradox: precisely those Babylonian Sages whose rigid ‘scientific’ approach kept them from creating their own aggadot and midrashim did as they pleased with the Eretz Israel aggadot, reworking them and changing not only words but also the meaning, while introducing truths suited to their own needs and inclinations.

I would like to demonstrate some Babylonian reincarnations of Eretz Israel aggadot, noting the three trends behind these changes: (a) The contents-related context of the midrash or the aggadah. (b) The halakhic approach of the editor who quotes the midrash or the aggadah. (c) The ideological context in which the editor embeds the midrash, or the Aggadah.

4. I. Heinemann, *Darchei Ha-aggadah*, p. 195.

5. Joseph Heinemann, *Aggadot ve-Toldoteihen* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974 [Hebrew]), p. 163.

6. *BT Pesachim* 32a.

## A

Let me begin with a midrash found in two Eretz Israel sources from the Talmudic times—*Bereshit Rabbah* and *Va-yikra (Leviticus) Rabbah*, and in *BT Ta'anit*. The midrash is also to be found in Buber's edition of the *Tanhuma*, *Behukotai* 7, and *Tanhuma Va-yetze* 60, as well as in *Yalkut Shimoni* 107. (The last two are late compilations, hence irrelevant to our subject.)

*Bereshit Rabbah* responds to Gen. 24.24, as Abraham's servant performs his duty to search for a bride for Isaac: 'Behold I stand by the fountain of water. So let it come to pass that the damsel to be chosen shall be she to whom I shall say: Let down thy pitcher...'.<sup>7</sup>

The servant's words raise a theological issue. The wording implies that he himself sets forth the test—he does not ask or receive guidance or approval from God. The *Bereshit Rabbah* commentator finds that the servant's style is 'improper'. He then creates a commentary enumerating all similar cases where, instead of asking God to send the right person for a particular task, ordinary mortals set the conditions. Thus the commentator:<sup>7</sup>

Four asked improperly: three were granted their request in a fitting manner, and the fourth, in an unfitting manner. They are: Eliezer, Caleb, Jephthah and Saul.

Eliezer: 'So let it come to pass that the damsel'—even a bondmaid! Yet God prepared Rebekah for him and granted his request in a fitting manner.

Caleb: He that smiteth Kiryath-sepher and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife (Judg. 1.12)'—it might have been a slave! But God chose Othniel for him.

Saul: 'And it shall come to pass that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter (1 Sam. 27.25)'—it might have been a slave! But God prepared David for him.

Jephthah asked in an unfitting manner and God answered him in an unfitting manner. He asked in an unfitting manner as it says, 'And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord and said: Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth ... it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering (Judg. 11.30ff)'. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: Then had a camel or an ass or a dog come forth, thou wouldst have offered it up for a burnt-offering! What did the Lord do? He answered him unfittingly and prepared his daughter for him as it says, 'And Jephthah came...and behold, his daughter came out to meet him' (*ibid.* 34).

By placing Jephthah as 'the other' in the group of those who asked in an unfitting manner, the commentator discloses his own view as to the two levels of requests unfittingly made. The vows of Eliezer, Caleb and Saul

7. *Gen. Rab.* 60.14 (Theodor/Albeck edition).

also present theological problems since they set up the conditions themselves instead of awaiting a sign from heaven, but they were not as bad as Jephthah's vow. The vows of the other three could have injured those who made them or their families on the level of relationships and status determined by human beings, whereas carrying out Jephthah's vow could have meant a sin against God and a violation of divine law. Hence, the three were answered 'in a fitting manner' and Jephthah 'in an unfitting manner'. Calamity befell his daughter and himself, and a difficult theological issue arose as to divine justice. The midrash discusses it further later but this is beyond the scope of this article.

The commentator in *Va-yikra Rabbah*<sup>8</sup> follows the same ideological line as the one in *Bereshit Rabbah*, although his style is different. He expounds the first verses in Numbers 6: 'And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, When either a man or a woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself unto the Lord: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, nor vinegar of strong drink...'. Thus in *Va-Yikra Rabbah*:

Four people began their supplication by making vows. Three of them made their request in an improper manner and the Holy One, blessed be He, answered them favourably while one made the request in an improper manner and the Omnipresent answered him correspondingly. They are as follows: Eliezer the servant of Abraham, Saul, Jephthah, and Caleb.

Eliezer made his request in an improper manner, as is proved by the text, 'So let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say: Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee... let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for thy servant, even for Isaac (Gen. 24.14)'. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: If a Canaanite slave-girl, or a harlot, had come out, would you still have said, 'let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant even for Isaac'? Yet the Holy One blessed be He did well for him and brought Rebekah to his hand.

Caleb made a request in an improper manner, as is proved by the text, 'And Caleb said: He that smiteth Kiryath-sepher and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife (Josh. 15.16)'. The Holy One blessed be He, replied: If a Canaanite or a bastard, or a slave had captured it, would you have given him your daughter? What, however did the Holy One blessed be He, do? He brought him his brother and the latter captured it; as it says: 'And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb took it (*ibid.* 17)'.

Saul made a request in an improper manner as is proved by the text, 'And it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter (1 Sam. 17.25)'. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: If an Ammonite, or a bastard, or a slave had killed him,

8. *Num. Rab.* 37.3.

would you have given him your daughter? But the Holy One blessed be He, brought him David, and he gave his daughter Michal to him.

Jephthah made a request in an improper manner, as is proved by the text 'Then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me... I will offer it up (Judg. 11.31)'. Said the Holy One blessed be He: If a camel, or an ass, or a dog had come out, would you have offered it for a burnt-offering? So the Holy One blessed be He, answered him correspondingly by bringing him his daughter to hand.

Beside the difference arising from the verse being interpreted, in one case 'making vows' and in the other 'made a request', there are also small differences in the reasons for the 'improper manner'. In the first case Eliezer could have caused Isaac to marry a bondmaid or a gentile or a harlot, in the second the handmaid was the only danger. In the former case Caleb and Saul could have caused their respective daughters to marry a gentile, a bastard or a slave, while in the latter the slave was the only danger. (In other versions Caleb's daughter could have been given to a bastard or a slave, and Saul's to a gentile or a slave.) Apart from these minor points, there is no ideological or structural difference between the midrashim.

Proceeding now to the *BT*, we quote the midrash in Tractate *Ta'anit*.<sup>9</sup>

Rav Shmuel bar Nachman said in the name of R. Yonatan: Three individuals made requests in an improper manner, two were answered in a proper manner, and one was answered in an improper manner. They are: Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, King Saul, the son of Kish, and Jephthah the Gileadite.

Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, made an improper request when he sought a wife for his master's son Isaac. As it is written that Eliezer prayed to God: 'Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say Please tip over your jug so I may drink, and who replies Drink and I will even water your camels, Let her be the one you have designated for your servant, for Isaac'. Now is it possible that he meant to take even a lame or blind girl as a wife for Isaac? Nevertheless God responded to Eliezer in a proper manner and Rebecca was sent his way.

Saul, the son of Kish made an improper promise when he sought a warrior to slay the giant Goliath. As it is written: 'And it shall be that the man who slays him the king shall enrich him with great wealth and will give him his daughter'. Now is it possible that Saul meant to give his daughter even to a slave, or a *mamzer*? Nevertheless God responded to him in a proper manner, and David was sent his way.

Jephthah the Gileadite made an improper promise before setting out to battle the Ammonites. As it is written that Jephthah vowed: 'And it shall be that whatever emerges from the doors of my house to meet me when I return from the Ammonites shall be to God and I will offer it as a burnt

9. *Ta'anit* 4b.

offering'. Now is it possible that Jephthah meant to offer even something unclean (e.g. a pig, or a dog)! God responded in an improper manner. His daughter was sent his way.

R. Berechyah said: Also the congregation of Israel made an improper request yet the Holy One blessed be He answered them in a proper manner. As it is said: 'Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of God. His going forth is sure as the morning, and He shall come to us like the rain' (Hosea 6.3). Israel requested of God that He resemble the rain. The Holy One blessed is He said to Israel: My daughter you request something which at times is desirable and at other times is not desirable. Rain is not of benefit at all times, for in the summer it is detrimental. But I will be to you something which is desirable at all times. As it is said: 'I shall be like the dew to Israel' (Hosea 14.6). Dew is desirable all year round, even in the summer.

The congregation of Israel made another improper request of God. She said before him: Master of the universe, 'Place me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm (Song of Songs 8.6)'. The Holy One blessed be He answered her: My daughter, you request something which at times can be seen and at other times cannot be seen. A seal that it placed on the heart or arm cannot be seen when one is clothed. However, I will make of you something which can be seen at all times, as it is said: 'Behold, on the palms of my hands I have engraved you' (Isa. 49.16).

Before us is a combination of two midrashim, the one attributed to R. Shmuel bar Nachmani in the name of R. Yonatan and the other to R. Berechyah. There is no doubt, then, that this is an Eretz Israel midrash. R. Shmuel bar Nachmani, his teacher R. Yonatan and R. Berechyah, are well-known as Eretz Israel aggadists.

The broad context of the *BT* midrash is a long *sugia* relating to rain, and its narrower context is the difference between angry and calm speech. The first *BT* midrash is attributed to Eretz Israel Sages, recalls the content, style and structure of their writings and is expounded from their sources. However, it differs from them in a significant point: The list of those who request improperly is reduced to three: Eliezer the servant of Abraham, Saul son of Kish, and Jephthah the Gileadite. The condensation establishes a clear hierarchy among the improper requests: (1) lame or blind but not inferior in status; (2) slave or *mamzer* (of inferior status and unacceptable in marriage), imposing what is prohibited on another, his daughter; and (3) defiled object—a forbidden sacrifice, a sin before God. It is clear, then, why two were answered in a proper manner and the other one was not.

R. Berechyah's additional midrash includes another questioner—the congregation of Israel—who asked in an improper manner but was answered in a proper manner.

The early Talmudic commentators sensed the first difference and responded to it, but their commentaries were not critical.

Rashi questions why in the aggadah, i.e. in the midrashic collection, Caleb is mentioned along with the others who asked improperly, while the Gemarah, i.e. R. Yonathan, does not mention him. His justification is the following passage from *BT Temurah*:<sup>10</sup>

In our studies we have learned of 1700 minor and major judgments, parallels and distinctions of the scholars that were lost during the days of mourning for Moses. Said R. Abbahu: Nonetheless Othniel ben Kenaz returned them in his discussion, as it is said (Josh. 15): 'And Othniel son of Kenaz the (younger) brother of Caleb took it and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife'.

This talmudic passage in Tractate *Temurah* indicates that the metaphorical significance of taking Kiryat Sepher was the return of the 1700 halakhic judgments lost in the days of mourning Moses. Hence Rashi deduces that when Caleb promised his daughter to him who would take Kiryat Sepher, he meant to give her to him who would restore the forgotten *halakhot*. The conditions would thus be met by a disciple of the Sages, not by a slave or a *mamzer*.

And yet, we still have to ask why Caleb is mentioned in the midrashim of the Eretz Israel collections. One could of course say that in Eretz Israel the metaphorical explanation of the *BT* was not known or was not accepted. Possibly, the Babylonian narrator or editor omitted the Caleb story in accordance with the interpretation familiar in his own place. In my view, however, the story was left out not only due to the metaphorical explanation current in Babylon, but mainly because of the context within *Ta'anit*, which required an externally suitable subject to place beside R. Berechyah's midrash.<sup>11</sup>

Once the midrash on improper requests became part of the *sugia* over prayers for rain, one of the requests had to be omitted in order to preserve the symmetry of three who asked improperly and one who asked properly. It would seem that of Eliezer, Caleb and Saul, Caleb was the natural candidate for omission since he was not the messenger of the first Patriarch, Abraham, nor was he the first king, Saul, and possibly as well because of the metaphorical interpretation of Kiryath Sepher's capture. However, preserving the structure for which the Caleb story was, as it were, sacrificed in *Ta'anit* was not just for the sake of putting the midrash on 'three who asked improperly' next to R. Berechyah's midrash because of their similarity. The main reason lay in its contribution to a new ideological structure of the issue, arising particularly in the second part of R. Berechyah's midrash. Here the ideological center has shifted to the special relationship between

10. *Temurah* 16a.

11. Rashi says that the midrash about the three who asked in an improper manner was integrated into the *sugia* because of its resemblance to R. Berechyah's midrash about rains.

Knesset Israel (the Community) and God. Bringing in the ‘three who asked improperly’ before the midrash of R. Berechyah and Knesset Israel creates an ideological hierarchy whose peak is embodied in God’s ‘proper’ answers to Knesset Israel despite their ‘improper’ questions.

As previously stated, the reason for bringing R. Berechyah’s midrash into the *sugia* in *Ta’anit* that deals with rain is, that rain is central to the words of Knesset Israel in this context. The rain, however, is but an external reason because Knesset Israel is discussing not rain but the relationship between her and God. The rain merely serves to illustrate the relationship: ‘Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of God...and He shall come to us like the rain’ (Hosea 6.3). Moreover, the first part of the midrash forms the background for the second and more important part that presents Knesset Israel’s request to God: ‘Place me like a seal on your heart’, that longing for the ultimate relationship, and it parallels the ultimate answer: ‘Behold, on the palms of my hands I have engraved you’. Both request and answer express the perpetual link between the two that adhere to one another, Knesset Israel and God, which is the ideological summit of the *sugia*. Bringing in the midrash on ‘those who asked improperly’ before R. Berechyah’s midrash on Knesset Israel who also ‘asked improperly’ created the opportunity to shift the ideological center little by little from the question of rain, through the relationships of individuals in Israel with God, to the relationship of Knesset Israel with Him, and hence to the ideological summit of the *sugia*: Israel’s ultimate link with God. It seems to me that this structure and the reasons for it—shifting the ideological center of the *sugia*—are what determined the form of the midrash on those ‘who asked improperly’ and the omission of the Caleb story to that end.

## B

In Song of Songs 8.8-10 there is a dialogue between the female protagonist of this scroll and her brothers. The brothers’ words may be interpreted as concern for their sister’s physical safety and her reply as assurance of it, or else as concern for the sister’s moral safety and her answer as assurance in that direction.

In *Bereshit Rabbah*<sup>12</sup> R. Berechyah expounds the passages as describing Abraham the Patriarch and his steadfastness as his faith was tried by Nimrod in the fiery furnace. Since this story is not in the Bible, the midrashic author must have relied on a previous midrash.

R. Berechyah commenced: ‘We have a little sister (Song of Songs 8.8)’. This refers to Abraham, who united the whole world for us. Bar Kappara observed: Like a person who sews [what] aren’t together, ‘little’: even while young he stored up pious acts and good deeds. ‘And she hath no

12. *Gen. Rab.* 39.3 (Theodor-Albeck edition).



breasts': No breasts suckled him in piety or good deeds. 'What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?': i.e. on the day when the wicked Nimrod ordered him to be cast into the fiery furnace. 'If she be a wall we will build upon her' [v. 9]: If she resist (Nimrod) like a wall, He (God) will build up (a defense) for him. 'And if she be a door we will enclose her with boards of cedar': If she is poor<sup>13</sup> in piety and noble deeds, we will enclose her with boards of cedar, and just as a drawing is only temporary, so will I protect him only for a time.

Said he (Abraham) to Him: Sovereign of the universe! 'I am a wall' [v. 10]: I stand as firm as a wall, 'And my breasts like the towers thereof': My sons are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 'Then was I in his eyes as one that found peace': He entered in peace and left it unscathed. Now the Lord said unto Abraham: 'Get thee...'

According to this midrash, the 'sister' is Abraham, 'little' because even when young he stored up good deeds, although 'no breasts suckled him' in such acts. The brothers' question, 'What shall we do for our sister in the day she shall be spoken for?', and the subsequent conditions, 'If she be a wall... And if she be a door...', are interpreted on Abraham's test in the fiery furnace in which it would be determined if he was a wall, i.e. clung firmly to the commandments, or if he was shaky and feeble like a door. The door, opening and shutting, is construed by the commentator to signify wavering faith.

The sister's answer—'I am a wall and my breasts are like the towers thereof'—is interpreted on keeping with Abraham's answer to those concerned about his conduct on the day of his ordeal, that he stands as firm as a wall and his descendants will be as firm in their faith as he is. His breasts are his sons 'Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah' (Daniel 3). Summing up the dialogue is the passage: 'Then I was in his eyes as one who has found peace (v. 10b)', interpreted as the successful outcome of the ordeal, 'He entered in peace and left it unscathed'.

What concerns me in this paper is not the entire midrash, but rather how the expression 'I am a wall and my breasts are the towers thereof' (v. 10a) is construed here symbolically. In *Bereshit Rabbah* 'wall' represents Abraham's steadfast belief and 'breasts' the faithful descendants of his line, i.e. the strength and the viability of the new culture. In another Eretz Israel collection, *Shir ha-Shirim (Song of Songs) Rabbah*,<sup>14</sup> various midrashim interpret the passage in question. Among these are the homily of R. Berechyah, now familiar to us from *Bereshit Rabbah*, with a few changes insignificant for our present purpose. Most changes link the verses to Israel and its performance of the commandments. One of these is attributed to R. Johanan, who interpreted the verses as referring to Sodom and Israel,

13. This is a sound play. The word *delet*, Heb. 'door', sounds much like the Heb. *dal*, 'poor'.

14. *Song Rab.* 8.

‘We have a sister’: this is Sodom, as it says: ‘And thine elder sister is Samaria...and thy younger sister...is Sodom (Ezek. 16.46)’. ‘And she hath no breasts’: She gave no suck of religious observances and good deeds. ‘What shall we do for our sister on the day’ when the Celestial Court decreed that it should be burnt with fire, as it says, ‘Then the Lord caused to rain upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire (Gen. 19.24)’. ‘If she be a wall we will built upon her’. This refers to Israel. Said the Holy One blessed be He: If Israel stand firm in their virtue like a wall, we will build upon them, and deliver them. ‘And if she be a door’: If they sway to and fro in their conduct like a door, ‘We will enclose her with board of cedar’: Just as a drawing lasts only for a short time, so I will stand by them only for a short while.

‘I am a wall’: Said Israel before the Holy One blessed be He: Sovereign of the universe, we are the wall and we will be firm in religious observance and good deeds like a wall. ‘And my breasts are like the towers thereof’: Because we are destined to raise up numbers of righteous descendants like ourselves in Thy world. ‘Then was I in his eyes as one that found peace’: Why so? Because all the other nations taunted Israel saying to them: If that is so why did God expel you from his land, and why did He lay waste His sanctuary? Israel thereupon answered: We are like a king’s daughter who went to celebrate the first festival after her marriage in her father’s house, in the end she will certainly return to her own house in peace.

When R. Johanan uses the expression ‘I am a wall and my breasts are the towers thereof’, it represents Israel’s total steadfastness in adhering to the Commandments and performing good deeds, and its ability to raise up battalions of righteous descendants. This is much like R. Berechyah’s interpretation, only broader. While R. Berechyah speaks specifically about Abraham, R. Johanan speaks about the whole Israel nation. But there is no difference between them as to ‘My breasts are however, like the towers thereof’. For both, this points to descendants and continuity.

The Babylonian *sugia* in *Baba Batra*<sup>15</sup> brings in a different interpretation to the phrase ‘I am a wall...’, as said by R. Johanan. The *sugia* reads:

R. Judah the Prince levied the impost for the wall on the Rabbis. Said Resh Lakish: The Rabbis do not require the protection [of a wall], as it is written, ‘If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand’. Who are these that are counted? Shall I say the righteous, and that they are more in number than the sand? Seeing that of the whole of Israel it is written that they shall be like the sand on the sea shore, how can the righteous alone be more than the sand?—What the verse means, however, is, I shall count the deeds of the righteous and they will be more in number than the sand. If then the sand which is the lesser quantity protects [the land] against the sea, how much more must the deeds of the righteous, which are a larger quantity, protect them? When Resh Lakish came before R. Johanan, the

15. *Bab. Bat. 7b–8a*.

latter said to him: Why did you not derive the lesson from this verse, 'I am a wall and my breasts are like towers', where 'I am a wall' refers to the Torah, and 'my breasts are like towers' refers to the students of the Torah?—Resh Lakish, however, adopts the exposition [of this verse] given [also] by Rava<sup>16</sup>, that 'I am a wall' refers to the community of Israel, and 'my breasts are like towers' to synagogues and houses of study.

The Babylonian *sugia* reports the decision of R. Judah the Prince, leader of the Jewish community in Eretz Israel in the third century CE, to involve the Rabbis in the costs of providing security. The *sugia* attributes opposition to this measure to Resh Lakish and R. Johanan, on the assumption that the Sages are protected by their righteous deeds. Resh Lakish's implication that 'The Rabbis do not require protection' is based on the interpretation of a verse in Psalm 139. R. Johanan, however, sought to show this from the verse in the Song of Songs, 'I am a wall and my breasts the towers thereof', as 'I am a wall is the Torah and my breasts are the towers thereof are the Sages'. The Gemarah asks why Resh Lakish did not base himself on this text, and replies that he interpreted it differently, as the Amora Rava did later: 'I am a wall is the congregation of Israel and my breasts are the towers thereof are the synagogues and houses of study'.

Thus, Resh Lakish's interpretation for 'I am the wall...' is almost identical to R. Johanan's in *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah* as quoted above, while R. Johanan himself provides two different interpretations: one in the Eretz Israel midrash *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah*; and the other in the Babylonian *Baba Batra sugia*. In this case we can assume that the compiler of the Babylonian *sugia*, who wanted to present the Sages of Tiberias as a united front against the decree of Judah the Prince, attributed to R. Johanan an extreme position which he linked to his well known Eretz Israel midrash on the Song of Songs. He allowed himself to rework R. Johanan's words because he maintained the gist of the original midrash. After all, seeing the wall as a symbol of the Torah and the breasts as symbols of the Sages is not far from seeing them as symbols of Israel—the nation of the Torah and of the righteous who preserve it.

## C

In this section I present an example of an Eretz Israel story entirely reworked to adapt it to the ideological tendencies of the Babylonian Talmud, and an entire *sugia* edited with that end in view.

It is very common to find Eretz Israel stories reworked in order to be adapted to the ideology of the Babylonian *sugiot* of which they became a part. Here I bring in a short Eretz Israel story that forms the basis for two

16. *BT Pesahim* 87a.

stories we find integrated into a *BT sugia* in *Ta'anit*.<sup>17</sup> The purpose is to show how from the Eretz Israel story arose two *BT* stories that are suitable in content, style and structure to the ideological content and structure of the *BT sugia* they are part of.

Here is the story as it appears in the *Jerusalem Talmud* (*JT*), *Tractate Ta'anit*.<sup>18</sup>

There was a pestilence in Sepphoris, but it did not come into the neighborhood in which R. Haninah was living. And the Sepphoreans said: 'How is it possible that that the elder lives among you, he and his entire neighborhood in peace, while the town goes in ruin?'

(Haninah) went in and said before them: 'There was only a single Zimri in his generation, but on his account 24,000 people died. And in our time, how many Zimri's are there in our generation? And you are raising a clamor!'

The reference is to Zimri son of Salu who lay with the Midianite woman, when the son of Aaron the high priest slew both of them to stop the plague that killed 24,000 Israelites (Num. 25.6-15).

This story and those that follow it in the *JT* are linked to the mishnah that discusses, inter alia, the proclamation of a fast to avert a plague (death).

The ideological focus is the anger of the Sepphoreans that the plague that struck their city passed over R. Haninah's neighborhood, and his reproof. Both the anger and the reproof require study. Just as it is not clear why the Sepphoreans should have been angry with R. Haninah, the link between their anger and his reproof is not clear either. Does R. Haninah want to say that sin has spread through Sepphoris and his neighborhood has not sinned, or that it is right and proper that his neighborhood should be saved because of him even if it has sinned? Or did he want to tell them that their own wickedness gave them no right to complain? In any case, the anger and the reproof are clearly the ideological focus of the story, for which the report of the plague that passed over R. Hanina's neighborhood is only the background.

We move on now to two *BT* stories within the *sugia* in *Ta'anit*.<sup>19</sup>

1.

There was once a plague in Sura. However, in Rav's neighborhood there was no plague.

(People) concluded from this that the neighborhood was spared due to the merit of Rav, which was so great.

It was shown to them in a dream that for Rav, whose merit is very great, this would be a minor matter for Rav.

Rather, it was due to the merit of a certain man who would regularly lend out a hoe and a shovel for burials.

17. *BT Ta'anit* 21b.

18. *JT Ta'anit* 66c (3.4).

19. *BT Ta'anit* 21b.

## 2.

There was once a fire in Derokeret. However, in Rav Huna's neighborhood there was no fire.

(People) concluded from this that it was in the merit of Rav Huna, which was so great.

It was shown to them in a dream this would be a minor [feat] for Rav Huna.

Rather, it was due to a certain woman who would heat her oven and lend it out to her neighbors.

The two stories are part of a *sugia* developed from the mishnah discussing when it was decided that a certain place was stricken with the plague and a fast proclaimed there. Later on, following the story of the plague and the proclamation of a fast in Derokeret, the discussion takes another direction, and subsequently revolves around whether his place honors a man or a man honors his place.

It is easy to see how the story of the calamity that passed over the neighborhood where the famous Sage lived, becomes two stories whose themes and morals are different. As against the famous Sage of the neighborhood, the Babylonian editor places the stories of a simple man and a simple woman, anonymous righteous souls, together with the additional hidden element of a dream that discloses the truth, namely, that the hidden righteous souls and not the famous Sages saved their neighborhoods.

There is no doubt that the Babylonian stories are literary creations, deliberately placed side by side. Identical style, structure and content all show this, as do their differences that create a hierarchy. Rav features in the first story and Rav Huna, his student, in the second. An anonymous man is in the first story and an anonymous woman in the second; one good deed is named in the first story, two good deeds in the second. Moreover, the two stories are linked to the preceding story (not quoted here) through the subject, 'plague' in the first and the place name 'Derokeret' in the second story, and they also create a hierarchy in the group of stories within the *sugia* (not quoted here). All these show that the two stories were formed in a fashion that would integrate them into a *sugia* structured to transmit a certain idea. The idea is that external arrangement does not necessarily reflect internal truth, and sometimes the actions of simple righteous souls are preferred in heaven above those of illustrious Sages.

We have seen, then, how the Eretz Israel narrative serves as a basis for Babylonian reworkings designed to advance the ideological concepts in which they were integrated.

In conclusion. The three examples chosen from among the hundreds available show how anonymous Babylonian editors changed the Eretz Israel sources. At the declared ideological level, they sought the single midrash that rightly interprets the biblical text, the one story that is historical fact,

and the one halakhic pronouncement that fits the biblical source or condition. On the literary level, however, they did not hesitate to change and adapt midrashim and stories to their own ideological tendencies.

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## Part III

### REMEMBRANCE OF MEMORIES



## WHAT MATTERS IN LIFE: MEMORY AND NARRATIVE IN *SIMON* AND *WIT*

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### *The End of Life, the Beginning of the Story*

Death, the end of life, is the beginning of many stories. Already in the book of Genesis, the introduction of death opens up the story of humanity's life and culture beyond the Garden (Genesis 2–3). The dead are remembered in stories; we hope to be remembered after our death. In a way, the whole enterprise of giving meaning to life is a tryout of a flashback at the moment of our death. In the Arabic narrative culture of *The Arabian Nights*, storytelling is a way to remain a day ahead of death. The stories that Scheherezade tells her sister every evening never come to a complete ending. Scheherezade speculates that the Sultan, who she knows listens in, will be curious to hear the ending and therefore spare her life one more day.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, in the stories told in the two films I will be presenting in this article, it is clear from the start that the tale will end with the main character's death. The stories are not as adventurous as those of the Bible or of Sinbad the sailor, Aladdin and his magical lamp, or Ali Baba and the forty thieves.<sup>3</sup> They are more reflective and evaluating. They are constructed from the perspective of death. All the elements are arranged in such a way that they converge at the moment of death.

The two films are *Wit* (USA: Mike Nichols, 2001) and *Simon* (Netherlands: Eddy Terstall, 2004).<sup>4</sup> In looking at these films, I focus my attention on

1. Translation: Shailoh Phillips.

2. Richard van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights* (London: Routledge, 2007).

3. Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2004).

4. *Wit*. USA, 2002. Warner Bros, HBO Films. Producer Simon Bosaquet. Screenplay by Emma Thompson and Mike Nichols. Based on the play by Margaret Edson. Directed by Mike Nichols. Photography Seamus McGarvey. Editor John Bloom. Starring Emma Thompson, Christopher Lloyd, Eileen Atkins, Audra McDonald, Jonathan M. Woodward, Harold Pinter. [www.warnerbros.nl](http://www.warnerbros.nl).

*Simon*. Netherlands, 2004. Spaghetti film. Producer Imco Nieuwenhuis, written and directed by Eddy Terstall. Photography Willem Nagtglas. Music Paul de Munnik.

the link between death and the telling of personal memory. In both films, the approaching death is the trigger for telling the dying person's life story. What interests me is the place of death in these stories. Is death a moment of judgement, a time to evaluate the purpose and meaning of the life lived? If this is the case, then how important is the way in which someone dies? Is it possible to set things straight at the last minute, or even to ruin it all? Consider the film *What Dreams May Come* (USA: Vincent Ward, 1998), in which the suicide of a honourable but depressed woman traps her in Hell.<sup>5</sup> And then, is death perceived as the end, or a passageway to something else? In the words of the poet Donne, as referred to in *Wit*: Is death a full stop, or merely a comma?<sup>6</sup>

### *A Biography of Death*

According to Philippe Ariès (1914–1984), pioneer in the writing of social history, the link between death and an individual life story arose at a particular time in history, namely at the end of the 15th century. Ariès attributes the link between death and memory, living in the memory of others and the cult of memory, to the 18th century and onward. The most important sources that Ariès draws upon are graves, obituaries and wills. Based on these, he distinguished four phases. He typifies the period preceding his actual research time span, ranging from the 2nd to the 12th century, as the times of tamed death. Life contains death—*Et moriemur*, we are all going to perish. The second period, ranging from the 12th to the 17th century, he characterizes as the period in which death is born as one's own personal death, and linked to this is the rise of the individual biography. From the 15th century on, '(...) it was thought that each person's entire life flashed before his eyes at the moment of death. It was also believed that his attitude at that moment would give his biography its final meaning, its conclusion'.<sup>7</sup>

Starring Cees Geel, Marcel Hensema, Rifka Lodeizen, Nadja Hübscher, Eva Duijvenstein, Daan Ekkel, Dirk Zeelenberg, Stijn Koomen, Johnny de Mol, Jr, Maria Kooistra. See [www.simondefilm.nl](http://www.simondefilm.nl).

5. *What Dreams May Come* (USA, 1998). Polygram Filmed Entertainment. Produced by Stephen Deutch and Barnet Bain, Screenplay Ronals Bass, based on a novel of Richard Matheson. Directed by Vincent Ward. Music by Michael Kamen. Starring Robin Williams, Annabella Sciorra, Cuba Gooding Jr, Max von Sydow, Jessica Brooks, Josh Paddock, Rosalind Chao. In the Heaven of this movie, people are able to achieve their dreams. Reference is made—in the title of the film—to Hamlet's 'For in that sleep of death what dreams may come'. As in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, suicides go to hell. In the movie the woman's husband, spiritually guided by a tracker, succeeds in tracing her in hell and rescuing her.

6. John Donne, *The Divine Poems* (ed. H. Gardner; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9. For the numbering of the sonnets and the references in *Wit* see further in n. 24.

7. Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 38.

After this, in the third period that Ariès discerns as starting in the 18th century and running until after WOI, the attention is shifted to the death of the other. Death becomes the unaccepted separation, the death of the other, 'thy death', the death of the loved one. Tombs begin to serve as a sign of the presence of the dead. People hold on to the remains. The fourth and last period that Ariès delimits is from 1939 to 1974, which marks the publication of his book. He calls this the period of forbidden death. Death becomes shameful and forbidden. One no longer dies at home, in the bosom of one's family, but in the hospital, and alone.<sup>8</sup>

Ariès' depiction of Western conceptions of death as a succession of different phases evokes the question: Are we now in the last phase that he described? Or, have we meanwhile progressed one or several phases beyond what he described? Authors who draw on Ariès, including Ariès himself, go on to write a sequel to the story, in order to continue and complete the 'biography of death' from its very birth right up until the death of death. In 1983, Ariès wrote of death as 'a sensible nothing' in his work *Images de l'homme devant la mort*.<sup>9</sup> There he refers to the film *Les choses de la vie* (France: Claude Sautet, 1970), in which death is presented as a return to the source or origin.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, the Dutch sociologist of religion Meerten ter Borg writes of death as the end. He signals a change from a longing to live forever to a desire for a paradisaal life (and death).<sup>11</sup>

### *Individual Paths in Trend-Sensitive Patterns*

I recognize the trend that ter Borg draws attention to, the longing for life as a paradise and for a paradisiacal death. I notice people planning their death

8. In the above division in time periods, it must be noted that Ariès is only concerned with Western conceptions of death. Moreover, Ariès's research spans only the period from the Middle Ages up until 1974. Another and earlier starting point, for example with Plato, would certainly have revealed a different rendition. In *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, Plato clearly draws the relationship between death and individual biography. (For recent scholarly translations see the bibliography). The gradual change that Ariès sketches—from anonymous death to individual death—must then be preceded by an opposite course of change.

9. Translation by Janet Lloyd: *Images of Man and Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

10. *Les choses de la vie* (France, 1970). Lira Films. Producers Raymond Danon, Jean Bolvary and Roland Girard. Screenplay by Claude Sautet, Jean-Loup Dabadie et Paul Guimard. Based on the novel *éponyme de ce dernier*. Directed by Claude Sautet. Editing: Jacqueline Thiédot, Marie-Claude Sarnak. Photography: Jean Boffety. Musique: Philippe Sarde. Starring: Michel Piccoli, Romy Schneider, Gérard Lartigau and Jean Bouise.

11. Meerten B. ter Borg, *De dood als het einde* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1993), pp. 114-23.

as if it were an anniversary. The trend that Ariès sketches, going from collective and anonymous graves to individual and identity-constitutive graves, is too noticeable to be ignored. But is hereby the choice for a chronologically ordered biography of death as the narrative form of the story of Western conceptions of death as obvious as it seems? Death is not dead, nor is the death of death anywhere in sight.<sup>12</sup> All people born up until now have died, and have lived with the prospect of certain death. Most people now alive expect to die sooner or later. Is it not then more plausible to sketch shifts in conceptions of death as variable, trend-sensitive patterns in a matrix of possibilities? Especially now that so many images and stories of other times and places are simultaneously available, people develop their own personal attitudes and opinions. Indeed, perhaps there have always been great differences in experience and conception, not only within a culture, but even within one individual person—differences that are lost in a one-sided focus on cultural trends or religious traditions.

### *The Knowledge of Death, the Origin of Religion*

According to Schopenhauer, the knowledge of death lies at the origin of all religions and philosophical systems. The primary function of religious and philosophical systems is to deliver an antidote against the certainty of death. Schopenhauer sharply differentiates between, on the one hand, the three religions of the book (Judaism, Christianity and Islam; or as Schopenhauer always writes, Judaism and the two religion that arose from Judaism); and, on the other hand, Hinduism and Buddhism. One way or the other, the religions of the book all promise individual immortality. Eastern religions promise a loss of individuality, a return to the ocean of being. Most interestingly, however, Schopenhauer signals that—despite all specific doctrines about death—at least within Europe, the opinions people adhere to concerning the interpretation of death fluctuate between death as total destruction and the assumption that we would be, as it were, immortal ‘with hide and hair’.<sup>13</sup>

12. Or should you put your faith in the Russian Kriorus, which is specialized in freezing human bodies? They predict that science will be able to successfully treat symptoms of aging within 10 or 15 years, and that in about five decennia it will be possible to revitalize frozen human beings. For over €7000 you can freeze only the brains. According to them, freezing the brain is sufficient, because that is where ‘all your memories and your identity is stored’ (in the Dutch daily *Trouw*, June 24, 2006).

13. ‘Nach Allem inzwischen, was über den Tod gelehrt worden, ist nicht zu leugnen, dass, wenigstens in Europa, die Meinung der Menschen, ja oft sogar des selben Individuums, gar häufig von Neuem hin und her schwankt zwischen der Auffassung des Todes als absoluter Vernichtung und der Annahme, dass wir gleichsam mit Haut und Haar unsterblich seien’ (Arthur Schopenhauer, ‘Über den Tod und sein Verhältnis zur

Assuming the co-existence of different positions and attitudes regarding death, I would like to map out the conceptions of death in the films I have selected. In doing so, I am searching for the most suitable matrix. The dimension that Schopenhauer mentions, the interpretation of death as a solution or as confirmation of the ego, seems relevant here. Yet perhaps there are more, additional, or more discerning dimensions involved. Is death and dying experienced as absurd or as familiar? Is death seen as a passageway or as The End? Is [the moment of] death determined by accident, or by Fate/God? How about death as judgement, versus death as the great equalizer (see for instance in the biblical book of Qoheleth)? By focusing on the relationship between a main character's death and the narration of personal memories, I hope to detect the most important dimensions, in order to finally address the question whether the conceptions concerning death, as revealed in both films, fit into one and the same (secular or religious) matrix.

### *Wit and Simon*

Both films, *Wit* and *Simon*, start with announcing cancer. Both main characters are middle-aged. And yet, this is where the comparisons between the two films seem to come to a halt. Or not? I will first discuss the films individually, and then weave together my interpretations with reflections on the various dimensions involved in conceptions of death, and on thinking about life under the banner of death.

### *Wit*

*Observations of a Senior Scholar.* *Wit* is a made-for-cable adaptation of the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Margaret Edson. According to Emma Thompson who plays the film's lead character, the reason that no feature film was made for movie theatres can be found in American culture:

They seem to view it as an optional extra over there, rather than something that is inevitable (...). I think it's because you can't sell death to Hollywood. It got 22 million viewers on the small screen in the US but death doesn't fit with the big studio execs. And because 'Wit' is about dying and not the transport of the human spirit, which they view as a happier subject, they're not interested.<sup>14</sup>

*Wit* presents the story of Vivian Bearing (played by Emma Thompson), a prominent professor in 17th century metaphysical poetry. She learns that

Unverstörbarkeit unseres Wesens an Sich', in his *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, II, p. 538.)

14. Emma Thompson's *Wit*—Edinburgh International Film Festival 2001, interviewed by Sian Kirwan. [www.bbc.co.uk/films/2001/08/30/emma-thompson-wit-2001-interview.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2001/08/30/emma-thompson-wit-2001-interview.shtml), August 17, 2006).



she has cancer, in an aggressive form and quite advanced stage. 'I have stage four metastatic ovarian cancer. There is no stage five'.<sup>15</sup> In support of science, it seems, she nevertheless subjects herself to a long-winded and gruelling bout of experimental chemotherapy.

It is also for the sake of science, but now in the Humanities field, that she reports to the camera about her sense of self as an object of medical science. As she allows the doctors to use her body for collecting data in their research projects, she also makes a file of her own mental state and the way in which she is approached. Observations of a senior scholar, distinguishing herself in sickness. At the university she taught literature as an exact science. Now she classifies the results of her own research as superior to that of her medical colleagues. The doctors will certainly be able to harvest fame and fortune with the publication of her case; however, it will not be about her:

They will no doubt write about me. But I flatter myself. The article will not be about me. It will be about my ovaries. It will be about my peritoneal cavity. Which, despite their best intentions, is now crawling with cancer. What we have come to think of as me is, in fact, just the specimen jar.<sup>16</sup>

*Keeping up Standards of Scholarship.* From her admittance to the hospital up until, or nearly until the moment of her death, she employs satirical humour and wit.

'Hi, how you feeling today?' (...) It is the standard greeting here, so I just say, 'Fine' (...). I've been asked, 'How are you feeling today?' while throwing up into a plastic basin (...). I'm waiting for the moment when I'm asked this question and I'm dead. I'm a little sorry I'll miss that.<sup>17</sup>

The people that watch over her are Susie Monahan, a nurse in the hospital who cares for Vivian's condition; Dr Kelekian, the head doctor who just wants results no matter what they are; and Jason Posner, a young doctor with scientific ambitions. He knows Prof. Bearing from his days as a student. Students of biochemistry could not get into medical school unless they were 'well-rounded'. Posner bet with himself that he could get an A in the three hardest courses. And so he followed a course on 17th century poetry with Prof. Bearing. She was highly regarded on campus, he tells Susie, in Vivian's presence. 'Her course looked very good on my transcript'.<sup>18</sup>

*Rereading Donne.* Bearing is an expert authority on John Donne, the famous 17th-century poet and Anglican clergyman whose poems are characterized

15. I cite here from the script that is available on the Internet: [http://www.script-orama.com/movie\\_scripts/w/wit-script-transcript-emma-thompson.html](http://www.script-orama.com/movie_scripts/w/wit-script-transcript-emma-thompson.html).

16. *Wit*, script, p. 50.

17. *Wit*, script, pp. 5, 6.

18. *Wit*, script, p. 25.

by 'wit' and 'conceit'.<sup>19</sup> Launched back into a state of biological existence, 'exposed to death', Bearing seeks a new relationship with Donne's poetry, especially his 'Holy Sonnets'.<sup>20</sup>

The film is set entirely in the hospital, except for four important flashbacks. Three out of these four are centred on an explanation of Donne. In the first, her essay on *Holy Sonnet VI* ('Death Be Not Proud') is rejected as being melodramatic. Then, Vivian was a student whose mentor pointed out the 'standards of scholarship and critical reading' and the importance of more than a simple application of these standards: 'The effort must be total for the results to be meaningful'. The second flashback goes back to her childhood. She is about five years old and reads 'The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies'.<sup>21</sup> Her father's explanation of the word 'soporific' introduces her to a lifetime of literary scholarship. Words are her life. Though this scene is not centred round Donne, he is mentioned as the superlative of her early reading experiences: 'Imagine the effect the words of John Donne first had on me'.<sup>22</sup> In the third and fourth flashback, Vivian is an arrived professor,

19. 'Wit' in the sense of the clever deployment of language in grappling with metaphysical subjects. 'Conceit' as using surprising, far-fetched comparisons and elaborating them in such detail that they have effect. John Donne (1572–1631) was born in a Catholic family and studied law before sailing with the Earl of Essex to attack Cadiz in 1596. He was appointed secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton in 1598, but forfeited his worldly prospects when he secretly married Ann More, Lady Egerton's niece, in 1601. The next twelve years passed in poverty. He entered the Church and in 1621 was made Dean of St Paul's, where he became a renowned preacher. His first collection of poems was published posthumously in 1633 (D.J. Enright, *John Donne* [London: Dent, 1997], cover text).

20. In citing Donne I refer either to the film script or to Helen Gardner's edition, first published in 1952 and now unavailable in the original edition (see for instance H. Gardner [ed.], *John Donne: The Divine Poems* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]). I chose this edition because the script refers to it (*Wit*, script, p. 8). Apart from this explicit reference, this scholar might well have inspired the character of Vivian Bearing. Reading Gardner's preface, one gets the picture of an ambitious scholar who aims at succeeding Sir Herbert Grierson, to whom she pays her debt with the words that all new work on Donne is based on his (p. viii). As remarkable is Gardner's acknowledgment of the debt she owes—like Vivian Bearings in the film—to her English teacher: 'If this book bore a dedication, it would be to the memory of Florence Gibbons, sometime senior English mistress at the North London Collegiate School, with whom, twenty-six years ago, I first read the *Divine Poems* of John Donne' (p. ix).

21. Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies* (originally published 1909), p. 9: 'It is said that the effect of eating too much lettuce is "soporific". I never felt sleepy after eating lettuces; but then *I* am not a rabbit. They certainly had a very soporific effect upon the Flopsy Bunnies'. The full text is available for free reading and download on many web pages, among them <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/14220>.

22. *Wit*, script, p. 40.

disciplining her students to read Donne's poetry (*Holy Sonnet IX* and *A Valediction—Forbidden Mourning*).

In dying, she is coming to terms with what it means to live at all. She poses herself the question whether the knowledge of life and death that she draws from Donne will hold up in these critical times. Her solutions to this dilemma remain unclear. First of all, because the end of her 'play's last scene' still overwhelms her. Secondly, because what she has said and shown can be interpreted in two different ways. It is possible to take her account about her path of suffering as a conversion. Through her suffering, Vivian learns that humanity is more important than science. In this reading, Donne's poetry is unnecessarily complicated, and her study thereof merely a waste of time. However, it is also possible to take her account as a confirmation of her admiration for Donne. Vivian learns to suffer, and Donne is her supporting guide on this path.<sup>23</sup> Let us look at two scenes from the film in order to get a better grip of this ambivalence.

*Donne Undone?* Is Donne undone, or does he prove his worth? The first scene that I would like to present is the first flashback, in which Vivian is admonished by her mentor, Professor Ashford, to do her work over again.

(Ashford) Your essay on *Holy Sonnet VI* is a melodrama with a veneer of scholarship unworthy of you, to say nothing of Donne. Do it again. Begin with the text, Miss Bearing, not with a feeling.

(V.) 'Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou are not so'.

(A.) You've missed the point of the poem because you've used an edition of the text that is inauthentically punctuated. In the Gardner edition...

(V.) That edition was checked out.

(A.) Miss Bearing?

(V.) Sorry.

(A.) You take this too lightly. This is metaphysical poetry, not the modern novel. The standards of scholarship and critical reading that one would apply to any other text are simply insufficient. The effort must be total for the results to be meaningful.

Do you think that the punctuation of the last line of this sonnet is merely an insignificant detail?

The sonnet begins with a valiant struggle with death, calling on all the forces of intellect and drama to vanquish the enemy. But it is ultimately about overcoming the seemingly insuperable barriers separating life, death and eternal life.

In the edition you chose, this profoundly simple meaning is sacrificed to hysterical punctuation

23. 'I am learning to suffer' (*Wit*, script, p. 27).

‘And Death’ capital D...

‘shall be no more;’ semi-colon.

‘Death’, capital D, comma...

‘thou shalt die!’ exclamation mark.

If you go in for this sort of thing I suggest you take up Shakespeare. Gardner’s edition of the *Holy Sonnets* returns to the Westmoreland manuscript source. Not for sentimental reasons, I assure you, but because Helen Gardner is a scholar. It reads:

‘And death shall be no more’, comma...

‘Death thou shalt die’.

Nothing but a breath, a comma separates life from life everlasting. Very simple, really. With the original punctuation restored, death is no longer something to act out on a stage with exclamation marks. It is a comma. A pause. In this way, the uncompromising way one learns something from the poem, wouldn’t you say? Life, death, soul, God, past, present. Not insuperable barriers. Not semicolons. Just a comma.

(V.) Life, death, I see. It’s a metaphysical conceit, it’s wit. I’ll go back to the library.

(A.) It is not wit, Miss Bearing, it is truth. The paper’s not the point.

(V.) Isn’t it?

(A.) Vivian, you’re a bright young woman. Use your intelligence. Don’t go back to the library, go out. Enjoy yourself with friends.

(V.) I went outside. It was a warm day. There were students on the lawn, talking about nothing, laughing. Simple human truth. Uncompromising scholarly standards. They’re connected. I just couldn’t. I went back to the library.<sup>24</sup>

The paradoxical nature of this scene is that on the one hand, there is an opposition between living and learning. Vivian is not able to speak of trivial things, to simply amuse herself with friends. She flees into/chooses for a life with books. At the same time, her mentor points out to her that simple human truth and uncompromising scholarly standards are in fact linked. Donne becomes Vivian’s second voice. But will she arrive at her mentor’s point of view, taking, in the face of suffering and death, the metaphysical conceit not as wit, but as truth? Her occupation with this question is

24. *Wit*, script, pp. 8-12. Note that in the Gardner edition, to which the script refers, the *Holy Sonnets* are printed in three sets. The first set consists of the twelve sonnets, which were printed in the first edition of 1633. The four sonnets which were interpolated later in the second edition on 1635 are printed together, arranged in a logical order of their subject matter. This leaves three sonnets which are extant only in the Westmoreland manuscripts (John Donne, *The Holy Sonnets*, p. v). The implication is that the sonnet ‘Death Be Not Proud’, in many editions Sonnet X, is in this critical edition Sonnet VI.

wonderfully visualized with the switching back and forth between Vivian in the hospital and Vivian in the fragment. The figures change scenery (decor). Without interrupting the story, her past mentor suddenly is at her hospital bed, or the hospital Vivian stands in for the young Vivian. This procedure is repeated in the later flashbacks.

### *Time for Simplicity*

In the flashbacks of Vivian's life as a professor, she still clearly presents Donne's texts as 'wit'. She has also taught Jason Posner to see Donne's poetry as a puzzle in which the aim is not to find a solution but, rather, to look at increasing levels of complexity. 'The puzzle takes over. You're not even trying to solve it anymore. Fascinating really. Great training for lab research'.<sup>25</sup>

But, perhaps, something has shifted in Vivian's experience of Donne's poetry. She withdraws into his poetry about death as into a blanket that protects her from the anonymous handling she receives in the hospital. For example, after being left in a humiliating position on the gynaecologist's table for the first time, she recites 'Death Be Not Proud' by heart as protection against fear and abandonment:<sup>26</sup> Words have always been her shelter. Therefore she also swiftly appropriates the medical jargon: 'My only defence is the acquisition of vocabulary'.<sup>27</sup> Yet Donne remains closest to her. Parked somewhere in a hallway, waiting for a medical test, she recites the beginning of *Holy Sonnet III*:

This is my play's last scene; here heavens appoint  
My pilgrimage's last mile; and my race,  
Idly, yet quickly run, hath this last pace,  
My span's last inch, my minute's latest point;  
And gluttonous death will instantly unjoint  
My body and soul.<sup>28</sup>

She has always particularly liked that poem. 'In the abstract. Now I find the image of my minute's last point a little too, shall we say, pointed'.<sup>29</sup> Too

25. *Wit*, script, p. 76.

26. *Wit*, script, p. 24.

27. *Wit*, script, p. 40.

28. *Wit*, script. p. 48. Note that the text does not follow here the Gardner edition, which reads:

This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint  
My pilgrimages last mile; and my race  
Idly, yet quickly runne, hath this last pace,  
My spans last inch, my minute's last point,  
And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt  
My body, and soule, and I shall sleepe a space, (...)

29. *Wit*, script, p. 49.

pointed or not, Donne's poetry crawls under her skin; at the end of her tether, reflecting back on her conversation with Susie the nurse about her own life and death, and whether or not to be revived when the end comes, while both of them are licking Popsicles, she signals:

That certainly was a maudlin display. Popsicle, "Sweetheart". I can't believe my life has become so corny. But it can't be helped. I don't see any other way (...). Now is not the time for verbal wordplay (...). Now is the time for simplicity.<sup>30</sup>

But does this mean that she rejects Donne in the end, now that things become concrete? Or is it more that Donne has accompanied her, and gone along with her for a long, long time? He gains more depth for her on her bed of suffering; and yet, in light of the approaching end, she realizes that she must let him go. She must shed him in the same way that she took off her shoes; and now, finally, as death comes closer, she decides to stop the treatment.

### *Time to Go*

Halfway through the film we see Vivian admitted to the hospital again, and she is deathly ill. She ends up in isolation. 'I am not in isolation because I have cancer', she analyzes her situation, 'I'm in isolation because I am being treated for cancer. My treatment imperils my health. Herein lies the paradox. John Donne would revel in it. I would revel in it, if he wrote a poem about it'.<sup>31</sup> What she says here about the treatment she has subjected herself to can also be applied to her dedication to Donne's poetry. She has been occupied with it as treatment for the absurdity of existence. The contents of his poetry and her academic study thereof gave meaning and value to her life. But now the time has come for her to recognize her erudition, interpretation and complexity for what they are. And does she have any regrets? And if so, because she would have wanted to continue, or does she regret having spent so many years of her life doing that in the first place?

The second and last fragment that I would like to discuss, which involves Vivian's old mentor visiting her in the hospital, seems crucial for answering these questions, and yet it does not seem to contain a clear conclusion. Or does it?

(Ashford) It's Evelyn.

(V.) Oh, God. Prof. Ashford? Oh, God.

(A.) I'm in town visiting my great-grandson, who is celebrating his fifth birthday. I went to see you in your office, and they directed me here.

I've been walking all over town. I'd forgotten how early it gets chilly here.

30. *Wit*, script, p. 68.

31. *Wit*, script, p. 44.

(V.) I feel so bad.

(A.) Yes, I know you do. I can see. Oh, dear. There, there. (*Takes off coat and shoes, removes the railing to her bed, and lies down next to her*) There, there. There, there, Vivian. It's a windy day. Don't worry, dear. Let's see. Shall I recite something to you? Would you like that? I'll recite something by Donne.

(V.) No.

(A.) Very well.

Let's see... *'The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown. Pictures by Clement Hurd. Copyright, First Harper Trophy edition.

Once there was a little bunny, who wanted to run away... so he said to his mother, "I'm running away".

"If you run away", said his mother, "I will run after you. For you are my little bunny".

"If you run after me", said the little bunny, "I will become a fish in a trout stream, and I will swim away from you".

"If you become a fish in a trout stream", said his mother, "I will become a fisherman, and I will fish for you".

Look at that. A little allegory of the soul. Wherever it hides, God will find it. See, Vivian?

"If you become a fisherman", said the little bunny, "I will be a bird and fly away from you".

"If you become a bird, and fly away from me", said his mother, "I will be a tree that you come home to".

Very clever.

"Shucks", said the little bunny. "I might just as well stay where I am, and be your little bunny".

And so he did.

"Have a carrot", said the mother bunny'.

Wonderful.

Time to go.

And flights of angels

Sing thee to thy rest.<sup>32</sup>

And with this Shakespeare quotation, Professor Ashford leaves the room, and disappears from Vivian's life. In the next scene, which is a check-up visit by Jason, Vivian turns out to have already died, although it takes a while for him to realize this. As predicted by Vivian, he asks her corpse: 'Prof. Bearing, how are you feeling today?'<sup>33</sup>

32. *Wit*, script, pp. 78-81.

33. *Wit*, script, p. 81.



Vivian clearly does not want to have Donne read to her anymore. She calms down to the voice of Prof. Ashford reading aloud from a children's book. Was this book already there on the side table, or had Professor Ashford brought it along for her grandson? And then a quote from Shakespeare, who is a great playwright, and yet in the views earlier propagated by Ashford and Bearing, is a populist when compared to Donne. 'He (Donne) makes Shakespeare sound like a Hallmark card', says Jason as he recalls Bearing's lectures.<sup>34</sup> And yet, does the fact that Vivian does not want to be read aloud to from Donne mean that she rejects him, and writes him off in the end? In a review of the play, Carol Iannone summarizes this as follows:

In the last stages of her cancer, greatly weakened and discomforted, Vivian is visited by her old mentor, Professor Ashford. Ashford offers to recite something from Donne, but Vivian, the great Donne scholar, moans in protest, effectively repudiating all that she has done in her life.<sup>35</sup>

It is possible to interpret this scene in such a way. And yet, another reading is also possible, the reading in which Vivian does not reject Donne but, rather, simply lets him go. With the story of the Runaway Bunny (by Wise-Brown)<sup>36</sup> she returns to her childhood, to the moment when she discovered the magic of words in the story about the Flopsy Bunnies (by Potter) that she tried to read. In her last conversation with Susie, preceding this scene, there was also a reference to that story. Vivian asks if the painkillers have a 'soporific' effect. Susie has no idea what 'soporific' means, but she does say the pills make you sleepy. Vivian then starts to laugh contagiously. It is the first and only time we see her laugh. At least, she has not lost her pleasure in language (and see above, p. 191).

### *'Death Be Not Proud'*

Donne has the last word in the film. After a hectic attempt to revive her, Vivian again lies quietly in her sleep of death, and we hear her one last time in a voiceover as she recites the full text of 'Death Be Not Proud'.

However you look at it, in both readings the relationship between science and humanity, academic and non-academic approaches to life and death, creates the tension in the story Vivian tells as she faces death. Although Vivian never actually mentions the word 'regret', it is clear that in retrospect she is sad about her lack of personal attention for her students: 'I suppose we shall see how the senior scholar ruthlessly denied her simpering students the

34. *Wit*, script, p. 75.

35. Carol Iannone, 'Donne Undone', *First Things* 100 (February 2000), p. 14.

36. M. Wise Brown, *The Runaway Bunny* (originally published 1942; now available in a London: Harpercollins edition, 2006). Both 'Bunny' books, Potter's and Wise Brown's, are considered classical children's books which have never been out of print since their original publication in England and the US, respectively.

touch of human kindness she now seeks'.<sup>37</sup> It remains unclear whether she sees humanity and science as opposites, or as two poles in different dimensions of meaning—on one of which she has missed out. At any rate, her vision of death is double-sided. The implementation of quotes from Donne's 'Death Be Not Proud' points to an internalisation of his vision of death as an overestimated opponent. And yet at the end she is also afraid, obviously afraid. Not the fear of judgement—'If only I had been nicer to others then I would have had nothing to fear now'. Nor is she afraid of worse pain: 'Hard things are what I like best'.<sup>38</sup> She is afraid of the doubts that consume and overwhelm her. She is not sure what to expect, and if there is anything more to expect at all. 'I don't feel so sure of myself anymore'.<sup>39</sup>

### *Simon*

*Simon* is a film about love and friendship, about illness and saying goodbye.<sup>40</sup> It is the story about the hashish dealer Simon. Camiel, a homosexual dentist who now has his life under control, including his sweet, rich real-estate boyfriend Bram, tells the story. Camiel lives with Bram, and they are on the verge of getting married. The friendship between Camiel and Simon is unlikely, and yet immediately convincing. Simon comes into Camiel's life with a bang: his jeep hits Camiel when he still is a poor student. It is June 3rd, 1988. Simon fascinates Camiel, who starts to enjoy the notion that life can be discovered playfully. He even takes all Simon's political incorrectness and flood of comments on Camiel's homosexuality at face value. He becomes involved in the group of people surrounding Simon in his coffee shop in Amsterdam, or in his beach bar in Zandvoort. Simon also invites Camiel to travel to Thailand with him, and pays for his trip. There, Simon has two children, Joy and Nelson, with a Thai ex-wife. Camiel visits the set of an American Vietnam film in which Simon plays as a stuntman. And then things go wrong. In a drunken rush Camiel allows himself—under protest, yet nevertheless—to be seduced by Simon's 'steady bed mate', the kick boxer Sharon. With a lame excuse, he changes his ticket and flies back home ashamed. On the day of his return, he confesses to Simon what happened, and then they part ways. Four moves, six relationships and twelve years later, on October 21st, 2002, Camiel is again nearly hit by Simon:

37. *Wit*, script, p. 58.

38. *Wit*, script, p. 61.

39. *Wit*, script, p. 65.

40. *Simon* is the first part of a trilogy about the liberties of Dutch society. *Sextet*, about love and relations, is the second part, released in September 2007. Eddy Terstall is working on part three, *Vox populi*, a film that will address the relationship between politics and citizens.

(Simon) So, you're still alive?

(Camiel) Yep. You too?

(S.) Well, so far. I have cancer (big smile, wearing a hat that reads 'OK').<sup>41</sup>

### *Narrative Situation*

The film starts off with this introduction, which later returns as a fragment in the story's chronology. Camiel then picks up the friendship with Simon, now a friendship on more equal terms. His memories of spending time—as a student—with Simon are revealed as Camiel talks about him at home. Short scenes are shown in chronological order, during which Camiel's voiceover sometimes alternates with his life presence in his snappy design apartment. These flashbacks are thus presented as 'images over' of Camiel informing his boy friend Bram about the Simon before Bram's time. Later on in the movie, from the time of their renewed meeting to Simon's death, we also get a few flashbacks from Simon's girlfriend Sharon and from his daughter Joy, all embedded in their conversations with Camiel.

Joy and her brother live with their father. Their mother turns out to be dead, after capsizing in a water scooter. Joy tells about how she noticed that Simon was not doing well, and how he told her about it. In the meantime, Sharon is married to one of the owners of the beach bar next to Simon's, a 'heavy damper on the mood', according to Simon back then. She answers Camiel's question concerning what happened between them that lead to her to breaking up with Simon. Things here are far from clear, but her seducing of Camiel was an incident in a row. After catching her with Simon, Sharon had beaten a hockey girl who ended up in the hospital. Simon was fucking half of the hockey team, but when Sharon told him that she too had slept with someone else a few times, he punched her so hard that he broke her nose. 'But he wasn't aggressive really. Well at least not any more aggressive than I was', thus Sharon to Camiel.

As the chronological scenes of the present—Simon's last months are also exclusively scenes in which Camiel figures, as participant in the story or its listener—the effect is that, as a viewer, you are mainly invited to identify with Camiel or, through his eyes, with Simon.

41. The script of *Simon* was not made publicly available, on the Internet or otherwise. A direct application to the film producers did not yield access to the script either. Therefore, even though I reproduce lines from the film as quotations, these are my transcriptions and my translations, made after watching the film many times in DVD format. In the next few pages, then, 'quotations' from the film are not documented in footnotes.

*Opposite Poles*

Just like Vivian in *Wit*, the main character in *Simon* kicks off by announcing his death. However, apart from the direct opening of both films, a greater difference of character between Vivian and Simon is hardly imaginable. Vivian is a book person, a scholar of distinction, always busy, tough and formidable. Simon is a people's person. A cool heterosexual, adolescent but not highly strung. If something happens he takes it in his stride. He does not think in terms of the banal versus the scientific, rather in terms of mood enhancing or destroying a mood. He has a charismatic way with people, allowing him to say things with such charm that no matter what he says, it does not evoke aggression. Simon is an animal lover. He donates an average yearly income to the monkey protection foundation, and to a catboat. He earns about ten times an average income, and yet in order to avoid suspicion he still accepts welfare from the State. Vivian the intellectual finds the hardest part of her illness to be the fear of losing her mind: 'God, I'm gonna barf my brains out. If I did actually barf my brains out, it would be a great loss to my discipline'. Simon's greatest fear is to turn into a vegetable: 'Look, now I don't feel like turning into a living stumped willow tree ... I'd rather have them give me a shot'. He finds it embarrassing if people see him as a near corpse. The idea of physical deterioration, accompanied by loss of mental capacity and caused by pain or medicine, does not appeal to him. The way he tells his daughter that he has cancer is beautiful: 'I have good news, and bad news. The good news is that I still seem to have brains...'

Vivian can deliver entire lectures by heart, in flawless Oxford English. Simon speaks with a thick Amsterdam accent. He has no clue how to spell even the simplest words, yet he gets along with everyone. The things he says are not usually very profound, yet he is usually able to say what gets to him, or what really matters. They share intelligence and black humour, and are both level headed. But whereas Vivian's humour is sharp, Simon's is more like a stand-up comedian's.

*Simon the Philosopher*

It is interesting to note that whereas Vivian 'regresses' into common language on her sickbed, in the same situation Simon develops into a philosopher. Compare Simon's conversation with Camiel about organized religion at the beginning of the film, with the statements he makes at the end of the film. As usual, the conversation with Camiel starts off with a stinging remark from Simon:

(S.) You've really got a Jewish mouthful there, eh? You are Jewish, now aren't you? So am I. I mean, I'm even called Cohen, but such a mouthful as you can spout; they really made it up, eh?

(C.) I don't really do anything with my Jewish background.

(S.) What is he saying? (To the masseur working on Camiel in the coffee shop)

(Masseur) 'I don't really do anything with my Jewish background' (Laughter).

(S.) Oh, how awful. What did you want to do little boy, build a tower, or what? Him over here. How can you be proud of something you have no control of, man.

(C.) Well, I think that the Jews do have some nice things, like personal responsibility, and that God is not up on some cloud, but more like an own conscience.

(S.) Quit it, man. I mean, every organized religion is way wrong. Come on, man.

As commonplace as Simon's rejection of all organized religion, so sharp and private is his questioning of Camiel's words that he does not do anything with his Jewish background: 'What did you want to do little boy, build a tower, or what?' Indeed, little jokes and references to his own Jewishness appear here and there. Later on in the film Simon becomes really philosophical. In his first talk with the doctor about euthanasia—Camiel again comes along—we hear Simon say:

(Simon) At any rate I find it a strange idea that soon I won't be here at all anymore. Well, before birth we haven't been here for centuries either, and you haven't experienced anything then either, so.

(Doctor) A French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, says that 'life is a short interval between two eternities'

(S.) You hear that. I'm not the only one who says that, eh.

(Camiel) Yes, I hear you.

(S.) Yeah, that you are part of it

### *Euthanasia*

When it turns out that the chemotherapy did not have effect, and operating does not seem to be an option, Simon's first question is what will happen with his children. 'It's just starting to hit me, man. Yeah, it's cliché, but the first thing you think of are your children, really. Well, whatever, the world keeps on turning. They don't really need me for that'. To give his children a choice he takes them, and his whole group of friends, to Thailand. There he sets a date for his euthanasia: 'A soccer player has to quit while he can still keep up with the game'. When his daughter Joy turns out to have difficulty accepting it, he lets go of the idea immediately—until his private nurse and Camiel put the decision back in his own hands. It turns out to be too difficult for Joy to bear. Whatever she decides, she will feel guilty. Notice how, in

the following quote from a conversation between the Simon and his nurse, he goes on to make a clear-cut decision by switching from past to present tense:

(Nurse) I don't think you can really let Joy decide about your euthanasia. When it comes down to it, for her it feels like your life is in her hands.

(Simon) Well, I'm going to die no matter what. I am one big tumour.

(N.) We are all going to die. The decision should be yours.

(S.) Well, if the decision *were* mine, then it would be easy. I *will* just do it.

In the short time remaining, Simon arranges for Camiel and Bram to adopt his children. He asks Camiel on his wedding day: 'I don't know if you and Bram would be up for it, but I know, the kids would think it's great'. His contact with everyone, but especially with Joy and Camiel, becomes even more intense. There is a beautiful, also aesthetically beautiful scene in which Camiel enters through the sliding doors into the sanctuary-like room where Simon—with Joy half lying across him—is motionless on a purple bed, surrounded by burning candles and Buddhas, while music is playing. For a moment Camiel thinks Simon is dead, and the following conversation ensues.

(Simon) No, I just have a dress rehearsal every evening. Then I lie on my back, put on a terminal face, and the little one comes over and lies with me. Super duper.

(Joy) The future does not exist. Now we sometimes are happier than ever. It's all about now. People in our culture only think about the future and the past, although all that really counts is the 'now'.

(S.) So, did you think that up all on your own?

(J.) I was allowed to quote you, wasn't I?

### *Rituals*

Camiel promises to be present at the euthanasia. He finds it very difficult. 'You know what I miss, eh, and that's something really stupid, but it's rituals. Or a god or something to kick at'. And yet in the end, Simon's last day is one big ritual, but then a secular one. The scene of forgiveness has already taken place the night before, short and sweet. Simon says to Sharon: 'And we fucked too'. Camiel: 'Yes, so did we'. Simon: 'Yeah, I didn't like that'. Camiel: 'Nor did I'. Sharon: 'Nor did I'. Sharon starts to cry and Simon comforts her. On the last day we see the whole group walking on the beach in Bloemendaal (a seaside town near Amsterdam). They have their last meal in the beach bar, and then wait at home for the doctor to show up.

(S.) That was a nice day. And nice that you are all here. I'm sure lucky. I'm a lucky fellow. What time is it?

(J.) Doesn't matter. Time doesn't exist.

(...) That's a nice one, time doesn't exist. We'll keep that one.

(S.) It will all be fine Cohen.

(J.) Nope, 'cause soon you'll be gone.

(S.) Do you really think that? There's a bit of Simon in you, isn't there?

Everything is lined up for the euthanasia injection. The company surrounds the high bed where Simon is lying. He rolls up his sleeve. 'How about this one here then?' the doctor asks. 'Yeah, I don't know. I'm a bit foggy from the morphine. But I feel ok!' He asks if it goes quickly: 'Stupid eh, I never even wondered how fast it would go'. Simon then briefly connects with everyone; he pushes a necklace in Nelson's hand. And there he goes. The last image in the film is a dive that Simon had taken from a huge waterfall: a flashback that was started earlier in the movie is now completed. 'Do you think Siem is scared, I mean, inside?' Joy asks Camiel. 'I've only seen Siem scared once' Camiel answers, and then we switch to the scene portrayed: 'That was in Thailand, and then he was on the top of a waterfall, and he had to jump off, as a stunt for one of those Vietnam movies. He'd never done that before'. 'And did he jump?' 'Sure, sure, what do you think?'

### *Death Mirroring Memory*

Both in *Simon* and in *Wit*, the main character's death is a given. Both films tell the story of someone who is nearly certain that he or she will die within a short time span, and the story is told mainly backwards with forwards. The story advances in zigzag fashion through a monologue delivered by a main character (Vivian in *Wit*, Camiel in *Simon*), in which chronologically distinct occurrences are embedded in a non-chronological order up to the main character's death. Death surely plays a decisive role. The announcement of its approach triggers a story about the main character that ends at the moment of his or her death. Although the two films are very different, they share the same narratological structure. Could that be because the perception of death in both films is nearly identical? From my discussion of the two films it should be clear how differently Simon and Vivian approach life. The main characters' attitude towards death at first seems quite different too. Simon chooses euthanasia, Vivian offers herself as a test model for future therapies. It is then all the more noticeable that their perception of death is ultimately so similar.

In the introduction to this article, I mentioned a number of possible dimensions in perceptions of death: death as something to be taken for granted,



versus death as an absurdity; death determined by Fate/God versus death as an accident; death as judgement versus death as equalizer. These dimensions are irrelevant, both for Vivian and for Simon. Vivian does seem to regret not having been friendly towards her students, but there is no signal of her being afraid of a judgment from elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> Things like judgment, the absurdity of life and the existence of God are not themes that occupy either character, nor are they preoccupied with the contradictions or paradoxes at play. The dimensions that are important to them are 'death as a passageway' versus 'death as the end', and 'death as dissolving the ego' versus 'death as confirming the ego'. These are the two lines of thought along which their ruminations on death move. Simon tends toward 'death as the end', and yet he briefly returns to death as a passageway. Apart from his philosophical statements, the closing image—Simon's dive from the waterfall—does imply a passageway. Vivian starts at the opposite end, taking death as a 'passageway'—Donne's comma—and yet she does not exclude the possibility of 'death as the end'. Concerning the other dimension, Vivian primarily approaches death as a confirmation of the ego, and yet she also considers the option of death as dissolving the ego. Simon has the opposite position. In this, they are quite different, but the fact that they think in terms of the same oppositions brings them close together after all.

Death is the beginning of many stories. Concluding this article, I would suggest that the perception of death is an important factor in the way of storytelling. Where, as in *The Arabian Nights*, death is seen as a constant peril to be avoided, the stories never come to an ending. Overlapping the end of a story with the beginning of a new one is a way of leaping over the death threat. Where, as in religious stories, death is seen one way or the other as a passageway, the story line tends to be chronological—with a beginning, a middle and an end, an end as a comma or a pause. Where death, as in *Wit* and in *Simon*, is primarily seen as the end, the structure of the story tends to become fragmentary. Death as the dead end of the story provokes a way of storytelling that is reflective in the literal sense of the word. Death functions as the mirror in which we see the dying and the dying see themselves. Whereas Ariès tells his history of death in a chronological order of the birth, growth, decline and death of Death, neither film has a chronological structure. Both films are more a chain of fragments typical for the character, from the perspective of Vivian in *Wit*, and from that of his friends in *Simon*.

42. As Dr Jason Posner, who followed Vivian's courses, puts it: 'The *Holy Sonnets* we worked on mostly were mainly about salvation anxiety. But the puzzle took over: "Great training for lab research. Looking at increasing levels of complexity". Enzyme kinetics was more poetic than Bearing's class. Besides, you can't just go around thinking about that meaning-of-life stuff all the time. You'd go nuts' (*Wit*, script, pp. 76-77).

These life and death stories are more portraits than stories. It is not that there is no chronology at all in them: we follow the main characters from the moment they know they will die backwards up to their actual death. The flashbacks are also often chronological in their sequence of presentation, the point being that there are gaps throughout their whole life. We are not told where Simon or Vivian are born. Their parents only come into the picture fleetingly, in reference to their offspring's illness history. And other gaps abound.

Time becomes irrelevant and costly at the same time. In the perception of both main characters the chronological sense of time gets lost. I have already mentioned Simon's remarks regarding this, here a statement by Vivian: 'You cannot imagine how time can be so still. It hangs. It weighs. And yet there is so little of it. It goes slowly. And yet it is so scarce'.<sup>43</sup> And in the end, when she realises that either her killing pain or the morphine she will get for it will finish her capacity to formulate any coherent lines she comments: 'It came so quickly, after taking so long. There is not even time for a proper conclusion'.<sup>44</sup>

No conclusions indeed, neither in *Wit* nor in *Simon*. Neither Vivian nor Simon makes up the balance. Their stories are not about the meaning of life but about what matters in life, and what matters is that you are someone, a character. The ultimate test in dying is that you prove to be your true self, Simon as the OK guy, Vivian as a scholar for whom the effort must be total to be meaningful. Looking in the mirror of death they see themselves/are seen by others in scenes typical for their character. The selection is not on grounds of feel-good criteria—forget the bad experiences and foster the better ones—but the more characteristic the better.<sup>45</sup>

The mirror of death evokes this character-building process and accomplishes it. The collecting of memories serves the construction of character. Whoever wants to live on in the memory of others needs a character. As characters, the dead Vivian and Simon become ready to play a role in the memory of the living.

Death mirroring memories thus resolves the paradoxes at play. The 'death as the end' side of the mirror collects images of the character, thus confirming his/her ego. The black underside of the mirror remains off-screen.

43. *Wit*, script, p. 32.

44. *Wit*, script, p. 72.

45. In the film *Afterlife* (Japan: Hirokazu Koreeda, 1998) the collecting of memories does serve the construction of a personal paradise. The dead in this film make a detour on their way to the afterlife to find the most beautiful memory to bring along to the other side. That moment becomes their personal paradise. Those who are unable to choose remain in the eternal transit zone which is the film's primary setting.

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## RIZPAH [RE]MEMBERED: 2 SAMUEL 1–14 AND BEYOND

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### *Prior to Rizpah: Some Textual and Other Issues*

A three-year famine is somehow attributed, by Yhwh himself, to Saul's killing of the Gibeonites. A remedy is sought by blood revenge: seven live members of the nearly extinct Saulide house, two sons by Rizpah and five by Michal, are killed and their bodies publicly displayed. Rizpah keeps vigil over the bodies. After a while David is told. He collects the 'bones' of the dead, and Saul's and Jonathan's bodies, and has them buried. Yhwh then lifts the famine, presumably by ending the draught that caused it. A strange and horrifying story, a 'text of terror' to borrow from Phyllis Trible's coinage.

Even before getting to Rizpah and her actions<sup>1</sup> (properly speaking only v. 10; consequences in vv. 11-14), the text is perplexing and difficult to understand. To repeat briefly the main questions of readers, including scholars. To begin with, there is a textual/historical problem in the wider sense. There's no other mention in the biblical text concerning a conflict between Saul and the Gibeonites, even though the toponym Gibeon is well linked to David and his heir Solomon.<sup>2</sup> Historically, as possibly evidenced by the chapter's textual placing, it is difficult to contextualize within David's chronological story although the claim is for its occurring at the beginning of his reign. In view of David's and later Solomon's special links to Gibeon, at least as reflected in the biblical text, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that this is an etiological-tendentious story establishing those links with a sacred place (where Solomon has an initiation dream, in 1 Kings 3

1. The text of 2 Sam. 21.1-14 I used, Hebrew and English, is from the Unbound Bible site (homepage: <http://unbound.biola.edu/>, then search for your passage or idiom).

2. The toponym Gibeon appears in the HB 38 times; the generic singular 'Gibeonite' once in Neh. 3.7, and the generic plural 'Gibeonites' 6 times, only in our chapter. The main clusters of occurrences are about Joshua and his negotiations, then protection of Gibeon (Josh. 9–10), the struggle between Abner and David's supporters (2 Sam. 2–3), and information linked with David and Solomon in 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles (several) and 2 Chron. 1 (twice).

as well as in a second revelation, 1 Kings 9), with yet another attempt to 'explain' divine regret about Saul and his House's demise.

Another set of issues concerns the Gibeonites' demand and action, and David's agreement to accede to them. Neither the oracular procedure nor god's assent here is easy to follow. Worth noting is that, when all is seemingly done and the Saulides are executed, the famine is still not lifted. Here comes the final set of issues, that concerning Rizpah, her action and its consequences. For, if David as well as his readers wish for closure, this comes not after acceding to the Gibeonites' demand, but only after Saul, Jonathan and the impaled sons of Saul's house are brought to burial in their ancestral area (vv. 13-14).<sup>3</sup> It would therefore seem that the story, cryptic and problematically without a precise event-flow context, undermines its own main message: on the one hand, it seems to be an anti-Saulide, pro-David polemic; on the other hand, it seems to imply criticism of David, who needs a woman identified with Saul's house to remind him of his duty—to give honorable burial to the dead of the preceding royal house. In that framework, then, Rizpah is but a tool for educating David.<sup>4</sup>

### *Rizpah: Preliminary Considerations*

Indeed, apart from the single verse disclosing her action, and the narration of consequences, Rizpah is a 'silent witness' albeit not a passive one. All in all she is named four times: once as Saul's secondary wife, never heard of before, whom Abner 'comes to', to the chagrin of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul (2 Sam. 3.7), and as a trigger for Abner's planned cessation from Saul's house; and three times in our chapter (vv. 8, 10, 11). All we know about her is her male-relational status—to Saul after he has died, a passive relationship [not marriage, not in so many words!] with Abner, motherhood to two sons, her behaviour with the family corpses. No more. On that slim basis, we read summaries such as the following:

**RIZPAH** (PERSON) [Heb. רִזְפָּה]. The daughter of Aiah and concubine of Saul ben Kish, first king of Israel. She bore Saul two sons, Armoni and Mephibaal (Mephibosheth). Nothing is known of her life during Saul's reign. During Eshbaal's brief reign, she became the focus of Abner's unsuccessful attempt to depose his inexperienced nephew and rule Israel in his stead (2 Sam. 3.7). By having sexual relations with the former king's concubine,

3. For a rewriting of this passage while deleting Rizpah completely, see Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 7.12.1 and p. 209 below. Other ancient sources too grapple with the questions set briefly above, but these texts are not the subject of this article.

4. That Mephibosheth son of Saul has the same name as Jonathan's son, who appears later in David's court and is allegedly spared because of David's oath to Jonathan (21.7; cf. 2 Sam. 9, 16.4, 19.25-31), presents another difficulty of detail.

Abner tried to lay claim to the throne by virtue of his possession of the royal harem. During the early years of David's joint reign over Israel and Judah, Rizpah's two sons were ritually executed along with the five sons of Merab, Saul's eldest daughter, in an effort to end a three-year famine that had been plaguing the land (2 Sam. 21.1-14)... Rizpah is reported to have kept a vigil over the seven dead bodies, keeping away birds and animals of prey until rain fell and ended the drought—from mid-April until October or November. David then is said to have had the bones of the seven victims gathered up, and to have had them buried along with the exhumed bones of Saul and Jonathan, who had been buried in Jabesh-gilead, in the family ancestral tomb located in Benjamin at Zela.<sup>5</sup>

This summary is quite typical, and undoubtedly constrained by considerations of space and importance. I do not cite it here in order to insult Diana Edelman, whose work I usually appreciate highly. I do so in order to point out that so-called 'minor' female figures in the HB are often exploited not only by/in the text itself—to make a point extraneous to 'themselves'—but also by readers/interpreters, who largely repeat the text's main points, adding on various considerations and assumptions such as (in this case) Abner's attempt to realize a personal ambition through her (or: perhaps he simply loved her for her own sake? Can this option be entertained as well?), or attributing Rizpah's motivation for her act to pious observance of burial customs, or motherly feelings, by way of filling the biblical gaps.

My own intention is to remember female figures such as Rizpah and also re-member them. By re-membering I mean the process of tracing the re-fragmentation and re-grouping of narratives in which they feature, and their being enlisted for fresh contextual uses by contextual readers. My first attempt into this territory was to try and reconstruct a first-person, partly fictive, informed midrashic portraits that take into account the *Nachleben* of such figures. Such *Nachleben* perennially updates in favour of the reteller, or the reteller's fancy or needs: and as such, is worth tracing more for understanding the producer of the biblical figure's *Nachleben* than of the biblical figure's biblical 'life', although the latter may be illustrated afresh as well.

Thus in *I Am: Biblical Women Tell their Own Story*,<sup>6</sup> in the chapter on Rizpah ('Seven'), I used several sources for looking at Rizpah rather than at the relational male figures the story illustrates: from her assumed female genealogy [Rizpah daughter of Aiah] and a wordplay on her name to the midrash and Flavius Josephus—the latter deletes her completely from the 'events' of 2 Samuel 21, since her action seems to reflect badly on David—to

5. Diana V. Edelman 'Rizpah', *ABD CD-ROM*, 1997 (= 1992). See also Edelman's entry 'Rizpah' in C. Meyers, T. Craven and R. Kraemer (eds.), *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 145-46.

6. A. Brenner, *I Am: Biblical Women Tell their Own Story* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), pp. 120-32; see also pp. 225-26 for sources.

two twentieth-century Hebrew plays in which she features. Other sources such as Internet sites were mentioned only briefly. Here I am leaving behind the first-person mode but would like to commence from where I left off in that book. My central question remains that of retelling and memory/memorizing, as applied to this minor figure.

### *Rizpah Traced on Internet: Classification of Materials*

I have limited myself to Internet materials, as a conscious exercise in cultural analysis. Of course I cannot and do not wish to ignore the fact that Internet sources themselves are or may be processed from other textual, non-verbal and media objects. However, because of the Internet's dissemination and accessibility, it is highly suitable for research into the process of contextualizing, hence creating life/culture through and alongside the recreation of the bible.

Looking for Internet traces, for traces they are, of Rizpah, yielded first four types of materials and then an additional fifth. Those are:

1. Translations and retellings of 2 Samuel 21, moving Rizpah more to the story's foreground.
2. Rizpah as a personal name in the early to post-modern periods.
3. Nineteenth and twentieth-century poetry, with Rizpah at its centre.
4. Contemporary women's charismatic churches and other organizations; and finally,
5. Rizpah connections to some Freemasons' temples, or 'shrines'.

### *Rizpah Translations, Paraphrases and Retellings*

Translations, paraphrases, retellings and straight forward sermons extolling Rizpah in general terms for her deeds, also attributing to her maternal and theological motives that are 'silent' in or 'missing' from the HB text, are many. Customarily such texts would allow the exemplum Rizpah much more space and significance than she receives in the biblical text, considerably and dramatically expanding on the single biblical verse (v. 10) describing her actions. These texts, interesting as they may be, with their central message, common to feminist and non-feminist contemporary readers alike share a message: through her non-verbal persistence a pious woman [yes!] may teach a man a lesson by her behaviour, even when she is unimportant and he is an elevated king and god's chosen. Such interpretive texts are not surprising in that they differ from the source text in amplification and processing. They do spell out an extra moral lesson for men and women, but not in a revolutionary or novel fashion.



I do not wish to discuss such renderings at length beyond pointing out the relatively common romancing of two features, namely the praise Rizpah receives for her textual silence; and the value of proper burial. Two examples will suffice here.

In September 2003, forty female representatives participated in an Asian Ecumenical Consultation, 'Overcoming Violence against Women and Children', held in Manila. The group was sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia and hosted by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

Early Biblical and theological insights of women's wisdom and liberation were provided by Dr Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro from Silliman University in the Philippines. Using texts such as those in 2 Samuel—the story of strength through silence...some possibilities of working differently were explored.<sup>7</sup>

In a blog dated October 15, 2004, Marilyn Griffith—female and black, from Florida; describing herself as 'disciple/writer' and 'strange but wonderful'—cites the biblical text of 2 Samuel 21 together with a paraphrase of a sermon, ultimately applied to her Christian situation; the burial issue is taken up as central and made into a *proper* burial issue, that is, ultimate homing into the bosom of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

I use the word 'romancing' deliberately, since it seems to me that the consumers' context dictates their understanding, then gap filling, of the biblical text. Working backwards from the silence commonly and culturally enforced on oriental women, it is relatively easy to attribute to the literary Rizpah silence as a matter of technique or situation whereas, in the HB, the reason for her literary silence may be different. Frank Polak, working from the perspective of discourse analysis, thinks that the whole passage hangs on Rizpah's silence.<sup>9</sup> But my tendency is to fill the gap differently: in my opinion the passage hangs on her persistence in action. Now, who is right here? Moreover, why did Rizpah do as she did? It is customary to attribute her action to her wish to bring the bodies, her sons' and other kin's bodies, to burial since burial is a sacred value in the HB. This is indeed possible by citing the many examples of narrated burials, together with ceremonies and places linked to them, in the HB. However, those sources talk more about *proper* burial than about burial *per se*. And there is one more possibility: that Rizpah objected to the [foreign?] custom of displaying a dead adversary's body as trophy, to the shame caused by the performative element certainly sought by the Gibeonites, more than to anything else. Or perhaps was

7. In *Unity* Spring/Summer 2004, read online, [http://www.ncca.org.au/\\_\\_data/page/2217/04\\_SS\\_06.pdf](http://www.ncca.org.au/__data/page/2217/04_SS_06.pdf).

8. <http://rhythmsofgrace.blogspot.com/2004/10/rain-from-heaven.html>.

9. In a discussion of this contribution's first draft, workshop in Tel Aviv, February 2005; and see also his article in this volume, esp. pp. 48–50.



her concern not necessarily for the *proper burial*, that is, ceremonial and in one's own family grave, as David gratuitously does at the end, but simply for the end of the shameful, public spectacle and the return of family honour in any form of burial?

I find it interesting, in these and more examples, that the Rizpah figure is adopted as emblematic by non-western women, a marginal woman figure magnified into an exemplum for marginalized women. This, however, is not always the case<sup>10</sup> and certainly does not hold for the next category.

### *The Name Rizpah and its Contexts in Family Trees/Genealogical Lists*

www.genealogy.com is a mine of information. For instance, there is a discussion thread about Rizpah Laforge (1793–1882, Somerset County, NJ);<sup>11</sup> and a digital book at the University of Pennsylvania has a Rizpah in its eighteenth to nineteenth-century genealogies linked to 'The early Village'.<sup>12</sup> Truman Ames, a lawyer born in 1851 and residing in Lake County, Illinois, was originally from a Vermont/Pennsylvania family. There were eight siblings: 'Walter W., Lydia W., Edmund, *Rizpah*, Truman, Watie M., Lillie P. and Luella'.<sup>13</sup> In official registries as well as genealogy forums, there are Rizpahs in Vermont and other New England areas, and across the Canadian Border. Even a year ago, a *Rizpah* Stone was looking for an ancestor, her father's mother called Ruby Hockaday, from North Carolina. She is a young woman: the father she never met was born in the 1940s.<sup>14</sup>

The location as well as family histories point mainly to white, Protestant environments where the name was if not exactly popular, then at least used fairly widely. (That the name is now less common seems to be clear.) Why was it, for a while, a noticeable given biblical name? This is difficult to determine. Perhaps an identification of Rizpah with Mary, made by some, because of the vigil for the dead/executed, played its part. And this appears also in at least one strand of Rizpah-inspired poetry/literature.

10. A quick search using Google blogsearch beta (<http://search.blogger.com/?q=rizpah&hl=en&ie=UTF-8&x=20&y=6&filter=0&ui=blg&sa=N&start=0>) will show 128 recent postings, mainly by women, using Rizpah as an emblem. As far as I can ascertain, there are no clear race delimiters here, although most postings are gendered female. See also [http://www.womensministries.cc/prayer\\_january06.htm](http://www.womensministries.cc/prayer_january06.htm).

11. <http://genforum.genealogy.com/laforge/messages/198.html> etc.

12. [http://www.libraries.psu.edu/do/digitalbookshelf/27995405/27995405\\_part\\_02.pdf](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/do/digitalbookshelf/27995405/27995405_part_02.pdf).

13. <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/sd/state/tluc/page101.html>.

14. <http://www.jenforum.com/hockaday/messages/328.html>.

*Nineteenth-Century Rizpah Poetry*

My search for poetry was not infinite: I am sure that, given more time and effort, more examples of Rizpah poems in the English language could have been found,<sup>15</sup> and probably prose too.<sup>16</sup> However, the laws of Internet search and distribution would perhaps indicate that the examples below (and reproduced in *Appendix 1*) are the most famous for, or most often read by, contemporary readers.

The most popular and often cited poems are from the second half of the *nineteenth century*. They are written by male poets: Buchanan, Tennyson, Kendall and Bryant. This gender factor is interesting; first, in view of the greater attachment of *twentieth-century* female readers to the Rizpah figure, as already shown and as will be shown also below, under 'Charismatic Churches'; and second because, unlike the female-gendered Rizpah usages cited above, only Buchanan focuses on Rizpah's alleged theological dimensions, while the other three poets use her figure as a stepping stone for social, political and religious critique.

Robert Williams Buchanan (1841–1901), in *The Earthquake* [1885], ll. 110–23, calls Rizpah 'mother of nations' (l. 110) and explicitly equates her with Jesus' mother Mary and the taking of the body from the Cross ('Madonna', ll. 115, 123). This link may explain further and implicitly the attachment of Christian female readers to the Rizpah figure. I have not checked the Church Fathers and early modern interpreters for such an interpretation: this would be another project. At any rate, an interpretation such as this, without assuming actual knowledge of the poem, may also bolster the adoption of Rizpah as an emblem figure for charismatic women churches (below).

Alfred Lord Tennyson's (1809–1892) ballad 'Rizpah', written in 1880, is perhaps the most famous Rizpah poem. But is it about the biblical Rizpah? Not really. The ballad is a soliloquy of a dying woman, obviously delivered just before her death to another [silent but strongly implied as audience] woman. As the ballad unfolds, we understand that the dying woman is poor and disreputable, her listener bourgeois and conventionally pious. The speaker—'Rizpah'—is explaining to her listener how her son was convicted of robbery and executed, part of the sentence being to leave his body

15. One line in Christopher Smart's (1722–1771) *Jubilate Agno*: Fragment B, Part 1 ('let Rizpah rejoice with the Eyed Moth who is beautiful in corruption'); Edward Hayes Plumptre (1821–1891), *Rizpah Daughter of Aiah*; Frances E.W. Harper (1824–1911), *Rizpah, the Daughter of Aiah*; Felicia Dorothea Hemans, née Browne (1793–1835), *The Vigil of Rizpah*, in *A Century of Sonnets* (ed. Paula Feldman), p. 409. Several of those and possibly others are to be found in the Electronic Poetry Project of Emory University, under several headings.

16. For instance, a novel by Charles E. Israel, *Rizpah* (1961), which I have not been able to read.

to rot in a metal cage without possibility of burial. She has spent years collecting the son's bones and finally managed to bury them all. In her talk she attacks the conventional piety of her listener, which is implied by the unfolding story, and justifies her own morbid action by mother's love and the higher demands of decency (burial).

Tennyson put '17-' at the beginning of the poem, indicating that the monologue/conversation takes place in the eighteenth century. Indeed, the poem is based on a true story that happened in Shoreham, Sussex, in 1792. A highway robbery by a Shoreham man named Rook, an accomplice to a man called Howell, on the mail at the Goldstone Bottom resulted in the execution of the perpetrators by hanging.<sup>17</sup> The recovery of the bones from the gibbet by Rook's mother was used by Tennyson about 100 years later together with the biblical story for social critique of class and religion, which he did quite often in his poetry, recycling older myths and events (such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* in *In Memoriam*) for critique of Victorian conventions he perceived as unjust. However, apart from the imperfect similarity in the two figures' preoccupation with their sons' dead bodies, Tennyson's *Rizpah* bears little similarity to the biblical Rizpah.

Henry Kendall (1839–1882), an Australian poet, embeds an elaboration of v. 10 within a passer-by's message to David: he actually uses the few words of v. 11—'and David was told what Rizpah daughter of Aiah, Saul's *pilegesh*, had done'—as a narrated frame in which the events that occur in one biblical verse are expanded, with other figures (such as a watchman) added. And he stops there: for Bryant in this poem, David does not act upon being told.

But David, son of Jesse, spake no word,  
But turned himself, and wept against the wall.

Whether David did bury the sons outside Bryant poem or not, and also his apparent pain upon hearing the story (an addition to the biblical text and undoubtedly in David's favour), is of no consequence to what happens here. From this point onwards the poem becomes an unambiguous critique of the American civil war, foregrounding especially the situation of women/mothers, citing also Rachel and her quest for her sons. Rizpah (singular)

17. In the 18th century the mail was delivered on horseback. On 30 October 1792, a crook by the name of Edward Howell undertook the robbery of the mail coach at the Goldstone Bottom, with his accomplice a young man named James Rook. James Rook gave away his involvement at the Red Lion, Shoreham, and the two highwaymen were arrested for the robbery from John Stephenson (the boy delivering the mail) of half a sovereign. They were tried and found guilty at the Spring Assizes at Horsham and sentenced to death. The hangings took place on 26 April 1793 before a large crowd at the Goldstone. After the two guilty men were hanged, the bodies were saturated in tar and enclosed in a gibbet, an iron frame with the chains fastened to the bodies (<http://www.glaucus.org.uk/GoldMail.htm>).

becomes American Rizpahs (plural). Once again, perhaps a different slant to the biblical story.

William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), an American poet and journalist, begins his poem by quoting 2 Sam. 21.9–10. He then lets Rizpah tell her story of v. 10, at great length, in a monologue. In addition to describing the vigil in great detail, and dwelling upon her maternal sufferings, Rizpah has an ethical critique. Her sons have not sinned: the alleged sin was their father's; and yet, they were sentenced to death, and an ignoble death at that. The issue of collective/cross-generational punishment is raised and defined as unjust.

The poems are of course very different from each other. But the [male] poets' tendency to use the Rizpah figure for social critique (apart from in Buchanan's case) is clear. Another feature worth noting is the voice given To Rizpah by Tennyson (although his Rizpah is not the biblical Rizpah!) and by Bryant. Apparently, these two poets do not recognize strength in Rizpah's silence but in her action—and in the speech they award her.

### *Contemporary Charismatic Churches and Other Women's Organizations*

*The Daughters of Rizpah*<sup>18</sup> is a charismatic Black/African American church run by Pastor Jacqueline E. McCullough, CEO and President, who founded the church in 1986.

Daughters of Rizpah is an international urban evangelistic ministry with a traditional missionary grassroots focus. Technologically on the cutting edge, Daughters of Rizpah functions as a publishing and distribution company that provides services to the community, both nationally and internationally by promoting family enhancement, educational development and spiritual renewal.<sup>19</sup>

Pastor McCullough, a former nurse, also runs an organization known as *Beth Rapha*: while the web site claims this is Hebrew for 'House of Healing',<sup>20</sup> this seems more like Aramaic to me—at any rate, the house is dedicated to healing through prayer. Both organizations seem like big and healthy businesses, based in Brooklyn, New York but with many urban branches across the US.

There is also another Rizpah association of women dedicated to nursing, and an organization called 'Daughters of Rizpah', 'Women coming together praying for families, churches, leaders, schools and the nations',<sup>21</sup> and a company called 'Rizpah.com' offers religious links, and more.<sup>22</sup> One

18. <http://www.rizpah.org/>.

19. <http://www.rizpah.org/aboutdaughters.htm>.

20. <http://www.bethrapha.org/index2.html>.

21. <http://womenofrizpah.cabanova.com/>.

22. <http://www.rizpah.com/>.

text will perhaps suffice here to illustrate this latter-day Rizpah attachment and what it means in terms of the biblical story's latter-day articulation.

...This [Rizpah's actions, AB] is a metaphor for how relentless our intercessory prayers should be. We should determine to cover those in sin and those in need with our prayers so that Satan can't devour them, be it daytime or nighttime. Rizpah was not deterred by hunger, by exhaustion, by the stench of the bodies, by her grief, by the hopelessness of her situation, or by the reactions of those passing by. She was single-minded in her goal to see that the sons and the grandsons of a king were properly buried. Her persistence paid off. When David was told what Rizpah was doing, not only were her own sons buried, but so were the bones of Saul and Jonathan and the bodies of Saul's grandsons as well.

If an earthly king such as David would yield to the demands of a persistent concubine named Rizpah, how much more will a loving heavenly Father hear and answer the persistent prayers of mothers in Zion who long for the salvation of souls and not just physical bodies? We must be persistent in prayer. God wants to answer our prayers for restoration.

Abraham persisted in prayer for Lot, and Lot was saved. Jacob persisted in prayer, and the Lord blessed him. Moses persisted in prayer for the sins of the Israelites, and they were not destroyed...

God will hear the persistent prayer of the church today!<sup>23</sup>

Elements such as (proper) burial, persistence, action, motivation, and somehow also prayer are all combined in an updated figure. Rizpah's intercessory powers are compared to Abraham's and Moses', her praying powers (!) to Jacob's. Ultimately she becomes not only an emblem of the church but the Church itself—whether the Christian church in general or the particular Rizpah Church on this, 'today's', day of prayer, remains ambiguous.

Last but not least, there is a seemingly unrelated 'Daughters of Rizpah Janitorial Service' in Jacksonville, FL.<sup>24</sup> I have no idea who the Janitorial service owner/s is/are, from the viewpoint of colour. It is clear, though, that the energetic Daughters of Rizpah church has chosen her emblematic matron not only because of her biblical character as imagined and re-imaged but also and mainly for her colour: for in Hebrew Rizpah means 'burning coal', hence 'black'. Perhaps this understanding can be applied to the name choice of the Florida Service company as well.

### *A Rizpah Shrine*

There exists a Freemasonry-related 'Mystical Order of the Shrine'. The story is a little strange, to say the least, and perhaps well-worth quoting verbatim from the website. (The full quote is to be found in *Appendix 2*).

23. [http://www.womensministries.cc/prayer\\_january06.htm](http://www.womensministries.cc/prayer_january06.htm).

24. <http://www.drjclean.com/index.html>.

Gleaned from various Shriners' sites as well as from the *Wikipedia* site,<sup>25</sup> it would seem that the Shriners, or *Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine* [AAONMS, an anagram of 'Masons'], are an order attached to the Freemasons. Until 2000, an aspirant member had to complete either the Scottish Rite or York Rite degrees of Masonry to be eligible for Shrine membership, but now any Master Mason can join. Established in New York City in the 1870s, the Shriners are best known for organizing fun events. Members of the Shrine are immediately recognizable by the fezzes they wear, and are often seen in parades and as clowns in the Shrine Circus. However, the Shrine is also noted for its charitable works, most notably the Shriners' hospitals for children, which provide medical treatment to children free of charge.

The Shriners' lodges or, as they call them, 'temples' or 'mystical temples', were usually given Arab names, such as Abdallah, Abu Bekr and Rameses, with few exceptions.<sup>26</sup> There are three shrines in Kentucky: one of them, the Rizpah Shrine, is in Madisonville. However, how it came to its name could not be found, since the URLs given do not seem relevant at this time. One of them does not work; and the second loops through commercial information without delivering 'secretive' Shriners' and Freemasons' 'secrets'.<sup>27</sup>

Why Rizpah, then? This remains unclear. What is nevertheless striking is the choice of a biblical name; of a biblical female figure at that, for a male-centred institution; and the connection to healing, be it accidental or otherwise, as also apparent in the discussion of the charismatic women's churches and organizations.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The journey undergone in this article took me from a biblical text with a silent although highly active figure at its centre, Rizpah, a 'burning coal' that is not consumed by its own fire; through Internet alleyways of Rizpah *Nachleben* in—principally—English-speaking Christian culture, early modern to modern to post-modern. The available sources were classified into five groups: translations, interpretations, retellings and take-offs from the biblical texts; Rizpah as a personal name in the early to post-modern period; nineteenth and twentieth century poetry, with a 'Rizpah' at its centre; contemporary women's charismatic churches and other organizations; and Rizpah 'shrines'. I was hoping to answer some questions, namely: What

25. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shriners>.

26. <http://www.iremshrine.org/Shrines.htm> lists all shrines by name, location and contact details. Other sites give the meanings of the names and their derivation, when known.

27. Various as <http://www.rizpahtempel.org/> or <http://rizpahtemple.com>.

are the common ideological parameters, if any, that can be deduced from each cluster/group/classified category? Does the genre or form (genealogies, poetry, religious info/propaganda) reflect or shape the re/membering? Can time/place characteristics be defined as decisive or significant for Rizpah usage?

At the end of this search I find myself unable to answer these questions in a way that will satisfactorily make sense of the disparate materials I discovered, to bundle my findings—interesting as they may be—into a meaningful whole. Perhaps such an endeavour is, ultimately, a reductionist exercise neither possible nor advisable. I can see no direct line of historical or cultural development in what was here presented. What I can see are certain modes of *use* and adaptation to changing conditions of time, gender, class, personal status—in certain locations. I can understand why Asian women and also white women from the American Bible Belt would interpret Rizpah's silence not only as a virtue but also as a tool for affecting change; I can also see why some male interpreters would see it as such as well, within the framework of upholding traditional female virtues. The same applies to various other attempts to find in the biblical story's gaps additional elements that could update it to specific readers' concerns. A tenuous link produced (and evident in Buchanan's poem) between Rizpah and Mary may support the relative popularity of Rizpah as a first name, but nevertheless does not explain its race provenance (apparently white) in the early modern and modern period, and its status as less fashionable today; and I know nothing about its colour provenance now. The choice of attributing emblematic 'black' significance to Rizpah is understandable from the name's meaning in Hebrew ('burning coal'), but the timing of this choice remains inexplicable. The political use of Rizpah by the poets cited (Tennyson, Kendall, Bryant; not Buchanan, whose use is religious more than political) does not require justification, since the biblical story itself is highly political and can be taken further. What amazes me is that only one poet—Kendall—uses it directly to criticize David and other persons of authority, whereas this is done repeatedly by woman readers; a gender differential is apparent here. Finally, the Rizpah shrine remains enigmatic.

This inconclusive picture, strands that form a loose mosaic, may be the result of non-sufficient information, defective search, lack of patience, Internet (my chosen medium) slant for US sources, especially when the language search is English; but it may also point to the possibility that the *Nachleben* of biblical figures, like other cultural myths, may be unpredictable and at times impossible to tame into tidy categories; and that recording the ways their memory is [re]constructed may be more fruitful than stating too easily that this or the other interpretation, or usage, is 'right' or 'wrong'—outside scholarship as well as in it.



## APPENDIX 1: THE POEMS

Robert Williams Buchanan (1841–1901)  
 From *The Earthquake* [1885],<sup>28</sup> ll. 110–123

O Rizpah, Mother of Nations, the days of whose glory are done,  
 Moaning alone in the darkness, thou countest—the bones of thy Son!

The Cross is vacant above thee, and He is no longer thereon—  
 A wind came out of the night, and He fell like a leaf, and was gone.

But wearily through the ages, searching the sands of the years,  
 Thou didst gather His bones together, and wash them, Madonna, with tears.

They have taken thy crown, O Rizpah, and driven thee forth with the swine,  
 But the bones of thy Son they have left thee; yea, kiss them and clasp—they  
 are thine!

Thou canst not piece them together, or hang them up yonder afresh,  
 The skull hath no eye within it, the feet and the hands are not flesh.

Thou moanest an old incantation, thou troublest the world with thy cries—  
 Ah God, if the bones should hear thee, and join once again, and arise!

In the night of the seven-hill'd City, discrown'd and disrobed and undone,  
 Thou waitest a sign, O Madonna, and countest the bones of thy Son!

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), British<sup>29</sup>

*RIZPAH*

17–

I.

Wailing, wailing, wailing, the wind over land and sea—  
 And Willy's voice in the wind, 'O mother, come out to me'.  
 Why should he call me to-night, when he knows that I cannot go?  
 For the downs are as bright as day, and the full moon stares at the snow.

II.

We should be seen, my dear; they would spy us out of the town.  
 The loud black nights for us, and the storm rushing over the down,  
 When I cannot see my own hand, but am led by the creak of the chain,  
 And grovel and grope for my son till I find myself drenched with the rain.

28. <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/quake2.html#rizpah>.

29. <http://home.att.net/~TennysonPoetry/rizpah.htm> as well as many other sites.



## III.

Anything fallen again? nay—what was there left to fall?  
 I have taken them home, I have number'd the bones, I have hidden them  
 all.  
 What am I saying? and what are *you*? do you come as a spy?  
 Falls? what falls? who knows? As the tree falls so must it lie.

## IV.

Who let her in? how long has she been? you—what have you heard?  
 Why did you sit so quiet? you never have spoken a word.  
 O—to pray with me—yes—a lady—none of their spies—  
 But the night has crept into my heart, and begun to darken my eyes.

## V.

Ah—you, that have lived so soft, what should *you* know of the night,  
 The blast and the burning shame and the bitter frost and the fright?  
 I have done it, while you were asleep—you were only made for the day.  
 I have gather'd my baby together—and now you may go your way.

## VI.

Nay—for it's kind of you, Madam, to sit by an old dying wife.  
 But say nothing hard of my boy, I have only an hour of life.  
 I kiss'd my boy in the prison, before he went out to die.  
 'They dared me to do it', he said, and he never has told me a lie.  
 I whipt him for robbing an orchard once when he was but a child—  
 'The farmer dared me to do it', he said; he was always so wild—  
 And idle—and couldn't be idle—my Willy—he never could rest.  
 The King should have made him a soldier, he would have been one of his  
 best.

## VII.

But he lived with a lot of wild mates, and they never would let him be  
 good;  
 They swore that he dare not rob the mail, and he swore that he would;  
 And he took no life, but he took one purse, and when all was done  
 He flung it among his fellows—I'll none of it, said my son.

## VIII.

I came into court to the Judge and the lawyers. I told them my tale,  
 God's own truth—but they kill'd him, they kill'd him for robbing the mail.  
 They hang'd him in chains for a show—we had always borne a good  
 name—  
 To be hang'd for a thief—and then put away—isn't that enough shame?  
 Dust to dust—low down—let us hide! but they set him so high  
 That all the ships of the world could stare at him, passing by.  
 God 'ill pardon the hell-black raven and horrible fowls of the air,  
 But not the black heart of the lawyer who kill'd him and hang'd him there.

IX.

And the jailer forced me away. I had bid him my last goodbye;  
They had fasten'd the door of his cell. 'O mother!' I heard him cry.  
I couldn't get back tho' I tried, he had something further to say,  
And now I never shall know it. The jailer forced me away.

X.

Then since I couldn't but hear that cry of my boy that was dead,  
They seized me and shut me up: they fasten'd me down on my bed.  
'Mother, O mother!'—he call'd in the dark to me year after year—  
They beat me for that, they beat me—you know that I couldn't but hear;  
And then at the last they found I had grown so stupid and still  
They let me abroad again—but the creatures had worked their will.

XI.

Flesh of my flesh was gone, but bone of my bone was left—  
I stole them all from the lawyers—and you, will you call it a theft?—  
My baby, the bones that had suck'd me, the bones that had laughed and  
had cried—  
Theirs? O no! they are mine—not theirs—they had moved in my side.

XII.

Do you think I was scared by the bones? I kiss'd 'em, I buried 'em all—  
I can't dig deep, I am old—in the night by the churchyard wall.  
My Willy 'ill rise up whole when the trumpet of judgment 'ill sound,  
But I charge you never to say that I laid him in holy ground.

XIII.

They would scratch him up—they would hang him again on the cursed tree.  
Sin? O yes—we are sinners, I know—let all that be,  
And read me a Bible verse of the Lord's good will toward men—  
'Full of compassion and mercy, the Lord'—let me hear it again;  
'Full of compassion and mercy—long-suffering'. Yes, O yes!  
For the lawyer is born but to murder—the Saviour lives but to bless.  
*He*'ll never put on the black cap except for the worst of the worst,  
And the first may be last—I have heard it in church—and the last may be first.  
Suffering—O long-suffering—yes, as the Lord must know,  
Year after year in the mist and the wind and the shower and the snow.

XIV.

Heard, have you? what? they have told you he never repented his sin.  
How do they know it? are *they* his mother? are *you* of his kin?  
Heard! have you ever heard, when the storm on the downs began,  
The wind that 'ill wail like a child and the sea that 'ill moan like a man?

XV.

Election, Election and Reprobation—it's all very well.  
But I go to-night to my boy, and I shall not find him in Hell.  
For I cared so much for my boy that the Lord has look'd into my care,  
And He means me I'm sure to be happy with Willy, I know not where.

## XVI.

And if *he* be lost—but to save *my* soul, that is all your desire:  
 Do you think that I care for *my* soul if my boy be gone to the fire?  
 I have been with God in the dark—go, go, you may leave me alone—  
 You never have borne a child—you are just as hard as a stone.

## XVII.

Madam, I beg your pardon! I think that you mean to be kind,  
 But I cannot hear what you say for my Willy's voice in the wind—  
 The snow and the sky so bright—he used but to call in the dark,  
 And he calls to me now from the church and not from the gibbet—for hark!  
 Nay—you can hear it yourself—it is coming—shaking the walls—  
 Willy—the moon's in a cloud—Good-night. I am going. He calls.

Henry Kendall (1839–1882), Australian poet<sup>30</sup>

*Rizpah*

SAID one who led the spears of swarthy Gad,  
 To Jesse's mighty son: 'My Lord, O King,  
 I, halting hard by Gibeon's bleak-blown hill  
 Three nightfalls past, saw dark-eyed Rizpah, clad  
 In dripping sackcloth, pace with naked feet  
 The flinty rock where lie unburied yet  
 The sons of her and Saul; and he whose post  
 Of watch is in those places desolate,  
 Got up, and spake unto thy servant here  
 Concerning her—yea, even unto me:—  
 "Behold", he said, "the woman seeks not rest,  
 Nor fire, nor food, nor roof, nor any haunt  
 Where sojourns man; but rather on yon rock  
 Abideth, like a wild thing, with the slain,  
 And watcheth them, lest evil wing or paw  
 Should light upon the comely faces dead,  
 To spoil them of their beauty. Three long moons  
 Hath Rizpah, daughter of Aiah, dwelt  
 With drouth and cold and rain and wind by turns,  
 And many birds there are that know her face,  
 And many beasts that flee not at her step,  
 And many cunning eyes do look at her  
 From serpent-holes and burrows of the rat.

30. <http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/K/KendallHenry/verse/PoemsOfKendall/rizpah.html> and others.

Moreover," spake the scout, "her skin is brown  
And sere by reason of exceeding heat;  
And all her darkness of abundant hair  
Is shot with gray, because of many nights  
When grief hath crouched in fellowship with frost  
Upon that desert rock. Yea, thus and thus  
Fares Rizpah", said the spy, O King, to me'.

But David, son of Jesse, spake no word,  
But turned himself, and wept against the wall.

We have our Rizpahs in these modern days  
Who've lost their households through no sin of theirs,  
On bloody fields and in the pits of war;  
And though their dead were sheltered in the sod  
By friendly hands, these have not suffered less  
Than she of Judah did, nor is their love  
Surpassed by hers. The Bard who, in great days  
Afar off yet, shall set to epic song  
The grand pathetic story of the strife  
That shook America for five long years,

And struck its homes with desolation—he  
Shall in his lofty verse relate to men  
How, through the heat and havoc of that time,  
Columbia's Rachael in her Rama wept  
Her children, and would not be comforted  
With that high patience that no man attains,  
For tidings, from the bitter field, of spouse,  
Or son, or brother, or some other love  
Set face to face with Death. Moreover, he  
Shall say how, through her sleepless hours at night,  
When rain or leaves were dropping, every noise  
Seemed like an omen; every coming step  
Fell on her ears like a presentiment  
And every hand that rested on the door  
She fancied was a herald bearing grief;  
While every letter brought a faintness on  
That made her gasp before she opened it,  
To read the story written for her eyes,  
And cry, or brighten, over its contents.

William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), American poet and journalist<sup>31</sup>

*RIZPAH*

And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord; and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of the harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley-harvest.

And Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest upon them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. 2 Samuel, xxi. 10

Hear what the desolate Rizpah said,  
As on Gibeah's rocks she watched the dead.  
The sons of Michal before her lay,  
And her own fair children, dearer than they:  
By a death of shame they all had died,

And were stretched on the bare rock, side by side.  
And Rizpah, once the loveliest of all  
That bloomed and smiled in the court of Saul  
All wasted with watching and famine now,  
And scorched by the sun her haggard brow,  
Sat mournfully guarding their corpses there,  
And murmured a strange and solemn air;  
The low, heart-broken, and wailing strain  
Of a mother that mourns her children slain: –  
"I have made the crags my home, and spread  
On their desert backs my sackcloth bed;  
I have eaten the bitter herb of the rocks,  
And drunk the midnight dew in my locks;  
I have wept till I could not weep, and the pain  
Of the burning eyeballs went to my brain.  
Seven blackened corpses before me lie,  
In the blaze of the sun and the winds of the sky.  
I have watched them through the burning day,  
And driven the vulture and raven away;  
And the cormorant wheeled in circles round,  
Yet feared to alight on the guarded ground.  
And when the shadows of twilight came,  
I have seen the hyena's eyes of flame,  
And heard at my side his stealthy tread,  
But aye at my shout the savage fled:

31. [http://www.4literature.net/William\\_Cullen\\_Bryant/Rizpah/](http://www.4literature.net/William_Cullen_Bryant/Rizpah/).

And I threw the lighted brand to fright  
The jackal and wolf that yelled in the night. –  
"Ye were foully murdered, my hapless sons,  
By the hands of wicked and cruel ones;  
Ye fell, in your fresh and blooming prime,  
All innocent, for your father's crime.  
He sinned- but he paid the price of his guilt  
When his blood by a nameless hand was spilt;  
When he strove with the heathen host in vain,  
And fell with the flower of his people slain,  
And the sceptre his children's hands should sway  
From his injured lineage passed away. –  
"But I hoped that the cottage-roof would be  
A safe retreat for my sons and me;  
And that while they ripened to manhood fast,  
They should wean my thoughts from the woes of the past;  
And my bosom swelled with a mother's pride,  
As they stood in their beauty and strength by my side,  
Tall like their sire, with the princely grace  
Of his stately form, and the bloom of his face. –  
"Oh, what an hour for a mother's heart,  
When the pitiless ruffians tore us apart!  
When I clasped their knees and wept and prayed,  
And struggled and shrieked to Heaven for aid,  
And clung to my sons with desperate strength,  
Till the murderers loosed my hold at length,  
And bore me breathless and faint aside,  
In their iron arms, while my children died.  
They died- and the mother that gave them birth  
Is forbid to cover their bones with earth. –  
'The barley-harvest was nodding white,  
When my children died on the rocky height,  
And the reapers were singing on hill and plain,  
When I came to my task of sorrow and pain.  
But now the season of rain is nigh,  
The sun is dim in the thickening sky,  
And the clouds in sullen darkness rest  
Where he hides his light at the doors of the west.  
I hear the howl of the wind that brings  
The long drear storm on its heavy wings;  
But the howling wind and the driving rain  
Will beat on my houseless head in vain:  
I shall stay, from my murdered sons to scare  
The beasts of the desert, and fowls of air'. –

## APPENDIX 2: THE SHRINERS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In August, 1870, William J. Florence, a prominent American actor traveling in Europe, was enthralled by a magnificent pageant presented by the Council from Egypt in Marseilles, France. Mr Florence related this experience to his personal friends, Dr Walter M. Fleming, in New York. Dr Fleming was a noted Masonic scholar, and he utilized this ability plus his knowledge of Arabian and Egyptian literature to contrive a ritual. This brilliant physician spaced mystery and enchantment through the manuscript and submitting it to actor Florence and eleven other distinguished men, explained it was his desire to form an order that would act to relax and appeal to the humoresque portion of human nature after being subjected to the continuous serious presentation of the Knight Templar Orders and Scottish Rite Degrees.

These thirteen founders of what was to be known as 'The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine' decided the prerequisite to membership would be members of the Masonic Order who has attained the status of Knight Templar and/or Thirty-Second degree Scottish Rite Masons. The first 'Temple' was founded in New York on September 26, 1872, and named 'Mecca'. The Shrine enjoyed rapid growth. The National Order was founded June 6, 1876.

On June 25, 1888 Rameses Temple in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, was chartered and the Order became the 'Shrine of North America', the name 'Imperial' was adopted to signify the International Order.

In Kentucky, Temples were chartered as follows: Kosair in Louisville in 1886; El Hasa in Ashland in 1906; Oleika in Lexington in 1908; Rizpah in Madisonville in 1909. The Shrine held annual conventions, and for the first fifth years fun and fellowship were the only net results.

With the passing of World War 1, the men who composed the membership of the Shrine geared their activities toward deeds of more exalted usefulness. At the Imperial Council Session held in Portland, Oregon, in June 1920, the Shrine 'found its soul'. The representatives authorized the formation of the 'Shriners' Hospitals for Crippled Children' to be supported by an annual assessment of each Noble. The first Hospitals for the treatment of orthopedically handicapped children was opened by the Shrine at Shreveport, Louisiana, on September 16, 1922. The Lexington, Kentucky, unit was opened November 1, 1926. The Shrine now operates 19 Orthopedic Hospitals and three Burn Institutes, the first of which was opened in Galveston, Texas, on March 20, 1966. Just as the Shrine has made America conscious of the crippled child, it is now performing the same humanitarian act in the fields of treatment and research of burned children.

The tremendous financial load of the Shriners Orthopedic and Burns programs of today must necessarily be supplemented by income in addition to the assessment of each Shriner. Football games, circuses, paper sales and other projects are conducted annually for this great charitable undertaking. Wills, bequests and the 'Living Trust' are earnestly solicited from all friends of mankind.

The Shriners Hospitals for Children have zealously earned and cautiously protect the proud title of 'THE WORLD'S GREATEST PHILANTHROPY'.<sup>32</sup>

32. <http://www.grandlodgeofkentucky.org/shrine.html>. See also <http://www.shrinershq.org/> for the children's hospitals supported.



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GENEALOGIES, GENDER, AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY:  
1 CHRONICLES 1–9 AND THE DOCUMENTARY FILM  
*MEIN LEBEN TEIL 2*

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*Introduction*

Along with traditions such as the creation story or the exodus, the biblical genealogies refer to Israel's origins and emergence in order to identify resources and formulate identities. 1 Chronicles 1–9 constitutes a heterogeneous yet organized composition of lists, family trees, and short embedded narratives, in order to perform a statement on Israel's identity in the late Persian period. The Chronicles' genealogies are patrilinear in character and construct the adult male Israelite as norm. However, they also contain numerous embedded references to women, slaves, and foreigners who co-constitute Israel. As I will argue, references to women follow specific linguistic patterns and feature distinct themes. They build a corpus of *female-gendered genealogies* that establishes one of several counter-traditions subverting the normative layer of the overall text unit.

The female-gendered genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 refer to women in short, often fragmentary, passages. In contrast, Berlin filmmaker Angelika Levi places the stories of her female ancestors in the centre of the genealogy that structures her experimental documentary *My Life Part 2* (original title *Mein Leben Teil 2*, Berlin 2003).<sup>1</sup> Here, female-gendered genealogies appear as strings of women standing in a biological and/or ideological succession, which is characterized by these women's subjectivity and agency. Each source provides different yet complementary perspectives on places and functions of women within patriarchal genealogies. In spite of the obvious differences, both 'texts' share important issues such as the priority of names, inclusion and exclusion, and the challenge of recalling

1. The film documents the life of the filmmaker's mother Ursula Levi (1926–1996) during the Nazi regime and in post-war Germany. Levi unfolds her mother's story at the centre of the thread running from her great-grandmother to her grandmother, mother, and herself. The personal account is complexly linked to political discourses in post-Shoah Germany and beyond, thus reflecting on intersections of personal and public memory.

a complex and fractured descent. Both biblical text and film portray a memory that pursues the politics of combining fractures and complexity into a meaningful picture.

This contribution encompasses three parts. The first part will discuss concepts of genealogy with a focus on notions of memory, performance, and gender. In the second part, female gendered genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 will be analyzed in a close reading of the relevant texts, and interpreted according to their contexts and functions.<sup>2</sup> The third part will involve genealogy constructions in the documentary film *My Life Part 2*, emphasizing intersections of private and public memory and the context of alternative archives. In a concluding assessment, the film will be brought back to 1 Chronicles 1–9, focusing again on the notion of the archive as well as on perspectives of ‘shaped gaps’ as against ‘gap filling’ (see below).

### *Concepts of Genealogy: General Notions as Applied to the Sources*

#### *Concepts of Genealogy*

Genealogies provide a particular form for recalling the origins and ‘biography’ of an individual, community, or culture. Their basic elements are names, data, and locations, connected by indications of mutual relationships. Genealogies may take the form of a simple linear thread or of a widely ramified root system. Form depends on a genealogy’s main target. A genealogy whose main aim is claiming power positions and legitimating hierarchies will emphasize the *depth* of a line. In contrast, *segmentation* will be a major tool in genealogies mapping affiliations, alliances, and processes of differentiation. Either way, genealogies aim at the present and the future. Referring to particular historical situations, they articulate contextualized subjectivity concerning cultural, economical, socio-political, and religious matters.<sup>3</sup>

Genealogies appear to be a sparse, sometimes monotonous genre. Often, narrative details that might flesh out name lists are provided in brief comments and embedded narratives of one or two sentences only. Significance is carried through genealogies’ basic elements, first and foremost through names. In fact, a genealogy lives by its audience’s ability to ‘read’ the stories behind the names and to get arguments implicitly made by specific ways of linkage. The genealogies in the Hebrew Bible are a good example for this implied assumption of background knowledge. Listed names, places, and relations are deeply interconnected with the canon’s narratives. The more

2. All biblical quotations are from the NRSV if not indicated otherwise.

3. For a sound standard monograph on the genealogies in the Hebrew Bible and beyond, see Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogies and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

the reader knows about these narratives, the more will she grasp the genealogies' implicit meanings and aims.

Genealogies often but not always work with the concept of kinship. A genealogy might also work with a concept of ideology-based communities, such as the concept of nationhood in the book of Judith. Narrative and language are crucial to genealogies even though the balance between narration and lists may vary. While the biblical genealogies are based in textual narratives, cinematic performances of genealogies use visual icons and symbols as a means to transform lists into stories. In the case of Angelika Levi's *My Life Part 2*, narrative and language become the concept in which her genealogy functions.

Genealogies emerge in interplay between deliberate constructions on the basis of actual needs and choices on the one hand, and commitments to previous generations and particular legacies and stories on the other hand. They are fluid, changeable, and flexible. Genealogies' *fluidity* facilitates their ability to chart fluctuations and reconstitute identity over periods of change. This capacity also brings about the need to actualize and (re)create genealogies in order to keep them functioning and relevant.

### *Performances of Memory*

Offering a frame of reference to previous generations and of commemorating the dead, genealogies may be understood as a specific form of *memory*. They perform acts of transfer in which the past becomes correlated to the present and future.<sup>4</sup> Basic features of the memory notion are relevant for understanding the concept of genealogy, e.g. the interdependence of remembering and forgetting, counter-present memory, and the importance of the Shoah as a major point of reference for theorizing memory in our time.

*Remembering* and *forgetting* interplay in the constitution of memory. As Aleida Assmann puts it, memory does not simply refer to a fixed storage of facts, but describes a flexible process of choice and interpretation in which, with regard to the present, meaning is applied to particular events while others are forgotten or repressed.

As a rule, remembering proceeds by reconstruction, always coming from the present, thereby inevitably leading to shifts, distortion, disfiguration, re-evaluation, renewal of what is recollected at the time of its recollection. During the interval of latency, remembrance is not stored as in a safe depot but is exposed to a process of transformation [...]. The act of remembering takes place in time, which actively partakes in this process. It is an essential part of the psychomotorics of remembering that remembering and

4. My understanding of memory as acts of transfer is based on Paul Conner-ton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 36-40.

forgetting always interlock inseparably, one enabling the other. We may even say: forgetting is the opponent of storing, yet it is the accomplice of remembering.<sup>5</sup>

The dialogic nature of remembering and forgetting is essential to genealogies. Genealogies recall an exclusive selection of persons or figures that are provided with the status of ancestors. Their names and interrelations hold the story. At the same time, the majority of past names is not listed and will be forgotten. The process in which meaning is applied to particular names, places, and relationships while others are forgotten or repressed, involves interpretations, negotiations, and choices. It provides a basic trace of power dynamics within the community that establishes identity through its genealogies.

Acts of remembering are complex and performed from different socio-political positions. Even though dominant viewpoints are in the fore, they are not the only ones to be transferred. The notion of 'counter-present memory' refers to acts of memory that recall the past against or in addition to mainstream memories.<sup>6</sup> It provides a means to hold on to identities during persecution or exile and may provide a source for resistance and engagement. Genealogies might as well assume the quality of a counter-present genealogy that recalls repressed threads or brings marginalized ancestors into focus. Moreover, many genealogies that depict dominant lines will nevertheless include counter-present aspects.

Counter-present genealogies play an important role in the context of 'post-Shoah memory', which forms, together with the history of slavery, a major reference point within recent discourses on memory.<sup>7</sup> The concept of genealogy has been used in order to retrace violently interrupted lines, to re-confer names and dignity on those persecuted by the Nazis and their collaborators, and to regain access to resources and empowerment connected to the

5. Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: Beck, 1999), pp. 29-30: 'Das Erinnern verfährt grundsätzlich rekonstruktiv; es geht stets von der Gegenwart aus, und damit kommt es unweigerlich zu einer Verschiebung, Verformung, Entstellung, Umwertung, Erneuerung des Erinnerten zum Zeitpunkt seiner Rückrufung. Im Intervall der Latenz ruht die Erinnerung also nicht wie in einem sicheren Depot, sondern ist einem Transformationsprozess ausgesetzt. [...] Der Akt des Erinnerns geschieht in der Zeit, die aktiv an dem Prozess mitwirkt. Zur Psychomotorik des Erinnerns gehört insbesondere, dass Erinnern und Vergessen stets untrennbar ineinandergreifen. Das eine ist die Ermöglichung des Anderen. Wir können auch sagen: Das Vergessen ist der Gegner des Speicherns, aber der Komplize des Erinnerns' [Translation Christine Meier and Marianne Löwisch].

6. Aleida Assmann, 'Memory', *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, vol. 3, pp. 1212-18, §6.

7. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, 'Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction', *Signs* 28/1: Gender and Cultural Memory (2002), pp. 1-19 (3-4).

knowledge about one's own roots and ancestors. The genre's focus on names also plays on the praxis of recalling the Shoah through the story of exemplary persons or figures, aiming at possibilities of transforming traumatic recall into narrative memory that is situated in social contexts.<sup>8</sup> Counter-present genealogies involve the commitment to previous generations that have suffered from disenfranchisement, persecution, and murder. For some communities, constituting counter-present genealogies will also include acts of critical awareness concerning the memory of perpetrators and bystanders.<sup>9</sup>

Genealogies, like memory, are open for use in different media. They may assume forms as different as written historiography and visual arts. Analyzing the literary lists and family trees in 1 Chronicles 1–9 alongside the narrative and photograph-based genealogy in the documentary *My Life Part 2* engages this openness, and reflects how different media shape and especially gender memory in the form of a genealogy.

### *Gendered Genealogies*

Genealogies are basically gendered. They are either patrilinear or matrilinear, assigning the potential to 'pass on the line' to a community's male or female members. Being men or women centred, gender inclusive or exclusive, genealogies allocate—or deny—socio-political positions to the listed ancestors and, by so doing, suggest and evaluate gender specific memory and identities.

Gender within genealogies involves three main dynamics. First, gender may be a means to produce, enforce, and maintain dominant gender relations. Obvious examples for this function are the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9. They are patrilinear in character and bring the male protagonists of Israel's stories into focus. Most socio-political key positions are assigned to men (only), while female protagonists known from other biblical texts are left out. In fact, the overwhelming majority of listed names are male. However, a second feature of gender dynamics within genealogies points to gender as a means to interfere with dominant, gender based power relations favoured in a particular genealogy. Such a dynamic results in what I call *gender modified genealogies*, i.e. genealogies that have undergone a change in character through threads that conflict with the main (gender) scope of the genealogy. The genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 provide a multitude of brief threads and fragmented spots that refer to women's subjectivity and

8. For the differentiation between traumatic recall and narrative memory, see Mieke Bal, 'Introduction', in Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. vii-xiii (ix-xi).

9. See for example Sigrid Weigel's reflection on genealogy and memory in a German context after 1945 ('"Generation" as a Symbolic Form: On the Genealogical Discourse of Memory since 1945', *The Germanic Review* 77 [2002], pp. 264-78).

agency in Israel. These passages interfere with the patriarchal character of the texts and transform them into gender-modified genealogies. As a third main aspect, gender may support the emergence of counter-present genealogies. An example for this dynamic is the genealogy filmmaker Angelika Levi constitutes in *My Life Part 2*. This genealogy is likewise patrilinear. However, it centres on its female protagonists and brings women's agency and subjectivity into focus. This woman centrality, together with the perspective of a Jewish German line in post-war Germany and the form of an alternative archive, works towards constituting a counter-present genealogy. The three aspects of gender dynamics within genealogies are not clearly delineated but may exist side by side. For instance, Levi's women-centred genealogy also holds gender-modifying threads. One thread is the main protagonist Ursula Levi's reference to the biblical Levi. In this way the male concept of priesthood interferes with (the expectation) of an exclusive women-centred concept of genealogy.

In the following, I use the terms 'women-centred genealogy' or 'gynealogy' when referring to genealogies in which gender works towards counter-present genealogies as in *My Life Part 2*. Passages in 1 Chronicles 1–9 that refer to women and interfere with the texts' tendency to privilege men will be characterized as 'gender-modifying genealogies' or just 'female-gendered genealogies'.

### *Gender-Modifying Genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9*

#### *The Literary Context*

The genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 assemble linear and segmented genealogies that are interlaced with related commentaries and short embedded narratives. The unit presents a heterogeneous, yet well-structured composition that reveals conscious editing.<sup>10</sup> The opening chapter reaches from Adam to the twelve sons of Israel (1 Chron. 1.1–2.2). In reference to the Genesis genealogies,<sup>11</sup> it locates the genesis of Israel in the context of neighbouring communities and people. The main inner composition (2.3–9.2) centres on the twelve tribes,<sup>12</sup> listed in a geographical order

10. In the following, I adopt the structure Gary Knoppers suggests in his commentary (*1 Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 12; New York: Doubleday, 2004).

11. Gen. 4.17–24, 25–26; 5.1–32; 11.10–26; 11.27–30; 22.20–24; 25.1–6; 25.12–16; 30.21; 34.1; 35.22–26; 36.1–43; 46.8–27. For a both thorough and innovative analysis of the genealogies in Genesis see Thomas Hieke, *Die Genealogien der Genesis* (HBS, 39; Freiburg: Herder, 2003).

12. 1 Chronicles 1–9 refers to a concept of the twelve tribes that replaces Joseph with Ephraim and Manasseh and furnishes Levi with a particular status, as for example in Josh. 13–19 and Num. 26.5–51.



which emphasizes Jerusalem in its centre.<sup>13</sup> The unit highlights the tribes of Judah, Levi and Benjamin at its beginning, centre, and end. Above all, the elaborated genealogies of Judah and David hold a privileged position (2.3-4.23).<sup>14</sup> The unit places Judah at the heart of Israel<sup>15</sup> and depicts it as central and inclusive. Levi is likewise qualified as central within Israel, yet not inclusive. The importance of Benjamin is allowed for but understated.<sup>16</sup> The emphasis on these three tribes forms a basic aspect of an act of memory that supports—and represses—the position of particular conflicting groups (e.g. Judah and Benjamin) and makes claims about the extension and significance of territories, including Jerusalem and the temple. Moreover, it advances ideological views on political and religious organizations (e.g. the exclusion of women from the cult). 1 Chronicles 1–9 extends to the first returnees from Babylonian captivity after 538 BCE and ends with a section on the ‘genesis and contours of the return (9.2-34)’.<sup>17</sup> The appendix on the house of Saul (9.35-44) offers a transition to the subsequent narrative part of the book.<sup>18</sup>

The picture of Israel as a functioning system of twelve tribes, as well as many instances of listed persons and places, significantly contradicts the constitution of post-exilic Jehud.<sup>19</sup> This obvious incongruity precludes an understanding of 1 Chronicles 1–9 as an attempted ‘historically correct’ record. Instead, it points to the use of the literary genre of genealogy as a means for performing a particular view on Israel’s identities and memory after the exile and beyond. At the core of this view is the (re)construction of Israel as a collective whose strength, endurance, and integrative power lies in its plurality, alongside with an emphasis of the ancestral period as decisive for its constitution.<sup>20</sup> This perspective presents the people of Israel as an entity that may continue institutions such as the monarchy or temple—although these ‘come to an end with the Babylonian exile’.<sup>21</sup>

13. The list of tribes starts with Judah, followed by Simeon, the Transjordanian tribes, Levi, Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Asher, and again Benjamin. It thus describes a circle that runs in a counter clockwise movement from Judah to the East, North, and West.

14. 1 Chronicles 1–9 focuses on David rather than on Solomon.

15. Unlike Joshua, Judges, and Samuel–Kings, which locate Judah as separate from Israel.

16. See the genealogies’ brevity as well as their location at the end.

17. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9*, p. 492.

18. Knoppers excludes this section in his outline of 1 Chronicles 1–9.

19. See for example Japhet’s analysis of the Chronicler’s ideological statements concerning the North–South extension of Israel: ‘Conquest and Settlement’, *JBL* 98 (1979), pp. 205-18 (208-10); and Isaac Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

20. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9*, p. 261.

21. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9*, p. 265.



The concept of a plural, integrative, and persistent Israel is performed in nine chapters of genealogies. In my view, the gender-modifying genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 play an essential part in this performance. The following sections are thus devoted to a more detailed investigation of these female-gendered genealogies and their function in the overall context of Chronicles.

*Female-Gendered Genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9: Occurrences and Nuances*

The genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 list more than 60 woman figures, named and nameless. They are to be found through the whole unit of 1 Chronicles 1–9, yet are unevenly distributed. Woman figures are identified as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters; few have exceptional roles such as builders (1 Chron. 7.24) or female household heads (2.16–17).<sup>22</sup> Many women are listed with information on their ethnicity and/or geographic origin; some are in the centre of short embedded narratives and commentaries. Finally, passages that refer to women use regular formulations and follow specific linguistic patterns.

*Numbers and Gender-Ambiguous Names.* 1 Chronicles 1–9 lists about 66 individual woman figures and several groups of women. Exact numbers depend on the gender interpretation of some particular names and passages. Names may be gender-ambiguous for different reasons. First, literary contexts may designate the very same name sometimes as female, sometimes as male.<sup>23</sup> Second, female names may occur in contexts that do not make their gender explicit, thus exposing them to the reader's gender projections.<sup>24</sup> As a conscious counter-reading of exegetical politics and traditions, I suggest a reading praxis that takes names that are clearly identified as female at one point of the text as decidedly female names until arguments beyond gender biases prove the contrary.<sup>25</sup> This is especially reasonable for the text unit in

22. For the qualification of Zeruiah and Abigail as female heads of family see Antje Labahn and Ehud Ben-Zvi, 'Observations on Women in the Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9', *Biblica* 84 (2003), pp. 457–78 (474–75).

23. For example, Abijah is the name of both the wife of Hezron in 1 Chron. 2.24 and the husband of fourteen wives in 2 Chron. 13.21.

24. For example, Oholibamah is a female name according to both literary context and grammar: Oholibamah, daughter of Adah, is listed as one of Esau's wives in Gen. 36.2,14,18,25. In addition, the emphasized final ך points to a female form. Now, 1 Chron. 1.52 (//Gen. 36.41) lists a certain Oholibamah among the town chiefs of Edom. It is open to discussion whether this Oholibamah should be identified as a female, in accordance with the literary context and grammar—or as male, according to the presumption that a town chief could not be a woman.

25. Eskenazi gives a clear example for how projections of gender biases have

question. 1 Chronicles 1–9 lists women in positions that may easily collide with readers' gender expectations: Sheerah builds three cities (1 Chron. 7.24); Sheshan's daughter passes on the family line in a problematic situation (2.34–35);<sup>26</sup> Zeruah 'fulfils the role of a (male) head of her section of the family';<sup>27</sup> and Keturah serves as reference point for the identity of her descendants (1.32–33). In these instances, the literary context makes sure that we are dealing with women. Other passages may refer to women as clan chiefs or 'sons' without making it explicit.<sup>28</sup> Of course, this praxis does not lead to unambiguous numbers. Additional women might be listed 'undercover' and only surface in the reading process. Others might become male again.

*Names versus Namelessness.* 51 individual woman figures are listed with their names, whereas 9 individual woman figures and 5 groups of women remain nameless.<sup>29</sup> 8 names of a total of 16 woman figures are also toponyms.<sup>30</sup>

Names play a crucial role for genealogies. Beyond their philological meaning, names establish links to intertexts, trigger key narratives, and activate association processes. Name lists may be understood as chains of concentrated mini-stories, housing ideologies and memories. In such chains, names and their bearers become symbolic figures, *ancestors*, who facilitate acts of transfer and memory. In this context, the namelessness of many woman figures in 1 Chronicles 1–9 undermines their subject position and abets dynamics to forget them. However, referring to a nameless woman's origin, social status or male relative, as well as highlighting her namelessness as such, may set up a context in which she may indeed be remembered.<sup>31</sup>

influenced the gender determination of names in her discussion of Ezra 8.10 and the name Shelomith (Tamara C. Eskenazi, 'Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Post-Exilic Era', in A. Brenner [ed.], *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], pp. 252–71 (267)).

26. See Labahn and Ben Zvi, *Observations on Women*, pp. 465–66.

27. Labahn and Ben-Zvi, *Observations on Women*, p. 473.

28. For example, 1 Chron. 4.17 lists a certain Miriam among the 'sons' of Bithiah daughter of Pharaoh.

29. Examples of named women are Ephrathah (1 Chron. 2.50), Hazzelelponi (4.3), and Shua (7.32). Examples of nameless women are the daughter of Machir (2.21) and the Aramean secondary wife of Manasseh (7.14). Examples of groups of women are the six daughters of Shimei (4.27) or the secondary wives of David (3.9).

30. Examples of toponyms are Tamar (1 Chron. 2.4, 3.9), Naarah (4.5–6), and Maacah (e.g. 7.15). Toponyms, geographical references, and details about migration shifts point to the link between genealogies, identity formation, and places. Discussing origin, subjectivity, and perspectives of Israel in terms of kinship as well as in terms of land, 1 Chronicles 1–9 does not only address the 'who' but also the 'where' of the community.

31. For example, the nameless Aramean secondary wife of Manasseh (1 Chron. 7.14) may be remembered as the figure who opens and shapes the significant line of women within the genealogy of Manasseh (7.14–19).

*Distribution and Structure.* Specific sections hold noticeably dense occurrences of women, while others include women only sporadically or not at all.

1 Chronicles 1.1–2.2 mentions 7 women in the genealogies of Esau but totally lacks women in the initial list running from Adam to Abraham. In significant contrast to the Genesis *Vorlage*,<sup>32</sup> the first woman to appear is Abraham's second(ary) wife Keturah (1.32–33).<sup>33</sup>

Things change in the subsequent genealogies of Judah and the house of David (2.3–4.23). Those feature 35 individual women and 2 nameless groups. In other words, the genealogies of Judah comprise more than 50% of the female-gendered genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9.

The presence of women decreases again in the next sections. The descendants of Simeon (1 Chron. 4.24–43), the Transjordanian tribes (5.1–26), the Levitical genealogies and settlements (5.27–41, 6.1–38, 6.39–66 MT) as well as the genealogies of Issachar, Benjamin, Dan, and Naphtali (7.1–13) list only two individual women (5.29; 7.13) and two nameless groups (4.27 and 7.4). Miriam is the only woman to be mentioned in the genealogies of the prominent tribe Levi (5.29). Other female members of Levi, as mentioned for instance in Exod. 6.14–25, are left out.

This low number of woman figures changes dramatically in the following section. The genealogy of Manasseh lists 7 women as well as a hint to Zelophehad's daughters in no more than five verses (7.14–19). The following genealogies of Ephraim (7.20–27), Asher (7.30–40), and Benjamin (8.1–40) include 8 women. Many of the listed women hold noteworthy positions, attributes, and names.<sup>34</sup>

The final summaries and lists of the returnees from exile (9.1–34) do not include women at all. The appendix with Saul's genealogy (9.35–44) mentions a single woman who already occurred earlier.<sup>35</sup> Once again, not all women who play a prominent role in other biblical books are adopted

32. The genealogy of Gen. 4.19–22 lists Adah, Zillah, and Naamah, who remain absent from the parallel list in ch. 5. The latter refers to female humankind in general; in addition the *lists of generations* of 5.1–11.26 repeatedly list nameless groups of daughters. The list of generations of Terah refers to Sarai/Sarah, Milcah and Iscah in the generation of Abraham (11.27–30); additional women follow.

33. Chronicles identifies Keturah as 'secondary wife' of Abraham (פִּילְגֵשׁ), while Gen. 25.1 depicts her as his 'second wife' (וִיכָרְהָם וִיקַח אִשָּׁה).

34. Serah and Shua are both listed as sisters (7.30, 32); Sheerah is referred to as the builder of three cities (7.24); Hushim and Baara are identified as co-wives and co-divorcées (8.8); Maacah is referred to as wife of Jeiel without mentioning her being a mother (8.29, 9.35); the sons of Manasseh are born from his Aramean secondary wife (7.14); and finally the name Hammolecheth means 'she who reigns' (7.18).

35. Maacah is listed in 9.35 and earlier in 8.29 in the context of the larger genealogies of Benjamin.

in Chronicles. Figures such as Sarah or Ruth are absent from the relevant passages (1.1–2.2; 2.12); others are only hinted at (e.g. 7.15).<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, many of the women listed here are otherwise unknown.

The distribution of female-gendered genealogies seems to correspond to the aim of particular sections as well as to the focus of the composition as such. Chronicles' emphasis on the elaborated genealogies of Judah and David comes with a remarkably high number of listed women. This feature partly overlaps with a notable high amount of references to non-Israelites, male and female, who belong to Judah (e.g. 2.16–17, 34–36). The female-gendered genealogies pick up the concept of a plural Israel, already set up by the structure of the whole unit, and take it further. While the twelve-tribe model suggests a plural association of patriarchal groups, references to women in different socio-political positions and of different ethnicities advance a constitution of Judah (and Israel) that is multilayered and inclusive in terms of gender as well as in terms of ethnicity and class. The genealogies of Judah, supported by its female-gendered genealogies, play a major role in carrying the idea of a complex community. In the context of 1 Chronicles 1–9, Judah can be at the centre because it is inclusive.

By contrast, the importance of Levi as a tribe does not come with an increase but rather a decrease of listed women. It seems that references to women run against or are at least not especially suitable for the concern of these lists. First, text passages on Levi seem to depict the cult as a male domain. The inclusion of women such as Huldah (2 Kgs 22.14//2 Chron. 34.22) would go against such politics. Second, the genealogies seem to trace particular circumstances of the Second Temple service back to the pre-exilic period.<sup>37</sup> This is primarily realized through mapping the *patrilinear* succession. It is all the more noticeable that Miriam is nevertheless mentioned in this context (5.29; in BHS the possibility that Miriam's name is an addition is introduced with a question mark). A similar dynamic may be at work in the first chapter of 1 Chronicles 1–9. Locating Israel's nascence in the context of its neighbouring communities functions through retracing the Genesis lists in short form. Women, e.g. Keturah, are listed for segmentation purposes if necessary.

Functions of female-gendered genealogies in other sections are less obvious. For now, the high amounts of interesting female-gendered genealogies within Manasseh, and to a lower extent within Ephraim, Asher, and Benjamin, is simply noted. The same goes for the marginal references to women in the genealogies of Simeon, the Transjordanian tribes, Issachar, the first

36. The verse refers to Zelophehad's daughters; see Num. 26.33, 27.1–11, 36.1–13; Josh. 17.3–6.

37. This concerns the relationship between priests and singers, the link between the three guilds of temple singers, and the status of the Qohathites among others (Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9*, pp. 428–30).

genealogy of Benjamin, Dan, and Naphtali. To summarize, the analysis of distribution points out that female-gendered genealogies are employed—or repressed—if they support—or undermine—the aim of a section. In other words, within 1 Chronicles 1–9 female-gendered genealogies may be understood as an ideological tool.

*Information on Ethnicity and Names of Non-Israelite Origin.* 8 women are introduced with explicit references to their ethnic and/or geographical origin.<sup>38</sup> In addition, at least 13 names point to the non-Israelite origin of their bearers.<sup>39</sup> Most of these non-Israelites are identified as wives, at times including a reference to their status as daughter.<sup>40</sup> The presence of foreign wives (and husbands<sup>41</sup>) reflects the exogamous background of the texts. Moreover, the explicit and approving<sup>42</sup> indication of women's ethnicity is in line with the large number of non-Israelite individuals and groups associated with and incorporated into Israel.<sup>43</sup> This applies especially to the genealogies of Judah and David.<sup>44</sup> As Knoppers argues, both intermarriages and other involvements of non-Israelites assist the concept of Judah as ethnically and socially diverse and inclusive.<sup>45</sup> Here, the effect of numerous references to non-Israelites parallels the significance of the many female-gendered genealogies for the overall text unit. *Both* groups of text passages specify the ideology of the plural collective in favour of a multilayered and inclusive community. In 1 Chronicles 1–9 gender and ethnicity are tools, often overlapping, for establishing and communicating complexity.<sup>46</sup>

38. For example the Canaanite woman Bath-shua (2.3), Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail the Carmelite (3.1), and the Aramean secondary wife of Manasseh (7.14).

39. For example the Midianite name Ephah (2.46) (Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9*, p. 312); and the Aramean name Maacah (2.48) (Japhet, 'Conquest and Settlement', p. 216).

40. For example David's wife Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur (3.2).

41. 1 Chron. 2.17, 34–35.

42. Gary Knoppers, 'Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah', *JBL* 120 (2001), pp. 15–30 (30).

43. Knoppers, 'Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity', pp. 23–27.

44. Knoppers emphasizes that 'groups that seem to be non-Israelites or distant relations of the Israelites in other biblical contexts—the Calebites, Jerahmeelites, and Qenizzites—are incorporated into Judah. Members of other peoples such as the Canaanites and Qenites are included within Judah. Judahite connections with the Midianites, Horites, Seirites, and Edomites are also intimated' ('Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity', pp. 26–27).

45. Knoppers, 'Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity', pp. 29–30.

46. Knoppers makes this point concerning ethnic and social dynamics in his most important contributions to 1 Chronicles 1–9. However, he does not engage his argument

*Role Models.* The most frequent role women are identified with is the position of first or secondary wife and mother of sons (38 women and 2 groups).<sup>47</sup> This is followed by the position of daughter (10 women and 3 groups),<sup>48</sup> and the position of sister (10 women).<sup>49</sup> Moreover, several women are listed in outstanding roles,<sup>50</sup> bear names that might refer to a vital position,<sup>51</sup> and perform specific activities.<sup>52</sup>

The predominance of the wife and mother of sons' role reflects a particular patriarchal socio-historical context and corresponding gender roles. Moreover, it points to the continuation of the line as a central concern of genealogies. In patrilinear kinship-based genealogies, this continuation entails the focus on the birth of the next generation, translated into action by women in such roles.<sup>53</sup> The distinction between first wife (אִשָּׁה) and secondary wife (פִּילֶגֶשׁ) brings about an important difference in status. Both continue the line and may identify and structure descendant groups,<sup>54</sup> but are qualified differently by their status. Designating an ancestor as a secondary wife *others* her descendants, who are located away from the

in the context of gender dynamics—which would deepen his analysis. See Gary Knoppers, “‘Great among his brothers’, but Who Is He? Heterogeneity in the Composition of Judah?,” *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 3 (2001), article 4, no pages; Knoppers, ‘Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity’; Knoppers, *I Chronicles* 1–9.

47. For example Azubah and Jerioth (2.18), Atarah (2.26), and Ephah (2.46). Among this group are wives of kings such as Mehetabel daughter of Matred, daughter of Me-zahab (1.50) and Ahinoam the Jezreelite, Abigail the Carmelite, Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur, Haggith, Abital, Eglah, and Bath-shua (3.1-5); women who identify their son/s such as Keturah (1.33), Zeruiah (2.16), Naarah and Helah (4.6-7), and Bilhah (7.13); mothers of daughters such as Matred and Me-zahab (1.50), Bithiah, daughter of Pharaoh (4.17), and Hammolecheth (7.18); sisters such as Zeruiah and Abigail (2.16), and the wife of Hodiah, the sister of Naham (4.19); and finally heads of houses such as Zeruiah and Abigail (2.16-17).

48. For example Mehetabel and Matred (1.50), the daughter of Machir father of Gilead (2.21), Sheshan's daughter (2.34-35), and Achsah (2.49). In addition, one woman, i.e. Tamar, is listed as daughter-in-law (2.4) and several are listed as ‘sons’, i.e. Ephah (2.47) and Miriam (4.17; 5.29).

49. For example Tamar (3.9), Shelomith (3.19), Hazzelelponi (4.3), Maacah (7.15), and Serah (7.30).

50. For example the role of a clan chief (see Timna and Oholibamah, 1.51-52), or builder (see Seerach, 7.24).

51. For example Hammolecheth, i.e. ‘she who reigns’ (7.18).

52. For example naming their children, such as the mother of Jabez (4.9) and Maacah (7.16) did.

53. Other biblical sources that bring subject matter such as prophecy, warfare, poetry, or the exodus into focus likewise provide related role models for women, i.e. wise women, midwives, lovers, prostitutes, female prophets and so on.

54. For example 1 Chron. 4.5-7 and 7.13.

central line and are often estimated as less important; they may have different socio-political and religious practices.

The dominant and hence prescriptive role of a wife and mother of sons is followed by the likewise substantial roles of daughter and sister. Especially the latter does not seem to fit into a patrilinear reproduction-oriented model. However, in exogamous contexts, the positions of daughter and sister play a crucial role for the constitution of memory. While women migrate to their husband's house when wed, the position of daughter and/or sister allows keeping their stories within their original community and to incorporate them into that community's performed memory act. Accordingly, many women remembered as sisters and daughters play a key role in inner-biblical intertexts,<sup>55</sup> whereas others remain obscure.<sup>56</sup> In this listing women as such are independent of marriage status.<sup>57</sup> Together with woman figures holding very particular positions, women listed as sisters and daughters hint at a less gender-normative setting than seems indicated by the dominant role of wife and mother of sons. Therefore, the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 communicate normative roles as well as nuances and shades that outreach the needs of a patrilinear genealogy. Moreover, the female-gendered genealogies provide a context in which social hierarchies and conflicts on the one hand, and the prescription as well as transgression of social positions and gender norms on the other hand, become visible and may be discussed.<sup>58</sup>

*Linguistic Patterns and Formations.* The gender-modifying genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 provide recurring linguistic phrases that form particular formations and patterns. As the references to women in general, these phrases are short. Three examples are supplied here.

*Formation A: The indication of a sister rounds off a list of sons, e.g. 3.19b: ובן־זרובבל משלם וחנניה ושלמית אחותם.* This phrase has its place at the end of a (section of a) patrilinear list. A series of sons concludes with the name of their sister, followed by the noun אחות with the short pronominal suffix, third-person masculine plural.<sup>59</sup>

55. For example Achsah, daughter of Caleb (2.49; see Josh. 15.16–17//Judg. 1.12–13), Zelophehad's daughters (7.15; see e.g. Num. 26.33; 27.1–11; 36.1–13), or Serach, sister of Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah (7.30; see Gen. 46.17; Num 26.46).

56. For example Shua (7.32) and Hammolecheth (7.18).

57. Some women explicitly retain the designation as daughter or sister beyond marrying and having sons, e.g. the daughter of Machir father of Gilead (2.21) and the wife of Hodiah, the sister of Naham (4.19).

58. Labahn and Ben-Zvi repeatedly emphasize that passages referring to women communicate that 'construed gender expectations may and have been transgressed in the past and with good results' (Labahn and Ben-Zvi, 'Observations on Women', p. 458).

59. See also 3.9, 7.30. Variations of this phrase are as follows. In 7.18, the phrase



*Formation B: Women act as a reference point for the identification of their sons.* This phrase may conclude and summarize or else begin a list of sons. It may begin with the pronoun *אֵלֶּה* or *בְּלִי־אֵלֶּה*, which is followed by the construct-state third-person masculine plural of *בֵּן* and ends with the name of the woman in question, e.g. 4.6b: *אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי נַעֲרָה*;<sup>60</sup> or the construct-state of the plural of *בֵּן*, followed by a female name, opens rows of sons, e.g. 1 Chron. 2.16b: *וּבְנֵי צְרוּיָה*.<sup>61</sup>

*Formation C: A woman, designated as legal first wife, bears a son/sons to her husband,* e.g. 2.21b: *בֶּת־מִכַּיִר אֵבִי גִלְעָד וְתֹלַד לֹא אֶת־שָׁנוּב יֹלֵד*. In this phrase, the verb *יֹלֵד* qal, imperfect third-person feminine singular, is followed by the particle *לֹא* and a list of sons, which is set in an accusative construction. The (legal) status of the women in question is emphasized.<sup>62</sup> In most cases, only one son is listed.<sup>63</sup>

These and additional formations that centre on woman figures occur regularly and frequently. They structure and interpret the female-gendered genealogies. Together with embedded information on listed women, they form an organic part of the overall genealogies, which likewise consist of strongly formalized lists and short embedded narratives. The interplay between formalized structures and embedded narratives, as well as between maintaining, varying and breaking down strict forms, sharpens and nuances the genealogies' statements.

is followed by the verb, 'to bear', and a list of the sons of the sister in question. 7.32 constructs the phrase with an accusative. This conforms to the general form of lists of sons, which might be set with or without accusative. 2.16 lists two sisters, and uses the full pronoun third masculine plural. 4.3 and 2.49 put an additional emphasis on the sister's/daughter's names. Finally, 1.39 and 2.49 list the sister/daughter of a father (instead of a brother/son), whose name replaces the pronoun. Other passages list sisters/daughters in a series of sons without explicitly mentioning their being sisters, e.g. Timna (1.36), Ephah (2.47), Mahlah (7.18).

60. See also 1.33, 7.13.

61. See also 4.7. This phrase has the following variations. 4.19 identifies the woman not by name but by the names of her husband and brother. 2.18 replaces the woman's name, which is given in the previous sentence, by a suffix-pronoun; the pronoun *אֵלֶּה* is added. In 1.32, the phrase is supplemented by the woman's status as secondary wife of her husband and the verb to bear.

62. The woman's status is emphasized by the indication of her father's status (2.21), by a reference to her legal status as wife (2.21, 24, 29; 4.5), by emphasizing her name (2.29), or by a commentary or longer embedded narrative (2.34-35).

63. 2.21, 24, 35 list one son (2.24 additionally refers to his special status). 2.29 lists two and 4.6 four sons respectively. Variants of the phrase use the third-person masculine singular perfect of *יֹלַד* niph'al (2.3) and the third-person feminine singular perfect *יֹלַד* qal (2.4). Both references emphasize the husband and father-in-law to whom the sons are born.



*Contexts and Functions:  
Chronicles' Female-Gendered Genealogies and Beyond*

*Integrative Power—A Two Sided Coin?*

The multilayered structure of the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9 interplays the establishment and deconstruction of norms. From the perspective of gender norms, the texts establish the picture of a community that exerts descriptive role models but at the same time has the flexibility to selectively suspend or vary these roles. By so doing, the genealogies acknowledge the presence and importance of women whose subject positions and interests transgress normative roles. These women are invited to identify as members of Israel. In turn, conservatives may be reminded that a community's memories and identities are complex and inclusive. Such politics integrate marginalized groups, critical voices and/or innovative dynamics. They enrich, energize, and strengthen the community, and increase its ability to face crises and changes. However, acknowledging and inviting different subject positions of women still takes place within a patriarchal setting. It does not lead to a basic deconstruction of the normative perspectives, not to mention an essential modification of power relations. Moreover, providing locations for non-mainstream positions may incorporate these positions into the prescriptive mainstream. The flip side of the integrative potential contained in the female-gendered genealogical corpus may thus cause a weakening of processes of radicalisation and silence impulses of resistance and change.<sup>64</sup>

Highlighting the embeddedness of gender-modifying genealogies exposes perspectives of the text. Brought into focus, the corpus of female-gendered genealogies is a rich, exciting, substantial part of the genealogies as a whole. Looked at through the predominant perspective of the unit, 66 woman figures face a 1:10 ratio of male names in a text that overwhelmingly privileges the male names. Women's subjectivity and agency is only alluded to and remain a marginal system within the texts' memory. Prevalent normative perspectives are not changed. This setting is reflected in the characteristic and fascinating structure of the 1 Chronicles' female-gendered genealogies, that of 'shaped gaps'.

*Shaped Gaps and Their Structure*

1 Chronicles 1–9 lists 20 single woman figures and 3 groups as sisters and daughters. Many of these references make part of reoccurring linguistic

64. This argument is based on Exum's discussion of the presence or absence of women in Exodus 1–2 (J. Cheryl Exum, 'The Hand That Rocks the Cradle', in J.M. Soskice and D. Lipton (eds.), *Feminism and Theology* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003]; reprinted from her *Plotted, Shot, and Painted* [1996], pp. 123–43).

formations (Formation A). These sisters and daughters are partly introduced with embedded information and references to intertexts that, together with women's names, allude to places,<sup>65</sup> take on discussions and/or suggested solutions,<sup>66</sup> and trigger core narratives.<sup>67</sup> Many references, however, solely give a sister's or daughter's name and status.<sup>68</sup> While the identification of woman figures as wives and mothers of sons co-establishes the picture of a genealogical stream, the recall of seemingly non-functional sisters and daughters evokes the image of coves in this stream. Centring on woman figures that remain storyless, these coves are not filled but bequeathed as particularly shaped and thus obvious gaps. In the following, I term this characteristic phenomenon within 1 Chronicles 1–9 a *structure of shaped gaps*. *Shaped gaps* operate in various ways. As gaps, they repress the remembrance of woman figures. As visibly shaped formations, they recall that there is more to remember than the texts actually do. Recurring again and again, they invite projection and gap filling and suggest a potential of recalling absent and marginalized groups beyond the biblical genealogies.

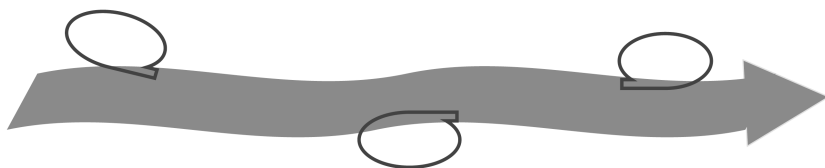


Figure 1. *Shaped Gaps on the Fringe of the Genealogical Stream*

The structure of shaped gaps is one of the most articulated forms of absence for women's subjectivity in the memory 1 Chronicles 1–9 constitutes. Beyond it, the major part of listed woman figures remains at the fringe of the texts' memory.

The perspective on women's identities and agency changes dramatically in recent cinematic accounts of female-gendered genealogies. Films such as *My Life Part 2* transform fringe into centre. Shaped gaps become starting point and axis of a genealogy and connected stories; they undertake a performance of gap filling that complements the biblical text.

65. For example the toponym Timna (1.39) and the reference to the cities Lower and Upper Beth-Horon, and Uzzan-sheerah which Sheerah built (7.24).

66. For example alluding to Zelophehad's daughters (7.15).

67. For example listing Miriam along her brothers Aaron and Moses (5.29 MT).

68. For example Ephah (2.47), Hazzelelponi (4.3), and Shua (7.32).

*Genealogies and Gap Filling in My Life Part 2**My Life Part 2: Memories' Contents*

In her documentary film *My Life Part 2*, Berlin filmmaker Angelika Levi develops the life of her mother Ursula Becker Levi into an experimental archive, accommodating photos, home movies, objects, audio material, historical documentary footage, and autobiographical voiceover. Ursula Becker Levi was born in Hamburg in 1926 to her Jewish father Robert Levi and her mother Karla Levi nee Heins, illegitimate daughter of Sophie Cecilia Heins, and was brought up by a legal guardian without any religious affiliation. Threatened by the Nazi terror, Ursula's father immigrated to Chile. Her grandmother Recha Levi committed suicide; other members of the family were murdered. Ursula and her mother survived the war in Hamburg/Germany. In 1947 they followed Robert Levi to Chile, where Ursula became an ecologist. Having received a research grant, mother and daughter returned to Germany in 1959. Ursula married the protestant minister Johannes Becker and had two children, Angelika and Thomas. In the early 1970s, Ursula Levi Becker fell seriously ill with cancer. In the course of her illness, her persecution trauma came to the fore again; traumatic recall and recent situation became blurred. Fifteen years later, Ursula Levi Becker reflected and recorded her life. The title of the film quotes the label of one of her audiotapes.<sup>69</sup>

Reaching beyond documenting an illustrative life story, the film *My Life Part 2* is about Jewish-German identity in post-Shoah Germany, about the impacts of trauma previous generations had experienced, and about dealing with one's legacy. As Levi puts it in the opening scene of the film:

I decided simply to make a film on the things she [her mother] left behind, what they meant to me, and the memories associated with them. I wanted to understand how a trauma I hadn't experienced myself was passed on to me and colored my perception.<sup>70</sup>

While working through her bequest, Angelika Levi explores gaps of normative historiography. Her film examines the subjectivity of a 'half-Jewish' young girl under the Nazi persecution and later on in the community of exiles in Chile. It portrays an engaged ecologist far ahead of her time and tells the story of a young wife and mother who decided to come back to Germany, yet refused to repress the memory of the Nazi crimes. The film adheres to the agency of a critically ill person who asserts her political

69. For a film synopsis and interview with the filmmaker see *Mein Leben Teil 2: My Life Part 2* (archive of the *international forum of new cinema*). Cited 29 September 2007. Online: [www.fdk-berlin.de/forumarchiv/forum2003/katalog/mein\\_leben\\_teil\\_2.pdf](http://www.fdk-berlin.de/forumarchiv/forum2003/katalog/mein_leben_teil_2.pdf), pp. 1-6.

70. Quotes from the film are according to the English subtitles.

position beyond being diplomatic or even adequate. Finally, it flashes on a middle-aged woman who makes up her own spirituality, politics, and ancestry line. By doing so, the filmmaker brings into focus a woman's life that is deeply interlaced with main traces of *Zeitgeschichte*, yet does not fit into its categories and subject groups. Linking her mother's story to her grandmother and great-grandmothers' lives, as well as basically involving her own position as daughter, the filmmaker develops a fascinating *gynealogy*. This *gynealogy* is established by the film's portraying of women over four generations and by carefully elaborating on links and likenesses among them. In addition to this *gynealogy*, the film builds up photograph-based lineages that resemble the ramified structures of 1 Chronicles 1–9 and set up an iconographic memorial album. Finally, both narratives and lineages provide a genealogical structure for the heterogeneous contents of Levi's experimental archive. The importance of genealogy construction within *My Life Part 2* is paired with central genealogical subject matters the film engages. These are, among others, notions of *postmemory*,<sup>71</sup> second generation memory, and legacy; matters of complex hybrid origins and subject positions; and processes of forgetting and repressing within memory performances, among others.

The following section explores three indicative aspects of the film's conception of genealogy, i.e. the memorial album, ideology based lineages, and the notion of alternative archives.

### *Gynealogy Composition in My Life Part 2: Occurrences and Nuances*

*Iconographic Lineages: A Political Memorial Album.* On the basis of family photographs, *My Life Part 2* establishes lineages in the form of a ramified family tree. The photographs are presented in a series of stills, commented on by the autobiographical voiceover. On the one hand, the photographs and commentaries feature issues familiar from the 1 Chronicles' genealogies: patrilinear lineages are referred to. Stills and related names spotlight singular ancestors who function as focal points for larger stories. Particular segments are emphasized as central for the larger genealogy (in the case of Levi, the Jewish branch of her ancestry). Commentaries made by the autobiographical voiceover concern ethnicity and socio-economical positions and suggest gendered role models.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, the iconographic

71. See Marianne Hirsch, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy', in M. Bal, J. Crewe, and L. Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 3–23.

72. Commentaries often refer to longer and more elaborate narrative sequences. For example, Levi's brief comment on her great-grandmother's picture, 'Recha Levi, nee Bodenheimer. Committed suicide', refers to an earlier audio sequence, in which Ursula Levi recalls her grandmother's suicide after she had received the deportation order in 1940.

lineages reach beyond 1 Chronicles 1–9: The lineage develops around the filmmaker's mother Ursula Levi and centres on Ursula Levi's female ancestors on both her mother and father's side, thus nevertheless conjoining patrilinear lineage constitution.<sup>73</sup> Photographs communicate additional visual information concerning socio-political settings and atmospheres.<sup>74</sup> Finally, the family tree features a distinct and crucial theme, i.e. comments that refer to dates, places, and circumstances of the family being persecuted, deported, and murdered by the Nazis. The naming and personalizing of the Nazi crimes in the context of lineage construction is already anticipated in the opening credits. There the autobiographical voiceover refers to her mother's 'photo albums with pictures of relatives murdered by the Nazis', as the filmmaker had known from childhood on. It exposes the twofold function of genealogy construction: it provides a means to commemorate the dead and to recognize their subjectivity and by so doing offers a tool for performing a political act of memory. Levi enforces the political implications of her genealogical performance by contrasting it with television footage of related public debates in post-war Germany. The footage documents a broad German interest in repressing the memory of the Shoah and exposes practices of forgetting.<sup>75</sup> Thus contextualized, the personal memorial album intersects with public debates and participates in the complex array of acts that constitute the contested memory of the Shoah.<sup>76</sup>

73. On the maternal side, Ursula Levi's mother Karla Levi and her grandmother Sophie Cecilia Heins take centre stage. The paternal side is opened by her grandmother Recha Levi, nee Bodenheimer. As to the reference to women, however, the film features a striking similarity with 1 Chronicles 1–9. The photograph of one of Recha Levi's sons, Rudolph, shows another woman, probably his wife. The woman is not referred to at all. Staying anonymous, she is at the centre of an *iconographic shaped gap*, that the photograph-based lineage constitutes.

74. An example for the force and complexity of the visual message is the shoot of a postcard, edged between the photographs. The card is addressed to Ursula Levi's uncle Franz who has been murdered in Dachau. It shows a Nazi parade at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin; the stamp displays Hitler; its postmark delivers a propaganda phrase.

75. Most important in this respect is the footage of a television debate with psychoanalyst Margarete Mitscherlich in the wake of the screening of the US television series *Holocaust* in Germany in 1979. Mitscherlich exposed social operation modes of repressing the Nazi dictatorship and co-initiated a public debate on the memory of the Shoah in Germany. Another piece of footage gives a clipping of the speech Martin Walser delivered on October 11, 1998 on the occasion of his award of the Peace Prize by the German Book Trade. In his speech Walser asserts the alleged instrumentalization of the Holocaust, a position that was contested by Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany at the time, and caused an extremely controversial debate.

76. A similar evaluation of the film led to awards from the Duisburg Documentary Film Festival (2003) and the Warsaw Jewish Film Festival (2004).

*Names, Links and Likenesses: Ideology-Based Lineages.* The political character of the film's genealogy is sustained by the role played by the names and political positions of its protagonists. Names, a central means of the film's genealogy construction similar to that of 1 Chronicles 1–9, exemplify Levi's headstrong lineage composition: in a central sequence, the filmmaker refers to her adopting the Jewish maiden name of her mother—Levi—in order to connect with her Jewish lineage and to enunciate difference, after the reunification of Germany in 1990. By doing so she aligns herself with the family history of assuming—and abandoning—the Jewish name Levi. Either act provides a means to assimilate or to enunciate difference in respective historical, cultural, and political contexts.<sup>77</sup>

The political stance of the female ancestors in Levi's lineage plays a crucial role throughout the film and is referred to as an important link for the genealogy's protagonists. Refusing to become part of the Nazi ideology as well as speaking out against social attempts to repress the Shoah in post-war Germany is perceived as a shared commitment.<sup>78</sup> As Madeleine Bernstorff puts it:

The film is a box within a box. On the outside there is the story of her family and the story of her mother's life. But it soon becomes apparent that the filmmaker has ordered her mother's records in such a way that she is using the archive to reflect on what needed to be suppressed or displaced, and what has to be put right: the grandmother's, mother's and daughter's sensitivity to the 'German situation', the power of the generation of perpetrators and collaborators to say what is and is not true, and their descendents, who seem to enjoy the privilege of not having to consider their family's past. It is a sensitivity deemed pathological by the majoritarian society in order to distract attention away from itself.<sup>79</sup>

The film highlights the political commitment family women over four generations have in common and engages it in its genealogy constitution. Shared political positions and ideological commitments become major

77. A second aspect of the power of names within the genealogy constitution—as well as of the unusual ways of establishing it—is Ursula Levi's drawing back her family line to the biblical Levi. Constructing Levi as eponymous ancestor assures her Jewish identity. Moreover, the notions of landlessness and priestly succession she ascribes to the tribe of Levi provide her with a means to interpret her life.

78. This shared commitment concerns Karla Levi's refusal to divorce her husband in the 1930s, Ursula Levi's naming of the presence of former Nazis in the Protestant congregation, Angelika Levi's exposure of recent anti-Semitism and racism at the Neustadt fair, Recha Levi's suicide in the face of her deportation order, and maybe even Sophie Heins's having an illegitimate child at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

79. Madeleine Bernstorff, 'Über den Film', in *Mein Leben Teil 2: My Life Part 2* (archive of the international forum of new cinema). Cited 29 September 2007. Online: [www.fdk-berlin.de/forumarchiv/forum2003/katalog/mein\\_leben\\_teil\\_2.pdf](http://www.fdk-berlin.de/forumarchiv/forum2003/katalog/mein_leben_teil_2.pdf), pp. 1–3 (2).

reference points for a lineage that is biographical as well as ideology-based and politically qualified.

Developing her lineage on the basis of both kinship and ideological affinities allows the filmmaker to maintain and deepen ties that are otherwise undermined by dominant politics of genealogy and memory formation.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, engaging the notion of genealogy also allows the filmmaker to chart difference through carving out the heterogeneous subject positions of the protagonists. In fact, enunciating disparate subject positions is part of the political commitment at the basis of Levi's gynealogy. *My Life Part 2* has a primary concern with hybrid subject positions that is also reflected in the filmmaker's decision to shape her film as an archive. In fact, the film employs the notion of the alternative archive as a central device for enunciating heterogeneity.

*Structure and Patterns of the Archive.* *My Life Part 2* has been categorized as an archive.<sup>81</sup> To render this categorization more precisely, Levi's film presents an *alternative archive*. The archive, as a form of memory, is deeply interrelated to power issues. These concern the design and charge of the archive and decisions on inclusion and exclusion as well as contents accessibility, among other variables.<sup>82</sup> Establishing and controlling archives may be a tool of hegemonic memory. However, recontextualizing archival materials<sup>83</sup> and employing alternative media, may also constitute alternative archives. These alternative archives provide a framework for acts of counter-memory. As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith put it:

80. Such politics includes genealogies' organization principles as well as political ideologies. The former encompass patrilinearity or the traditional passing on of the Jewish line through the mother's side. The latter include ideologies such as the Nazi's stamping on Jewish and non-Jewish marriages or German public interests to repress the memory of the Shoah.

81. See for example Bernstorff, 'Über der Film', pp. 1-2, and the screening of *My Life Part 2* at the film festival 'Soft Logics—Archives and Positions' (*Soft Logic—Archive und Positionen*), künstlerhaus stuttgart (March 25–26, 2004). Cited 20 September 2007. Online: <http://kuenstlerhaus.de/archiv/detail.php?id=600&search=soft+logics&offset=0>. See David Bordwell for the genres of documentary and experimental film: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (7th edn; New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), pp. 128-62.

82. See for example Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (trans. E. Prenowitz; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

83. The notion of *recontextualization* was introduced to me by Andrea Meuzelaar, PhD candidate at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis. *My Life Part 2* clearly shows the significance of recontextualization of archival materials for the notion of the alternative archive. For example, in the context of an archive that essentially aims at looking closely at the past, the archival TV footage of the Walser speech (cf. p. 247 n. 75), in which Walser strongly suggests that he had to look away over and over again, is exposed as a deliberate decision rather than being inescapably forced by circumstances.



From feminist and other varieties of social history, we have learned that public media and official archives memorialize the experiences of the powerful, those who control hegemonic discursive space. To find the testimonies of the disenfranchised, we have turned to alternate archives such as visual images, music, ritual and performance, material and popular culture, oral history, and silence.<sup>84</sup>

In *My Life Part 2* fragments of family story, intertwined with socio-political footage, are collected in a way that a meaningful story emerges. As Angelika Levi puts it:

My film is an attempt to tell what was told and not told in my family, using objects, photos, audio and video material. The film is about trauma and at the same time about how history can be produced, archived, brought into conversations and categorized both at the macro- and micro level, and how I continued to collect so that I could tell a story.<sup>85</sup>

Creating an alternative archive, Levi chooses for a form of narrative that emerges from collecting, arranging, merging, and placing materials side-by-side rather than forming a linear and chronological plotline. Such narratives may encompass heterogeneous fragments, slivers, and conflicting contents. They have been used in artworks addressing post-Shoah memory beyond *My Life Part 2*.<sup>86</sup> Including photographs, shots, and other audio-visual footage is especially suitable for the concept of this 'archival' form of storytelling. Angelika Levi chooses for an archive in order to engage the issues of trauma, second-generation memory, history, and hybridity. This points to alternative archives as a relevant form of memory when linear, coherent narrations may not be adequate for meeting the needs of a fragmented, fractured situation such as a post-trauma situation.

Archives do not randomly pool contents, but arrange and organize. The film's biography- as well as ideology-based gynealogy is a central structuring device within *My Life Part 2*.<sup>87</sup> As an ordering device, the branched structure of segmented genealogies suggests linking heterogeneous subject

84. Hirsch and Smith, 'Feminism and Cultural Memory', p. 12. Most striking in the context of this contribution is Hirsch and Smith's listing of silence as a possible form of an alternative archive—it immediately recalls both the structure of shaped gaps and Angelika Levi's attempt to 'tell what was told and not told' in her family.

85. *Mein Leben Teil 2* = *My Life Part 2*, p. 1.

86. Another example is the work of the US photographer Lori Novak. Also situated in the context of postmemory, her photographic collages similarly intertwine family photos and public images and/or sites, thus delimiting intersections and interdependencies of personal and public memories of the Shoah. For an analysis of her collage 'Past Lives' see Hirsch, 'Projected Memory', pp. 5-7.

87. Places are another structuring device within the film.





Figure 2. Collage from *My Life Part 2* (permission granted by Ms. Levi)

positions to particular ancestors. By doing so, it provides an organization principle that allows for ordering, highlighting, and linking contents without neglecting their disparity. On the one hand, difference is visualized and inconsistent inheritance positions are acknowledged. On the other hand, divergent subject positions are related to each other and may be integrated into a larger context.

Levi's utilization of a genealogy format to organize a heterogeneous archive facilitates the film's dealing with fractures and inconsistencies in inheritance. It allows for integrating—yet not annexing—hybrid lineages and thereby opens up its resources. In the final section of this contribution, the analysis of *My Life Part 2* will be brought back to bear on 1 Chronicles 1–9: the notion of the alternative archive will be employed for the interpretation of 1 Chronicles 1–9 and finally, gap filling as undertaken by *My Life Part 2* will engage with shaped gaps in 1 Chronicles 1–9.<sup>88</sup>

88. For further readings on Levi's film see an interesting article by Hilde Hoffmann, published so recently that I was not able to discuss it here ('*Mein Leben Teil 2—My Life Part 2: Reflections about Recent Autobiographical Documentaries*', in V. Apfelthaler and J. Köhne [eds.], *Gendered Memories: Transgressions in German and Israeli Film and Theatre* [Vienna: Turia & Kant, 2007], pp. 128–43).

*Reading 1 Chronicles 1–9 together with  
My Life Part 2—What Have We Gained?*

*Concepts of the Alternative Archive*

1 Chronicles 1–9 is a distinct text unit that assembles, organizes, and recontextualizes materials. As such it may be categorized as an archive. The identification of this text archive as an alternative archive, however, depends on the assessment of its power dynamics. On the one hand, 1 Chronicles 1–9 asserts normative power concerning gender relations and beyond. On the other hand, the unit seemingly utilizes its subversive corpora for performing Israel's memory as multilayered and complex. This assertion of complexity is a central criterion for qualifying 1 Chronicles 1–9 as an alternative archive. The qualifier 'alternative' is further supported by another shift of perspective. Bringing Israel's marginality in the face of contemporary great powers into focus, 1 Chronicles 1–9 may be understood as an alternative archive in which a disenfranchised group gathers and thereby narrates its stories.

Identifying 1 Chronicles 1–9 as an alternative archive has implications for its interpretation. The notion of recontextualization sheds a different light on its contents. 1 Chronicles 1–9 designs its own genealogies but also collects earlier materials. This genealogical scrap is recontextualized in an identity performance that opens the history of Israel's monarchy. In this new context, dry lists or census reports transform from archival material into constituents in an act of memory, and become highly ideological texts. The impact of recontextualization and collage used as explicit literary forms suggests that the heterogeneity of 1 Chronicles 1–9 may be reinterpreted anew. Inconsistencies and variations may be interpreted as interesting and reasonable features of 1 Chronicles 1–9; they do not need to be conceptualized as badly worked joinlines in the unit's redactional history.<sup>89</sup> Finally, the notion of the alternative archive may be used in order to conceptualize 1 Chronicles 1–9 as a post-trauma archive. In the post-exilic period, a linear narrative alone might not have been adequate to perform Israel's memory in a way that allowed for discontinuities, infringements, and socio-political complexity in the wake of the exile. In such a situation, an alternative archive might have stepped in. It allows for a side-by-side of norm and subversion, for inconsistencies in both memory and present identities,

89. Knoppers emphasizes that interpretations of 1 Chronicles 1–9 from the angle of redaction criticism (e.g. by Rudolph and Kartveit) have failed to explain why assumed editors multiplied 'incoherence in the text' and did not 'choose to create a more unified, even seamless text' (§5.4). Instead, he suggests that 'pursuing the heterogeneity within the Judahite genealogy holds much promise' ("Great among his brothers", but Who Is He?', no pages, §7.1)

for declared transgressions of set roles as well as for silence. The so understood act of (counter-)memory starts out with the corpus of female gendered genealogies and comparable corpora, yet reaches beyond it.

The notion of the alternative archive brings genealogy constitution within *My Life Part 2* back to 1 Chronicles 1–9 and the other way round. Both sources point out that genealogies—on the one hand patrilinear genealogies that are energized by a corpus of female gendered genealogies on the other hand lineages as biography and ideology-based gynealogies—may be a form of memory that allows for performances of counter memory.

*Perspectives: Shaped Gaps as against Gap Filling*

Genealogy constitution in both 1 Chronicles 1–9 and *My Life Part 2* is intrinsically powerful. This power, however, involves two extremely different perspectives on women's subjectivity and has different implications. In 1 Chronicles 1–9 we have a gendered corpus of fragments and gaps within a text that performs Israel's memory and identities. The corpus has a strong bearing on this performance. Israel as a national and religious community remains the focus of the text. 1 Chronicles 1–9 aims at the ongoing identity of this community; the integrative power of its female-gendered genealogies serves this concern. In 1 Chronicles 1–9 women's subjectivity is not addressed as such and, as a powerful but a slender trace, remains at the fringe of its memory.

By contrast, *My Life Part 2* centres on the process of assembling fragments and exploring gaps. The position of a gap—or differently put, the position of the *other*—forms the basis of its gynealogical lineage. Levi's gynealogy is constituted by the subjectivity of women who live on the fringes, who are challenged to fill in seemingly incommensurate subject positions and to take complex decisions concerning socio-political identification and participation. Here, gynealogy constitution aims at complexly articulating difference concerning socio-political ideologies and power dynamics. Rather than aiming at a national or religious community as such, it addresses difference within a community. Drawing on abundant sources of the subjectivity of a particular succession of women, the film eventually suggests a redefinition of fringe and centre.

Film and biblical text approach women's subjectivity from quite different, yet complementary perspectives. 1 Chronicles 1–9 recalls woman figures by means of shaped gaps, whereas *My Life Part 2* takes women out of the gap and makes a film out of them. Both sources use fragments, but for different ends. In 1 Chronicles 1–9, fragments function as clues to a larger picture; they present a performance of collective identities. In *My Life Part 2*, fragments are used in order to create a new picture; they make for a more individual performance of subjectivity. Reading text and



If I am asked for identification, to supply an answer to the question, Which project speaks more to you? my answer will be as follows. First of all 1 Chronicles 1–9, which is about integrated identities. This text allows multivocality to socio-political processes, discussions, and negotiations that lie at the basis of its genealogies. By comparison, the film creates distance by addressing a very particular lineage. And yet, beyond its specific lineage, *My Life Part 2* intrigues by suggesting genealogy constitution as a way of dealing with hybrid subject positions in recent socio-political contexts beyond its actual lineage. Compared to it, the Chronicles text allows for

integrating slivers of difference only. Reading film and text together again sharpens the understanding of their distinctiveness and limits: each of these two sources facilitates the assessment of the other.

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## THE HOLY LAND AND ITS BIBLE IN ORLANDO

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Standing before a crowd of well-dressed dignitaries, Madame Lydia Mamreov von Finkelstein Mountford patiently explained what she called ‘Orientalisms’, the rituals, dances, prayers, and chants that accompanied the breaking of ground for a replica of Jerusalem. In a few months, the full-size, eleven acre model would be one of the main attractions at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair.

Mountford was an elegant, amply figured woman, internationally known as much for her string of names as for her dramatic monologues on biblical life. Donning elaborate native dress, sitting, striding, singing, gesturing, filling lecture halls with richly modulated cries of desert and city, she had built a career on conjuring vivid images and incidents out of the biblical past and relating them to the concerns of her audiences. She was not one to miss a theatrical opportunity. Sweeping a gloved hand toward the crowd in St. Louis, and summoning a practiced stage voice, she exclaimed, ‘You cannot go to Jerusalem, so Jerusalem comes to you. To American energy all things are possible!’<sup>1</sup>

Madame Mountford spoke to Victorian Americans who were giddy with the young Republic’s industrial and military prowess, fascinated by travelers’ tales and images of the ‘Orient’, and accustomed to seeing the Bible and other historical themes staged as extravagant circus spectacles and open-air melodramas.<sup>2</sup> The United States was a nation whose public symbols and discourse established continuity with classical and biblical

1. *World’s Fair Bulletin* 4, no. 10 (August 1903).

2. Among the many dramas staged in open-air locations and traveling circuses, I have identified several related to the Bible: *The Fall of Babylon* (1887), *Rome under Nero* (1887) and *Moses, or the Bondage in Egypt* (1890); *The Crusades* (1851, revived in 1903); *Nero and the Burning of Rome* (1888); versions of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1891, 1899, 1901, 1903, 1914–15 and 1928; *The Crusades* (1851 and 1903); *King Solomon, or the Destruction of Jerusalem* (1891 and 1893); *The Deluge, or Paradise Lost* (1874); *The Fall of Nineveh* (1892); *Noah’s Ark* (1894 and 1924); *David and Goliath* (1903). For documentation and particulars, see Burke O. Long, ‘The Circus’, in John Sawyer (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 365–80.



antiquity, and asserted that Americans were the Christian successors to the promised-land ancient Hebrews.<sup>3</sup>

A century later, Americans are still energetically re-creating bibles and holy lands in public places. Having long since supplanted those Victorian pageants, Hollywood and Christian media enterprises nowadays actively purvey cinematic bibles and holy lands with dazzling technological wizardry. Palestine Park, a large-scale model of biblical Canaan built in the mid-1870s by the Chautauqua Institution in western New York, is today a venue for self guided tours of Christianized biblical history and geography, though much diminished from its earlier glory.<sup>4</sup> At the Great Passion Play and New Holy Land in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, visitors marvel at a seven-story high Christ of the Ozarks, attend an extravagantly staged passion drama, and tour re-created biblical sites. Palestine Gardens in Lucedale, Mississippi (a 'good place to visit' states the printed brochure), offers a scale model of biblical Palestine at the time of Jesus (with the word 'entrance' written in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin). Holy Land USA, a 250 acre nature sanctuary, gives tourists a 'pilgrim's map' and sets them off to trace Jesus' journeys and deeds in the rolling hills of Bedford, Virginia. Among the most recent roadside attractions is The Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida, which offers re-created biblical sites and high-tech venues for evangelistic films, lectures, and Christian musical drama. That's to name only a few made-in-the-USA bibles and holy lands, and none of those that have come and gone since the days of Madame Mountford.<sup>5</sup>

Whether grandiose or miniature, these flavorful extracts of nostalgia, as Umberto Eco shrewdly observed, are a special set of mnemonic practices. They are 'instances where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake'.<sup>6</sup> If by 'culture' one means the ways in which an identifiable group of people assign, often at the expense of suppressing dissent, shared meanings to the past, places, objects, and human activities, then these 'absolute fakes' are densely

3. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); 'The Biblical Basis of the American Myth', in Giles Gunn (ed.), *The Bible and American Arts and Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press: 1983), pp. 219-29.

4. See Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models and Fantasy Travels* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), for an extended analysis of Palestine Park.

5. Timothy K. Beal, *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

6. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), p. 8.

layered artifacts of unstable cultural processes.<sup>7</sup> Where possible, these artifacts of performance require ethnographical analysis, supplemented by study of printed programs, maps, recordings, advertisements, reviews, replicas, stage sets, drawings, photographs and the like. Here are the texts I excavate and read. They are evidence of the construction of human space imbued with social memory, including its entanglements with ideology and hegemony.

### *Orlando's Holy Land*

A \$16 million theme park, the Holy Land Experience sits on fifteen acres of reclaimed swamp land in Orlando, Florida. Nearby is the Millennia Mall, featuring upscale retail stores, gushing fountains, miles of waterways, and 96 theatrical projectors. A few miles further west are other sprawling theme parks, resort hotels, and the nearly round the clock entertainment of Universal Studios. The idea of the Holy Land Experience, however, is that a visitor to central Florida's most crowded tourist corridor can leave behind all that frantic America-at-leisure activity, at least for a few hours. Passing through the faux-stone Jerusalem City Gate (actually an architectural mish-mash of the Jaffa, Golden, and Damascus gates of present day Jerusalem), one immediately plunges into an ancient biblical world that is 'overflowing with religious history, rich culture and vibrant activity'.<sup>8</sup> Or so the enticing *Visitor's Guide* exclaims.

It takes a bit of doing to make the transition. First, a robed attendant (wearing Teva-like sandals) takes your ticket and runs it through a modern electronic reader/counter. A scrubbed up Indiana Jones look-alike gingerly pokes a stick into your opened backpack, looking for food, beverages, weapons or bombs and eyeing you for required shoes and shirts (no halter-tops, short shorts, bathing suits or spandex).<sup>9</sup> Clearing the gate at last, you walk into old Jerusalem—public restrooms, guest services, and

7. I accept that any notion of 'culture' is a product of socially grounded discursive practices and thus subject to debate and erasure. I assume that culture (hence our notion about what constitutes 'culture') is positioned, partisan and political, not innocent and neutral; it is local, not universal or general; and it is material and historical, not transcendent. See Marvin Harris, *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999); Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Robert Layton, *An Introduction to Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); R. A. Shweder, 'Culture: Contemporary Views' in Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), vol. 5, pp. 3151-58.

8. *Welcome Guide* (Orlando, FL: Zion's Hope).

9. *Welcome Guide*.



Fig. 1. Entrance Gate, *The Holy Land Experience*, Orlando, Florida. Photo by Judith Long.

ATM machine on your left, Jerusalem Street Market directly ahead. A few costumed pedestrians, shopkeepers and Roman soldiers mingle with visitors. Occasionally a soldier will stop and pose for tourist photos. From time to time, a man in biblical garb wanders into the area, blowing a *shofar* and announcing that the Wilderness Tabernacle performance is about to begin. Ambient background music, competing with traffic noise from the nearby highway, softly floods the space.

This nostalgic holy land may try to be insulated from its Florida neighbors, but it satisfies a first requirement of the neighborhood anyway—it's a place to go shopping. Arab dresses, made in Israel, hang from roof timbers and stone walls. Yusef, a Christian Arab who, like all park employees 'has a relationship with Jesus', greets visitors with a cheery '*shalom*'. He answers questions and offers encouragement to look inside the souvenir shop. There, clerks offer trinket mementos, postcards (of the park and the actual Holy Land), religious paintings, clothing, Jewish religious items (good sellers, I was told), recorded lectures on Bible prophecy, Messianic/Hebrew Christianity, and millenarian theology. You can purchase items related to the on-site model of Jerusalem (said to be the largest small-scale model in the world), as well as books on Holy Land travel and biblical archaeology. One very popular item, I was told, is a fold-out chart whose spread-sheet display compares 'seventeen religions and cults' with the gold standard, 'Biblical Christianity'.

Described in publicity materials as a 'living biblical museum', The Holy Land Experience opened in 2001. In part, planners try to enable a fantasy of entering a long-gone, yet familiar, biblical past. It is 'a spectacular place', proclaims the *Welcome Guide*, conflating, but not confusing the actual Holy Land with this engineered experience of it. Like nineteenth century travelogues and Holy Land picture books, the Holy Land Experience promises vacationers maximal reality of biblical sites without the trouble of traveling to modern-day Israel, or dealing with the constraints of geography or chronology, whether imposed by the biblical text or by historians. One enters a timeless zone of memory constructions, a materialized space of induced recollections that are rooted in prior experiences of Christian worship and teaching, the physical layout of the theme park, and vague notions of the Holy Land drawn from the Bible and popular images of biblical antiquity. But memory is tethered to none of these exclusively.

A visitor passes through Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, then (after passing Simeon's Corner, a soft drink stand) slips back into antiquity at an empty Qumran cave, marked now as the site of a future exhibit.

The place is centrally located, but empty of purpose, since Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls are fully integrated into a Byzantine styled museum building located on the far side of the Caravan Cabana, Oasis Palm Café, reflecting pool, and Shofar Auditorium. To the right of Qumran, and taking one further back into antiquity, is the Wilderness Tabernacle. There a sound and light show, with voiceover narration, recreates Old Testament ritual sacrifice and proclaims its annulment by the New Testament Christ. To the left of Qumran is the Garden Tomb—the Protestant version of the open-air place, not the shrine encrusted chamber within Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The tomb has been cut into the base of a faux-rocky cliff whose summit doubles as Calvary. At the Garden Tomb, visitors peek inside, presumably recalling the gospel narratives. Some pose for





Fig. 2. Visitors' Map. Courtesy The Holy Land Experience, Orlando, Florida.

snapshots beside the rolled aside stone. Several times a day, professional actors and singers enact an abbreviated musical version of the New Testament passion narrative: a blooded Jesus—walking, falling, getting up, carrying his cross to the place of execution, taunted and hounded all the way by vicious Roman soldiers, then the triumph of bodily resurrection.



Fig. 3. *The Garden Tomb, The Holy Land Experience, Orlando, Florida. Photo by Judith Long.*



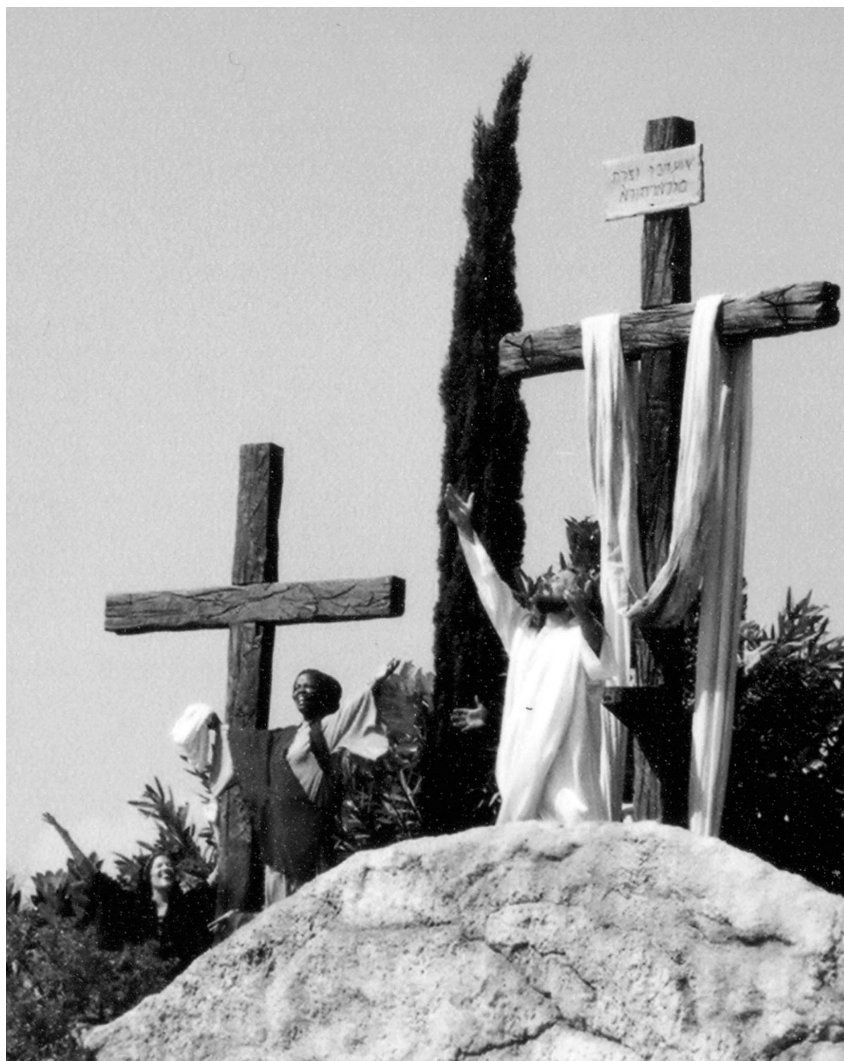


Fig. 4. *Finale to the Passion drama, The Holy Land Experience, Orlando, Florida.*  
*Photo by Judith Long.*

A little further on, its massive and ornate tower dominating architectural space, sits King Herod's Temple of the Great King. Visitors go inside (through a side entrance) for a cinematic re-telling of Christ as foreshadowed in the *Aqedah*. Outside, on the temple steps overlooking the paved Plaza of the Nations, park employees deliver historical lectures and stirring musical dramas to audiences seated in folding chairs.





Fig. 5. *Musical Drama at the Plaza of Nations, The Holy Land Experience, Orlando, Florida. Photo by Judith Long.*

Indeed, re-creating visits to biblical sites, which was in the original plan, now seems secondary to upbeat, energetic dramatic encounter. All the exhibits, polished lecturers, preachers, actors, singers and dancers proclaim, as though from the same script, a traditional message of universal salvation through Christ. Having discovered the emotional power of musical drama, management recently constructed several outdoor performance spaces equipped with staging, lighting, seating and audio equipment, all of which accommodates a full schedule of dramatic performances, notably on the Temple steps.

‘I like to think that all the exhibits point to Christ, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world’, park founder Marvin Rosenthal, a Baptist minister, told me with the practiced air of a man used to giving interviews. Rosenthal, a convert from Judaism who has made it his life’s work to bring Jews to Christ, wants visitors ‘to get all you can get from a good church and far more, but in an exciting way that is fun, that is educational, that is spiritual, that merges all these attributes’. Director of Ministry Facilities Chris Wallace sees the Holy Land Experience as a ‘full fledged bringing to life [of the Bible] from the [musical and cinematic] shows to the [lecture] presentations that you get—reaching people that you never would be able to reach’.

However, most who walk through the grounds (they sometimes arrive on church buses) seem to be already inside the Christian fold. They find a

program of entertainment that provides Protestant evangelism wrapped in sounds and drama made familiar by TV preachers and large, Bible-centered churches. Though worshipful, the package is perhaps more theatrical, more glitzy, more Disneyesque, than some might have expected.

Larry Sampson, Director of Guest Services, explained that the crowds on Saturdays are generally church going people. 'They know the Lord', Sampson said. 'We'll do "The Passion" and we'll do "The Centurion" [a drama about surrendering to the power of Christ], and they are just—well, they're just engaged in what we're doing'. On weekdays, Sampson added, visitors are 'far less likely to be so engaged and moved by the dramas'. Searching for an appropriate way to put his feelings, he continued, 'Scripture says some will be blinded...you know they're yappin', they're talkin' you know, and they're movin'. But on Saturdays, it's a different crowd'.

Sampson surely identified one of the fantasy-killing elements in this edenic garden of biblically shaped memory. While actors and employees strive to make The Holy Land Experience a utopian place for themselves and for visitors (codes of dress and behavior are enforced), staffers sometimes have to deal with paying guests who are less than fully attentive. Nonetheless, with single-minded intensity, the programs try to engender private religious experience—mainly through those upbeat musical dramas—and to bring the Holy Land and all its accumulated pieties home to America. Even if, in Umberto Eco's phrase, the result is an 'absolute fake' akin to the artificial realism of wide screen cinema or reality TV. The distinction is apparently not troublesome to many who go through the gate, and for whom a visit proves to be an enriching (and safe) substitute for an actual visit to the shrines and revered landscapes of modern Israel.<sup>10</sup> In any case, the emphasis falls not so much on Holy Land travel as on proclaiming a gospel of salvation-by-Jesus-alone that has been distilled into twenty-minute, technically expert, colorful and uplifting dramas. Many visitors find something that brings them back for repeated visits.

'I love it here', a young T-shirted and tattooed Marine told me in the spring of 2004. We were sharing a table outside the Oasis Palms Café, not

10. A British dentist, Brian Hawk, found that the programs did more than 'hammer you with salvation and I think it might give an insight into the real Holy Land. It's based very solidly on well-documented things'. Although he would like to visit Israel, Hawk added, 'right now it's not a very safe time'. For Eileen Faad, Orlando's holy land was the 'next best thing' to traveling to Israel, 'just like being in the Holy Land'. Tourist Kimberlie Humphrey told a news reporter that she felt 'so close to the Lord. I love him so much anyway and it made me feel much closer to Him. I felt that I needed to take time on my vacation to give back to Him and it's kind of neat that this experience is for that. The first time we came was when Hurricane Charlie hit'. She paused briefly, evidently recalling the devastation. 'It just made sense', she added (Hilary Rose, 'Oh come all ye faithful', *The Times* [London], April 15, 2006, p. 26).

too far from the Garden Tomb where the April jasmine was in bloom. I picked at a dry version of Israeli falafel; he was conquering a Marine-sized 'Goliath Burger'. A frequent visitor, Bryan was ambivalent about the war in Iraq. However, he took comfort in his belief that rampant immorality, the 'absence of natural affection' as he put it, alluding to Rom. 1.29-31, actually presaged the return of Christ. 'It's like being with the community of saints [awaiting the return of Christ]', he said, meaning those church people presumed to be in the park that day, including Bryan and his Latino-American buddy, Jesus (Rev. 19.5-8).

Staffers told me that very few visitors are disappointed with what they find. Perhaps tourists are attracted to the official web page and its unabashed huckstering of biblical reference and religious inspiration. 'Expect to be inspired', the home page promises, while the accompanying image plunges a prospective visitor into a sentimental recollection of the gentle Savior (Jesus actor Les Cheveldayoff) who, flowing hair aglow with backlit sunlight, gazes into the eyes of a little child. Expect to be like this little one, and those of the Gospel narrative, whom Christ welcomed into his embrace (Mk 9.37). And as adults, 'Look into the eyes of the One who changed the course of history'.<sup>11</sup>

Orlando's Holy Land Experience offers this sort of fantasy-realism in exchange for the \$30 dollar admission (\$40 for a two-day pass). It is a world seemingly emptied of human conflict, child-like in its scrubbed up innocence, uncomplicated in its presentation of Christian proclamation. It is a place filled with Hallelujah praise songs and reiterations of Christian commitment—by employees and visitors alike. It is a setting for stirring entertainment and surrogate emotion, the very stuff and appeal of engineered cinematic fantasy. 'When we're out there', said Cheveldayoff, 'we're kicking it in 150 percent. It has to be real. It can't be fake'.<sup>12</sup>

But like many idealized re-creations of the past, and *unlike* the controlled fantasies of *cinema-verité*, Orlando's Holy Land Experience has trouble keeping messier bits of reality from seeping into paradise. As I reflected on what the young Marine had told me, I thought of America's heated, sometimes vituperative discord over patriotic credentials, and the theme park's uncomplicated fourth of July celebrations of a God-blessed, Christianity-imprinted nation. The 'Old Scroll Shop' reiterated the message at the time by selling neckties inscribed with 'In God We Trust' and 'One Nation Under God'—testimonies, the official web page asserted, 'to your faith in God and

11. [www.holylandexperience.com](http://www.holylandexperience.com). This version of the web page was last accessed in January 2007. The content has now changed since Trinity Broadcast Network purchased the park in June of that year. For TBN's press release, see [www.tbn.org/index.php/7.html?nid=217](http://www.tbn.org/index.php/7.html?nid=217). Accessed September, 2008.

12. Paul Lomartire, 'What Would Jesus View?', *Palm Beach Post* (June 17, 2004), p. 1E.

love for your country every time you put them on!’<sup>13</sup> I recalled the struggle, mentioned by several staff people, to keep the line between entertainment and ministry sharply etched—and the problem the City of Orlando has with that stance when it comes to assessing taxes on Orlando’s prospering theme parks.<sup>14</sup> I thought of park management’s intervention in divisive debates over abortion, most publicly during its ‘Celebrate Life Week’. Co-sponsored with a Christian witness radio station, the event mixed a tour of Orlando’s holy land with events that helped raise funds to support pro-life, anti-abortion service agencies in the area.

Despite a good deal of individual *bonhomie*, the Holy Land Experience and its parent organization draw unyielding boundaries between themselves and the world beyond. Park employees, who may not identify as ‘charismatic’ Christians, must sign a statement saying that they agree with a fundamentalist ‘Doctrinal Statement and Statement of Principles’.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, employees may not belong to any church that is officially affiliated with the National Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches. Reporters routinely receive a ‘media authorization agreement’ that, if signed, prohibits use of material in any publication that represents categories such as ‘alternative, astronomy, automotive, environment and nature, fashion, games, humor, lesbian, gay and bisexual, men, music, science, sex, sports, tabloids, trade magazines and women’.<sup>16</sup>

‘We just walk with soft shoes’, Larry Sampson told me when I asked about ties to local Christian groups. ‘There’re certain ministries we just don’t want to get involved in. We want to be tactful with them. We love you, and it’s a “not where we are” kind of thing’. This stance and the organization’s rule of conformity ensure single minded focus and the utopian ethos inside the Jerusalem Gate. The staffs of Zion’s Hope and The Holy Land Experience await, as the Doctrinal Statement states, ‘the literal, physical,

13. In 2008, these neckties were no longer available for online purchase.

14. A Florida judge recently decided that the Orange County property assessor had failed to produce any evidence that Zion’s Hope was using The Holy Land Experience ‘to make money or for some other purpose than evangelizing and worshipping’. It could not, therefore, be denied its tax-exempt status, contrary to the county assessor’s claim that the park was a business with a religious theme (*Orlando Sentinel* [July 12, 2005], p. A1.) The Florida State Senate then stepped into the middle of the dispute and passed legislation that would specifically exempt the Orlando theme park from property taxes. The bill became law in June, 2006 (*Orlando Sentinel* [May 5, 2006], p. B5; *St Petersburg Times* [April 6, 2006], p. 1A; *Orlando Sentinel* [October 16, 2006], p. 16).

15. ‘We love them [the charismatic Christians]’, Rosenthal said. ‘We appreciate them. But we would not offer them a job’. To do so would be ‘hypocritical’ he added, since he and his tightly controlled Zion’s Hope ministries oppose charismatic worship on theological grounds (*Orlando Sentinel* [March 9, 2001], p. A1).

16. *Here We Stand: Doctrinal Statement* (Orlando, FL: Zion’s Hope), *St Petersburg Times* (April 6, 2006), p. 1A.

pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ' and the Church's rapture prior to the final judgment. One is not required to engage complexity of the past and present, or to work at bridging the cultural divides reflected in so much of today's public discourse in the United States.

The most evident, though suppressed tension involves Jewish-Christian relations. The Holy Land Experience opened in 2001 to protests by local rabbis and the Jewish Defense League, whose picketing members called the place a 'soul snatcher'.<sup>17</sup> On my visits, I saw no proselytizing of Jews. Apparently very few Jews attend anyway. It is not difficult to understand the reasons. Profits from gate receipts and sales go to support the Jew-specific missionary activities of the theme park's parent organization, Zion's Hope, although in mid-2005 the organizational link was broken.<sup>18</sup> Visitors can subscribe on site to the ministry's publication, *Zion's Fire: A Christian Magazine on Israel and Prophecy*, which reports regularly on pre-millennial missionary efforts in Israel and runs opinion pieces supportive of Israeli hard line nationalist politics. Notably, since 9/11, *Zion's Fire* and Marvin Rosenthal have increasingly demonized Muslims and Islam in an increasingly strident Christian-Zionist polemic.<sup>19</sup>

17. *Chicago Sun-Times*, (February 6, 2001), p. 5.

18. In July 2005, following what he would describe only as a 'disagreement with the board [of Zion's Hope]', Marvin Rosenthal abruptly resigned his post as founder and director of the Holy Land Experience (*Orlando Sentinel* [July 21, 2005], p. C1). He has subsequently reincorporated Zion's Hope as an independent ministry. Though publicly supportive of the Holy Land Experience, Mr. Rosenthal is no longer involved in its operations. See [www.zionshope.org/history](http://www.zionshope.org/history), accessed September 2008. Board chairman Scott R. Pierre would only say, in public at least, that everyone agreed that The Holy Land Experience needed stronger business leadership (*St Petersburg Times* [July 22, 2005], p. B5). Dr. Dan Hayden, a founding member of Zion's Hope board of directors and Director of Ministries at Sola Scriptura (a significant investor and co-partner in the theme park), became chief executive officer of the Holy Land Experience. To stem growing financial losses, the Board of Directors recruited three veteran theme park executives to its membership and gave them responsibility for aggressively marketing the park's attractions (*Orlando Sentinel* [October 16, 2006], p. 16). However, in June 2007, the Trinity Broadcasting Network purchased the park and undertook an extreme makeover for this newest addition to its empire: install new entertainment exhibits, lay off large numbers of workers, hire new TBN- approved managers, outsource ancillary services, and lay the ground for on-site TV and movie productions (*Orlando Sentinel* [October 21, 2007], p. A1; [February 8, 2008], p. C1). So far, however, the new owners have not jettisoned the premise of supersessionist Christianity. TBN's mission statement for the park echoes a typically American corporate policy of non-discrimination: 'to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all individuals regardless of race, religion, gender, education, or national origin' ([www.holylandexperience.com/about/mission.html](http://www.holylandexperience.com/about/mission.html), accessed September 2008). See Joan R. Branham, 'The Temple That Won't Quit', *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 16 (Autumn, 2008), pp. 18-31.

19. Nancy Stockdale, "'Citizens of Heaven' versus 'The Islamic Peril': The Anti-

Exhibits at the park reiterate traditional supersessionist Christian theology and make it easy for visitors to believe, if they did not already, that Jews, especially, need what the Gospel offers. 'There's nothing political here', Mr Rosenthal professed. 'We've just followed what's in the Bible'.<sup>20</sup> To be better informed of their faith, Rosenthal explained to me, 'Christians must understand the reality of Jewish culture out of which Jesus came'. Chris Wallace, Director of Ministry Facilities, was more forthcoming. The Holy Land Experience is 'a ministry based on reaching Jewish people... Zion's Hope supports missionaries in Israel... [the park does its part because] we're bringing all the Jewish heritage to life'.

However, that heritage has no independent Jewish vitality. It lives in sectarian social memory as a construct of historical Judaism that has been perfected in later Christian understanding—which of course leaves a lot of Jews out in the cold, at least for now. Visitors to the park encounter costumed Christians enacting a fantasy impression of biblical Jews, while highly scripted lecturers reiterate the notion that all things Jewish find their completion in Christianity. Speakers celebrate 'Ancient Festivals of the Biblical World', such as Day of Atonement (*yom kippur*) and Feast of Tabernacles (*sukkoth*), as prophecies of Christ's second coming when 'Israel repents of her sins and turns to the Messiah for salvation'.<sup>21</sup> When I visited the park, Daniel Howard, son-in-law to Senior Bible Teacher Bill Jones, told his audience in the Plaza of the Nations that among first century Jews, 'nobody [trying to earn their salvation] could keep all the law'. When the temple was destroyed Jewish scholars, who knew their major prophecies, chose instead a minor prophet as the key to a newly formed religious understanding. They simply 'missed their Messiah'. Nonetheless, Howard continued, God did not, and will not, abandon the Jews. The unrepentant and unconverted will have a second chance when Jesus returns in glory. Carrying a similar tone, the dazzling multi-media dramatization of Tabernacle ritual ends with a narrator asking, 'Could it be that God had more in mind?' And on cue, stage left, a scrim image of the Holy Family lights up in the darkness.

Islamic Rhetoric of Orlando's Holy Land Experience since 9/11', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21 (Summer, 2004), pp. 89-109; Ronald Lukens-Bull and Mark Fafard, 'Next Year in Orlando: (Re)Creating Israel in Christian Zionism', *Journal of Religion and Society* 9 (2007), <http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/2007/2007-16.html>. Accessed September 2008.

20. *New York Times* (February 25, 2001), p. SM113.

21. *Here We Stand: Doctrinal Statement* declares theological beliefs while obscuring the political consequences of holding such beliefs to be unalterable and absolutely true. God chose 'the Jewish people as the nation through which to reveal Himself, His glory, and His salvation'. And though 'presently under national blindness', a Jewish remnant, along with the whole Jewish people 'are in need of salvation and are saved only by faith in Jesus, just as the Gentiles'.



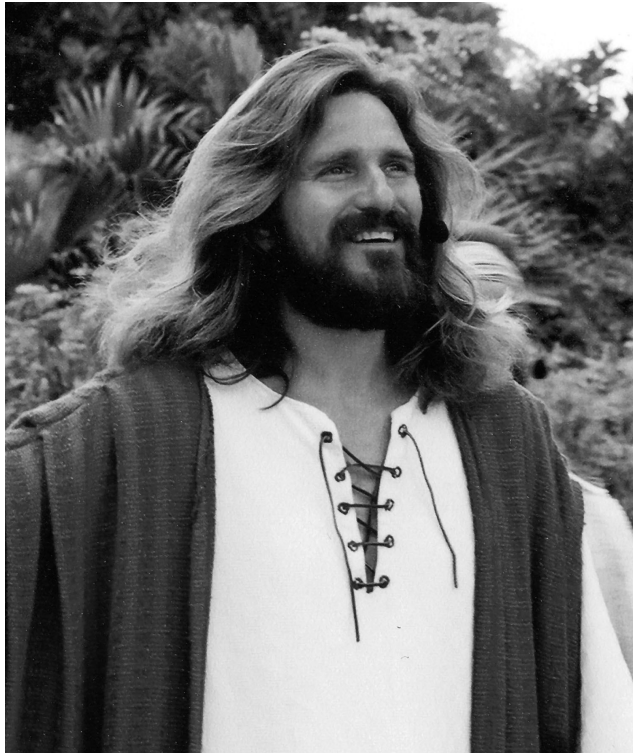


Fig. 6. Les Chevaldayoff in his role as Jesus. *The Holy Land Experience*, Orlando, Florida. Photo by Judith Long. Image of Mr Chevaldayoff published by courtesy of *The Holy Land Experience*.

When not being scourged and crucified, Jesus-the-Jew of that holy family, who in death and resurrection satisfied all that presumably could not be satisfied by a life of *torah*, is presented as an American styled Sunday school icon. Actor Les Chevaldayoff is a look-alike for Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ*. Robed in white, with a maroon-crimson tunic (he's the only performer to be so dressed), Jesus suddenly turns up amidst the park's visitors, teaching in parables, interpreting scripture, performing miracles, and converting the skeptical. During a performance of 'The Centurion', having given a manly (and American style) embrace to the newly converted Roman officer, Jesus suddenly reappeared at the rear of the seating area. While colorfully dressed singers and dancers celebrated on stage, Jesus strolled down the middle aisle shaking hands like a pop-star-politician working the crowds. Yet, by design, Jesus is also a de-localized Jew. He is the worshipped Savior of the World who gives no autographs and slips away quickly so as not to be drawn into posing for tourist snapshots.



A century ago, much of the American public would have been offended by an attempt to portray Jesus on stage.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, biblical dramatists such as Madame Mountford, and producers of huge open-air pageants such as John Rettig and the Kiralfy brothers, created the Victorian-era outdoor progenitors of Orlando's Holy Land Experience. These pantomimed biblical dramas, a sub-genre of productions that took advantage of new technology and rising demand for spectacular entertainment, were packaged not as Christian evangelism, but as melodrama, popular education and moral uplift.<sup>23</sup>

A typical example was *The Fall of Nineveh*, a show that toured with the 1892 Adam Forepaugh Circus.<sup>24</sup> The spectacle featured huge architectural sets, glitzy costumes and pageantry, glimpses of sexualized decadence (the effeminate Assyrian king; an 'oriental' slave market; gossamer-clad ballet dancers), and the prophet Jonah sternly upholding God's patriarchal morality. At the drama's climax, the city walls collapsed in a burst of pyrotechnics and prolonged applause by the thrill-seeking audience. The unrepentant king, Sardanapalus, threw himself onto a funeral pyre, taking himself, his wives and concubines to their fiery deaths. Beware of decadent civilization and gender confused opulence, the pantomime seemed to say. And this at a time when the clamor for women's rights and transgression of traditional sex-roles threatened good social order. Guard against unrighteous empire, now that the United States is becoming a muscular player on the imperial stage. And of course, do not neglect the Bible, in a time when many theologians and opinion-makers worried about a variety of social and intellectual challenges to traditional understandings of scriptural authority.

22. In dramatizing the immensely popular novel by Lew Wallace, *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), William Young, under Wallace's supervision, staged a healing by Christ as part of Judah Ben-Hur's dream. Even then, a beam of light, not an actor, represented Christ. Producers rightly calculated that had they done otherwise, public taste would have been offended (David Mayer, *Playing out the Empire. Ben-Hur and Other Toga Plays and Films, 1883–1908: A Critical Anthology* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], p. 191). It would not be until the 1920s that European immigrants would bring the medieval genre of passion play to the United States. Apparently, these dramatizations gave no offense to Christians because they were perceived as pious and accurate renderings of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. The long running *Black Hills Passion Play* had its first performance in the United States in 1932 ([www.blackhills.com/bhpp/pp\\_index.htm](http://www.blackhills.com/bhpp/pp_index.htm), accessed September 2008.) Another well established drama, *The American Passion Play*, claims to have originated in 1923 ([www.americanpassionplay.org](http://www.americanpassionplay.org), accessed September 2008).

23. See Russell Lynes, *The Lively Audience: A Social History of the Visual and Performing Arts in America, 1890–1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) and David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

24. For a full analysis see Burke O. Long, 'The Circus'.



Fig. 7. Front cover illustration, *The Fall of Nineveh*, a program guide for the spectacle drama by John Rettig, produced for the Adam Forepaugh Shows, 1892. Courtesy of the Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas.



Fig. 8. *Rear cover illustration, The Fall of Nineveh, a program guide for the spectacle drama by John Rettig, produced for the Adam Forepaugh Shows, 1892. Courtesy of the Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas.*

The Forepaugh Company spent lavishly on this extravaganza, as did producers of other Bible-based melodramas. Show owners boasted of sizeable investments—and moral virtue, capitalist and otherwise, to match. Heroic biographies of owners assured patrons that management and employees were admirable Americans who lived by the highest of moral principles. Show grounds were safe, and patrons would find nothing there that was offensive to public manners. All this was not entirely false. And such claims were necessary to build respectable middle class audiences whose members, among other things, had to be persuaded that the new, mass entertainment had left behind the secretive, all-male world of bawdy theater and music halls. These extravaganzas, said their promoters, offered self-improvement—a Victorian mania at the time—by dramatizing lessons from history and the enduring truths of vaguely biblical and Christian morality. The spectacles displayed other values as well, and presumed them equally essential to national character: industriousness, entrepreneurship, and the unrestrained growth of consumer based capitalism.

Something of that turn-of-the-century nationalistic capitalism runs through The Holy Land Experience. Activities at the park testify to an essential link between Christianity and the ideals of American democracy. Exhibits connect the Bible—its literary and theological complexities reduced to



reiterated 'good news'—with the free exercise of religion in public spaces. And not least, the Holy Land Experience proclaims a version of abstemious capitalist virtue—the accumulation and excessive display of money, not for profit, but for the holy work of missionary outreach.

Managers speak of growth, ingenuity, efficiency and mass appeal without, however, releasing many specifics. Officials maintain that about 250,000 people have attended each year since the park's opening five years ago, but there are hints that revenues have nevertheless been disappointing. Marvin Rosenthal, like countless other entrepreneurial CEO's, presided until mid-2005 (see n. 18) over this sprawling ministry that was fed by substantial investment capital, much of it coming from Robert van Kampen, a wealthy financier and fundamentalist Christian. In fact, the Scriptorium Center for Biblical Antiquities is presented as a memorial to the generosity, collecting habits, and 'passionate commitment to God and His Word' of Robert and Judith Van Kampen. A formal portrait of the couple, exuding the stylistic clichés of marital harmony and financial success, greets readers on page one of the *Guide to the Scriptorium*. One reporter speculated that millions of dollars more of Van Kampen's fortune may be on the way.<sup>25</sup>

Mr Rosenthal explains the park's evangelistic mission while showing feisty ebullience in going head to head with the likes of Universal Studios in a sophisticated marketplace of tourist entertainment. 'All we've done is condense everything that's in the real Holy Land... [There] you'd have to go about 30 miles to get from the Western Wall of the Great Temple to the Qumran caves, but we've got it just about 75 yards away'.<sup>26</sup> With the help of ITEC Entertainment Corp., a major theme park design company, Rosenthal built his American holy land with production values worthy of the oversized competitors in the neighborhood. 'We're going where nobody's gone before', he told *USA Today*. 'We're using high-tech methods to communicate the Bible'.<sup>27</sup>

Well, somebody's Bible, at least, and someone's version of the past. In the Holy Land Experience the Bible is scripted and reduced, limited to a few replicated visuals and evangelistic themes. While referring to the whole Bible, the exhibits actually present very little of it; and even so, they are tightly encased in sanctioned interpretation. Moreover, in tandem with audiences these representations do ideological work. In recalling a tendentious version of biblical antiquity, the park's programs reassemble, revise and rework the social realities of this evangelizing, messianic Christian

25. *Sunday Mercury*, Birmingham, UK (May 8, 2005).

26. *New York Times* (February 25, 2001), p. SM113.

27. As quoted by David Johnson, 'God and Man in Orlando', *Live Design Online* (July 1, 2001), <http://livedesignonline.com/searchresults/?terms=Holy+Land+experie&r=>), accessed September 2008.

community. The Holy Land Experience community lives within its collectively shared memory of biblical times and encodes it everyday as spectacle drama, replicas of Holy Land sites, and Goliath burgers. And the community does all this in relation to the highly regulated industries of tourism and mass entertainment.

The park's museum, the Scriptorium, adds the Bible as holy object to this mix of mnemonic practices. Yet, the textual content of Scripture is less important than its iconic role in a narrative that maps a particular set of Protestant and American cultural ideals onto ancient Jewish and Christian histories.<sup>28</sup> Shuffled through the darkened chambers by automated cues, a visitor encounters a story of heroes devoted to the holy book, to its preservation at all costs, and to the proclamation of God's soul-saving word. Displays convey impressions of ancient manuscripts, bookmaking, the Bible and its translators, its defenders and missionaries. Tourists are witnesses, as it were, to these great moments of the past that have been configured as examples of religious virtue, national heroism, and Christian evangelism. The journey ends with the Bible's arrival in the New World and its nineteenth century advance across the North American frontier, represented by prairie churches. In the finale, visitors move back to mythic origins. Standing in a rotunda space, looking up at Mount Sinai, they watch the ten commandments electronically etched in stone (a visual quote from Cecil B. de Mille's *Ten Commandments*) as velvet curtains draw back, revealing monumental paintings of biblical heroes. One now understands that the Bible, or its synecdoche Ten-Commandments, has been woven into the fabric of western civilization and American democracy. It has been preserved by martyrs who 'dedicated (and often lost) their lives to translate, duplicate, and take the Word of God to the ends of the earth'. To exit the show, every visitor has to pass through a mock-up of a modern suburban home entertainment center, filled with the media distractions of the 21st century. No one can escape the voiceover evangelist's question: 'What are you doing with the Word of God in your world today?'<sup>29</sup>

Indeed. The one *Christian* word, one understands. And the Bible, a genuine, made-in-America, Protestant evangelical product. And a call to recommitment, if not conversion. Everything professionally packaged for the marketplace of tourist entertainment. Messianic Christian preaching,

28. On this particular point, see Joan R. Branham, 'The Temple That Won't Quit', *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 16 (Autumn, 2008), pp. 28-29.

29. *Welcome Guide*. See also *A Guide to the Scriptorium* (Orlando, FL: Sola Scriptura, n.d.). Arriving at the last of many chambers, a museum visitor stands in a recreated family room empty of people but abuzz with the sounds and electronic devices of modern suburban life. The voiceover challenge to visitors comes through the din of distracted busy-ness.

capitalist enterprise, mass entertainment, socially conservative politics, utopian fantasy with kitsch, a spectacle. All are put together in Orlando.

Steve Massey, pastor of Hayden Bible Church in Hayden, Idaho, had his doubts about what he called the 'sea of consumerism'. But he hoped, surely with Marvin Rosenthal, that the 'real draw' would be the Park's 'presentation of the gospel: short, simple, and life-changing'.<sup>30</sup>

### *A Word on Theory*

Like many other American-made holy lands and dramatized bibles, Orlando's Holy Land Experience involves problematic exclusions and inclusions, effaced histories and privileged scenarios, assemblages of nostalgic desire and fantasy of the holy land, embodied interpretations of the 'true' and essential Bible, and claims to the truly American. Not least, the spectacle presents Jerusalem, as Annabel Wharton observed, as a 'theatrical figuration of capital and an expression of its excesses'.<sup>31</sup> In short, park management, employees and performers configure human space as a nexus of economics, memory, invention and geography. Invention must take place if recollection occurs. And invention is at the heart of geography. In this case, a socially constructed and maintained sense of socially and religiously significant place from the past, the Holy Land, has been inscribed within a different space altogether, the business-entertainment-evangelist complex along Interstate 4 in Orlando, Florida.

For some of this perspective, I have assumed that socially constructed memory lives within institutions and social groups. Such memory is expressed in mnemonic practices involving shared or contested meanings which are imputed to the past, and which are entangled with understandings of the present.<sup>32</sup> I owe a more substantial debt to related studies of human space and geography, especially to the writings of Edward Soja. Reworking Henri Lefebvre, Soja proposed that one might view history, space, and the social order—everything one normally considers reality—as

30. Steve Massey, 'Look beyond Kitsch to Message of Biblical Theme Park', *Spokesman Review* (Spokane, WA; January 17, 2004).

31. Annabel Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 190.

32. For a review of social memory as a flourishing area of academic study, with extensive bibliography, see Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), pp. 105–40. Among the studies that have been most helpful in sensitizing me to the mnemonic dimensions of the Holy Land Experience are Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992).

dimensions of human experience constructed intellectually and practically, in actions.<sup>33</sup> For Soja, space is not inert background, like an empty stage where events happen. Nor is it an empty container to be filled. Rather, space is produced. It is value-laden action that reflects social relations and loads certain structures of intellectual mapping, architecture and behavior with cultural significance.

According to Soja, perceived space means the material forms that can be directly observed, such as the former swamp, now reclaimed for a theme park in Orlando. Yet this space is inseparable from human actions, such as landscaping, buildings, evangelizing performance and enforcement of religious life that define this space as Zion's Hope *holy* land. Moreover staff members, and probably some visitors, produce this holy land space in actions that internalize social memory, Christ awareness, conversion, recommitment and missionary calling. Such as Bryan, the young Marine I met, who felt himself to be in the presence of end-time saints who—among other things—embodied a church-community-based memory of first century Christians awaiting the return of Jesus.

Officially sanctioned literature, exhibits, and colorfully upbeat musical theater create a consistent bundle of Holy Land and communal, even national, memory. And there is little opportunity to dissent. In costumed dramas and museum displays, in selling souvenirs and educational material—in multi-layered and multi-vocalic performance—staff members model an idealized missionary self. They articulate the 'real' holy land, the 'true' Bible, the 'true' version of the Christian gospel, and the model Christian as a convert compelled to testify to that gospel.

However, some visitors probably experience, and thus configure, that space differently. Some may not be 'engaged in what we're doing', as Larry Sampson put it. They may be bored, or annoyed at unfulfilled expectations. Or they may question, ignore, even reject, the ruling ideology. A participant observer such as I stakes out a place of resistant, though sympathetic, scholarly perspective. I produce social space in relation to the scholarly community to which I belong, but within the theme park-evangelizing-entertainment space that Zion's Hope imposes on its visitors.

For Soja participating in such a dominant ethos, and resisting that dominance, are both modes of spatial practice. Whether constructed with models, model behavior or musical theater, this holy land space in Orlando is fraught with all potentialities, Soja would claim. It is dynamic social production in which, as Soja writes, 'all histories and geographies, all times and places,

33. Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). See also Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).



are immanently presented and represented, a strategic space of power and domination, empowerment, and resistance'.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, one may view the Holy Land Experience as a physical extent infused with social intent.<sup>35</sup> Physical place (which has to be imagined and recollected in some fashion), symbolically charged conceptuality (which imparts significance and value), and enacted multiple perspectives (which allow for competing constructions and positioning inside of particular spaces) all overlap and bleed into one another in the lived experiences of staffers and visitors. There are many spaces, or rather many localized spatial practices, within a given physical place. Even a locale as carefully manufactured as Orlando's Holy Land Experience.

Put another way—and this points to another body of theory I find helpful—this space is *performed* space, a social intent realized in a variety of actions taken by performer and audience. Under the impact of postmodernism and the pluralistic eclecticism it inspires, the notion of performance now embraces critical theories and practices of theater, ritual in traditional and modern societies, and a wide variety of public practices, such as street demonstrations, TV broadcasts and theme parks. Setting this view within the broad framework of ethnographical cultural studies, Richard Schechner identifies the fundamental characteristic of all performance as 'twice-behaved behavior', that is, 'symbolic and reflexive' behavior that is 'not empty, but loaded behavior multivocally broadcasting significances'. In performance, say on stage, or in a peace demonstration, or in the spatial and mnemonic practices of Orlando's Holy Land Experience, a self 'can act in/ as another' and thus embody a 'social or transindividual' self that is 'a role or set of roles'. Together with pluralizing of identities, performance offers to individuals and groups, including audiences, opportunities to 'rebecome what they once were—or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or to become'. This restorative function of performance encourages one to see revision, change, and adaptation to contingency as endemic to the process. 'That', writes Schechner, is 'what theater directors, councils of bishops, master performers, and great shamans do: change performance scores'.<sup>36</sup> And that, I might add, is what members

34. Soja, *Thirdspace*, p. 11.

35. Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

36. Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 121, 125, 130-31. See also Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (eds.), *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). For the complexities of performance analysis in socio-linguistic anthropology, see Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, 'Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990), pp. 59-88.

of the continuously changing audiences at the Holy Land Experience are involved in. They receive, adapt, resist, or otherwise become a part of the live performance score. Herein is a way to see the park's evangelistic performances, including its museum presentations, as scripted yet somewhat improvisatory processes in which performers and audiences interactively revise, reaffirm and reassemble a variety of social realities, including social spaces imbued with shared, or even contested memory.

From this perspective, the Holy Land Experience, in many voices and practices, broadcasts the meaning-making social realities of one Christian group and its employees (formerly Zion's Hope, now Trinity Broadcast Network) that dominate this particular physical and mental space. Performances simultaneously embody authoritarian control, conformity, entertainment and friendly faced missionary outreach. The pluralized selves, to use Schechner's terminology, that are iteratively constituted between performer and audience, are idealized social roles. Among them are the converted sinner and missionary called forth by missionary impulse; believer in a Bible reduced to formulaic evangelical proclamation; actor and consumer of Christian theater who, with missionary zeal, seeks to colonize the entertainment and communications industry for Christ.<sup>37</sup>

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37. Schechner's theory of performance is similar to the notion of social modeling developed by Don Handleman, *Models and Mirrors: Toward an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). However, Schechner is more attentive than Handleman to the indecidability celebrated by postmodern theory. For an application of Handleman to a Methodist summer community at Ocean Grove, NJ, see Troy Messenger, *Holy Leisure: Recreation and Religion in God's Square Mile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

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## CUTTING EDGES AND LOOSE ENDS, OR: HOW TO RE-MEMBER JOHN THE BAPTIST

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The process of remembering a story is not only a matter of bringing it back to mind, but as much one of re-mem-bering, of putting it together again. As such, it is also a creative enterprise, because bits and pieces are selected and put together in a sometimes very different way, not to mention the new elements often added to the mix as one fills out the gaps in an effort to somehow keep making sense of it. Stories that cannot be re-mem-bered lose their meaning. As a result, they have no afterlife. This holds true for the personal recollection of a story as well as for the way stories continue to exist in social memory. One story that does have such an afterlife, and a very ‘lively’ one at that, is the biblical story about the death of John the Baptist (Mk 6.14-29; Mt. 14.1-12). In this article I focus on Julia Kristeva’s reading of this story as a particular case study of how this story is indeed re-mem-bered. To that end, I analyze the sources she used and how she uses them, in order to reconstruct how she makes sense of it.

Kristeva discusses the beheading of John in *Visions capitales*, the catalogue of a special exhibition at the Louvre in Paris from April 27 through July 27, 1998.<sup>1</sup> This exhibition was the fifth in a series called *Parti pris* (literally ‘Sides Taken’, meaning ‘Prejudices’ or ‘Biases’). The works of art Kristeva selected for this exhibition, which she was invited to curate, all relate to the theme of decapitation. Kristeva’s interest in this rather morbid topic already became apparent a few years earlier, in *Possessions* (1996), a detective novel featuring the dead body of a decapitated woman, but also indirectly before that time in her essay on the powers of horror, in which she explores the broader issue of abjection.<sup>2</sup>

1. Julia Kristeva, *Visions capitales* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998). See also my earlier discussion of this material in J. Bekkenkamp *et al.* (eds.), ‘Capital Re-Visions: The Head of John the Baptist as Object of Art’, in *Missing Links: Arts, Religion and Reality* (Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zu Religion, Wissenschaft und Kultur: A. Geisteswissenschaftliche Sektion, 1; Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000), pp. 71-87.

2. Julia Kristeva, *Possessions* (Paris: Fayard, 1996) and her *Pouvoirs de l’horreur*:

*Re-membering John*

A study of John's severed head by Andrea Solario features prominently on the cover of *Visions capitales* and a whole chapter in that catalogue is devoted to the figure of John the Baptist.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, Kristeva mostly recapitulates the biblical material, but also quotes Josephus, who, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, introduces John as 'a good man' who 'had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism' (*Ant.* 18.117). As Josephus further notes, John's success did not go unnoticed: 'When others too joined the crowds about him, because they were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons, Herod became alarmed' (*Ant.* 18.118).<sup>4</sup> Since Josephus does not give us more information about John, Kristeva notes, we have to turn to the gospels in order to recover John's personal history. She first recalls the story of his conception and birth (Lk. 1.5-80), as well as John's statements about Jesus in the gospel of John (1.15,29-34 and 3.24-30), before focusing on the particular circumstances of his death, which she interprets as a prefiguration of Christ's passion. Kristeva's recapitulation of John's death is preceded by a short historical introduction, in which she mentions both Herod Antipas and Herodias:

Navigating between the good will of the Romans and family intrigues, Herod had taken off with Herodias, the wife of his half brother Philip, thus attracting the hostility of the different parties involved, but also the rebuke of John as rigorous defender of the law. Fascinated by the saintly man but also fearing popular upheaval, since the authority of the Baptist was great with the crowds, Herod hesitated to put him to death.<sup>5</sup>

Kristeva further describes Herod as uncertain but also as so sly and hypocritical that Herodias takes the initiative in order to achieve John's decapitation. 'Finally, in order to conquer the hesitations of Herod with

*Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1980) which appeared two years later in English, under the title *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (trans. L.S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

3. See the chapter entitled, 'La figure idéale ou une prophétie en acte: saint Jean-Baptiste' [Ideal Figure or Prophecy in Action: St John the Baptist] in Kristeva, *Visions*, pp. 71-80.

4. Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (LCL, 9; trans. L.H. Feldman; Cambridge, MA, 1965). Cited (in French) by Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 71.

5. Kristeva, *Visions*, 73 [my translation]: 'Naviguant entre le bon vouloir des Romains et les intrigues familiales, Hérode Antipas éleva Hérodiade, la femme de son demi-frère Philippe, et s'attira l'inimitié des diverses parties en présence, mais aussi la réprobation de Jean, rigoureux défenseur de la Loi. A la fois fasciné par le saint homme et craignant un soulèvement populaire, tant l'autorité du Baptiste était grande auprès des foules, Hérode hésita à la faire mourir'.

respect to John the Baptist, who stigmatized the couple breaking the Law and threatened her power, Herodias appealed to the charms of Salome'.<sup>6</sup> As Kristeva further explains, Salome is the daughter Herodias had with Philip, whom she left in order to live with Herod, who had repudiated his own wife for Herodias. Her daughter dances for the guests in order to amuse them. The occasion mentioned is Herod's birthday, the place the fortress Machaerus. Kristeva then quotes Mk 6.22-29 and concludes her recapitulation of this story with the observation that Josephus, who 'ignores John's blame on the marriage of the tyrant', relates the defeat of Herod's army in 36 CE to John's death: 'Though John, because of Herod's suspicions, was brought in chains to Machaerus, the stronghold that we have previously mentioned, and there put to death, yet the verdict of the Jews was that the destruction visited upon Herod's army was a vindication of John, since God saw fit to inflict such a blow on Herod' (*Ant.* 18.119).<sup>7</sup>

As already noted, Kristeva's reading of John's death is mostly a conflation of elements coming from different sources. On the one hand, she uses Josephus to frame her reading of the gospel stories. He provides the political context as well as certain details about the characters that feature in the biblical story, such as the specification of the place where John was held captive as Machaerus, as well as the identification of Herodias' daughter as Salome and her father as Herodias' former husband, Philip. On the other hand, Kristeva also uses elements from the gospels. Thus, the fascination with John, which she ascribes to Herod, comes from Mk 6.19-20, while the reference to Herod's fear of upheaval and his wish to have John put to death are derived from Mt. 14.5. Herod is also described as 'a fox', a term which does not occur in either Matthew or Mark but in Lk. 13.32, where Jesus replies to the warning that Herod wants to kill him with the words: 'Go and tell that fox for me...'.<sup>8</sup> The description of Herod as sly seems derived from that same quotation. However, in taking bits and pieces from these different stories, Kristeva treats them as equally valid sources of information while overlooking the fact that each of these writers has reasons of their own for telling this story. I will demonstrate this by comparing the various sources. Then I will come back to Kristeva's interpretation of them in order to determine how she fills in the gaps as well as why that is the case. Finally, I will seek to define which factors inform the different choices she made in the process.

6. Kristeva, *Visions*, 73: 'Enfin, pour vaincre les hésitations d'Hérode devant Jean-Baptiste qui stigmatisait ce couple enfrenant la Loi et menaçait le pouvoir d'Hérodiade, celle-ci fit appel aux charmes de Salomé'.

7. Kristeva, *Visions*, 73.

8. English quotations from the Bible in this article are taken from the NRSV.

*Back to the Bible*

In order to reconstruct John's death, Kristeva uses elements of the gospels as well as Josephus. However, when we compare these sources, significant differences can be noted. Mark and Matthew, for instance, are the only ones who explicitly state that John was decapitated. The other gospels as well as Josephus refer to John's death without specifying how his death occurred. But even the parallel stories in Mark and Matthew differ at several points. The most remarkable difference concerns Herod's attitude towards John. Although both gospels state that Herod puts John in prison, Mark presents Herod's attitude in a much more favorable light than Matthew does. Herod considers John to be 'a righteous and holy man' and 'he liked to listen to him' (Mk 6.20). It is Herodias who wants to kill John, but she cannot because Herod fears him (vv. 19-20a). In Matthew, to the contrary, Herod himself is the one who wants to kill John, but has not done so yet because he fears the people, not John (Mt. 14.5). In both gospels John ends up being killed because Herodias' daughter requests his head. However, Herod's response to this request is quite different in either source. Mark stresses that 'the king was deeply grieved' (v. 26). Strangely enough, his grief is also mentioned in Matthew, be it in less strong terms (Mt. 14. 9), although it is inconsistent with Herod's earlier attitude to John in that version of the story.

Compared with Mark, the other characters clearly receive less attention in Matthew. The dialogue between Herod and the girl, as well as between the girl and her mother are absent. Matthew does mention, however, that the daughter asks for John's head and that she does so 'prompted by her mother' (v. 8), but Matthew does not mention why Herodias wants John dead, whereas Mark explicitly says that she has a grudge against him (Mk 6.19). The daughter's request, however, is explicitly quoted in Matthew: 'Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter' (Mt. 14.8). This request is almost literally the same in Mark but more forcefully stated there in so far as it is introduced by 'I want...' and given more urgency by her insistence to get it 'at once' (Mk 6.25). And yet, the fact that there are fewer references to Herodias in Matthew results in the girl playing a more crucial role in Matthew than in Mark, although she also features more explicitly as her mother's instrument. The overall result is a somewhat different picture from Mark: Herod's role is less ambivalent, Herodias appears as only a background figure, but her daughter plays a more decisive role in the narrative plot. From a rhetorical perspective, this difference in focus between Mark and Matthew is relevant. It reveals something about the function of the story in each gospel and about the particular interests of the gospel writers involved in telling that story. A fuller grasp of that function can be obtained by looking for clues in the context, especially the introduction to each story.



Thus we notice that in both gospels the story—properly speaking—serves as an explanation of a statement (introduced by ‘for’ [*gar*]: Mt. 14.3; Mk 6.17) made by Herod about Jesus, whose fame is spreading. In Mark this leads to speculation about Jesus’ identity. Some identify him as John the Baptist and ‘for this reason these powers are at work in him’ (v. 14); others identify him as Elijah; and still others as one of the prophets of old. Last but not least, Herod’s own opinion is given: ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised’ (v. 16). A similar statement is found in Matthew, but the context there is not the discussion about Jesus’ identity. Matthew only mentions that when Herod hears about Jesus’ fame, he tells his servants: ‘This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead and for this reason these powers are at work in him’ (Mt. 14.2). The explanation of Jesus’ fame given in Mark by ‘some’ is thus attributed to Herod in Matthew. More important, however, is that Herod claims no responsibility for John’s death in Matthew, as he explicitly does in Mark: ‘John, *whom I beheaded* has been raised’ (v. 16; italics added). As a result, the story about John’s death serves a different purpose. In Matthew it explains why Herod identifies Jesus as the resurrected John, while in Mark it explains why Herod had John beheaded. Matthew therefore focuses on John’s death as such and less on the role of the characters involved, as Mark does. He tells the ‘same’ story but for a different reason. What seems to matter most to Matthew is the fact that Herod understands Jesus’ fame and power in terms of his identity as John the Baptist, who had been killed but has come back now from the dead. Mark, on the contrary, appears more interested in the issue of Herod’s own involvement in John’s death: from all the different possibilities given, Herod considers it most likely that Jesus is the John he himself had beheaded.

That the particular interests of the gospel writers play a role in what and how they write about John’s death becomes even more apparent when we turn to Luke and John. Luke does not have the story about John’s beheading. In contrast to Mark and Matthew, he mentions John’s imprisonment by Herod early in his gospel (Lk. 3.19-20) and further only mentions his death in 9.7-9, a passage strikingly similar to the introduction of the story in Mk 6.14-16. According to Luke, Herod is perplexed because some say that John has been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets has risen. Herod, however, rejects the idea that Jesus can be identified with John, saying: ‘John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things? And he tried to see him’ (Lk. 9.9). Remarkably enough, the first part of the sentence is almost identical to what we read in Mk 6.16. In both cases Herod claims responsibility for John’s death, more specifically his beheading, but the second part of the sentence is radically different. While, according to Mark, Herod claims that John has been raised, he does not consider that an option in Luke. Moreover, in Mark Herod shows no further interest in Jesus whereas, in Luke, he seeks to see him.

Herod is mentioned again later in Luke's gospel, when some Pharisees come to Jesus and warn him: 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you' (Lk. 13.31). Interestingly enough, this incident does not occur in the other gospels. This is also the case with the role Herod plays in Jesus' trial. Only Luke tells that Pilate sends Jesus off to Herod (23.7), when he hears Jesus is a Galilean and thus falls under Herod's jurisdiction. Herod, however, after questioning Jesus, sends him back to Pilate (vv. 8-11). Luke next makes the following comment: 'That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies' (v. 12). As a result, the overall picture of Herod is more consistently negative in Luke than in Mark or Matthew,<sup>9</sup> while the gospel of John does not mention Herod or John's death at all and only refers to John's imprisonment in passing (Jn 3.24).

Apart from the gospels, John's death is, as already noted, also mentioned by Flavius Josephus. It is, however, Herod and not John who holds central stage in this account. Josephus further notes that Herod puts John to death because he is alarmed by his success: 'Herod decided therefore that it would be much better to strike first and be rid of him before his work led to an uprising, than to wait for an upheaval, get involved in a difficult situation and see his mistake' (*Ant.* 18.118). Although it is clear from what follows that John is imprisoned and then put to death by Herod, Josephus does not specify or show any interest in how John was killed. He rather refers to him as one of Herod's victims. The reason why he mentions John's death is because it was considered by 'the Jews' to be the reason for the destruction of Herod's army (*Ant.* 18.119). The explanation attributed here by Josephus to the Jews interprets the relationship between both events in terms of cause and effect. Divine retribution is presented as God's response to Herod's evil deed.

### *Back to Kristeva*

Kristeva's own interpretation is mostly a re-construction of John's death. Both Josephus and the biblical stories are used as sources that give us information on the circumstances and development of the event in question. The biblical stories, although assessed at one point as 'legend', are nevertheless thought to relate the personal history of John, for which Josephus delivers the framework. Since Kristeva's reading does not problematize the differences between these sources, it can therefore be considered to represent a harmonization.

Moreover, although Kristeva's retelling of this story remains close to the version found in Mark, she leaves out Mk 6.25-27a, where the daughter's

9. See also John Darr, *Herod the Fox: Audience Criticism and Lukan Characterization* (JSNTSup, 163; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 167.

request and Herod's reaction are mentioned. In so doing she not only shortens that account, thus bringing it more in line with Matthew's version, but also omits that the daughter does not simply repeat her mother's request, because she adds two further details of her own: 'at once' and 'on a platter' (Mk 6.25).<sup>10</sup> More significant, however, is that the omission also includes the reference to Herod's grief, a somewhat problematic reaction in light of Kristeva's earlier description of Herod's attitude towards John as one of fascination and fear, rather than sympathy. Thus, one of the ambiguities in the representation of Herod is smoothed over. Moreover, Kristeva's reading also contains elements that go beyond Josephus and the Bible, especially as far as the representation and interpretation of the characters involved are concerned. It is here that most of the gap filling can be seen to take place. For instance, Kristeva depicts John as a saint and a martyr, two concepts that obtained their full meaning only in later Christian tradition.<sup>11</sup> Herod is described as a tyrant, but also as hesitant. Herodias, in turn, is portrayed as perceiving John as a threat to her power. She manipulates her daughter to achieve her goal of neutralizing this threat. This daughter is further defined by her charms, which she uses to seduce Herod. These images of the women involved go beyond those provided in the gospels and seem closer to those we find later in the story's reception history. That Kristeva is well aware of these later images is clear from some of the other chapters in the catalogue, in which she discusses the way John's beheading has been represented in visual art and literature. As a result, her interpretation is more nuanced when it comes to these subsequent traditions of interpretation, both in terms of the story's reception in Christian theology and its cultural reception history, but she does not consider her own reading of these stories to be produced and informed by these same traditions.

In what follows, I will use the analysis of Mk 6.16-28 by Berthe van Soest in order to lay bare the culturally determined presuppositions present in Kristeva's interpretation. In her article, 'Who Dunnit', Van Soest starts from the observation that exegetes, like detectives, search for the 'real' murderer of John, and all end up finding the same perpetrator: Herodias.<sup>12</sup>

10. For a more detailed discussion of the different versions of this story in the gospels, see Caroline Vander Stichele, 'Murderous Mother, Ditto Daughter: Herodias and Salome at the Opera', in *lectio difficilior: European Electronic Journal for Feminist Exegesis* 2 (2001): <http://www.lectio.unibe.ch>.

11. For the reception history of John the Baptist in early Christian sources, see Josef Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation—Geschichte—Wirkungsgeschichte* (BZNW, 53; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1989). See also Theodor Innitzer, *Johannes der Täufer nach der Heiligen Schrift und der Tradition dargestellt* (Vienna: Mayer, 1908).

12. B. van Soest, 'WHO DUNNIT: Die Rolle der Frauen bei der Enthauptung von Johannes dem Täufer: Eine feministisch-dekonstruktivistische Lesart von Markus

According to Van Soest, there are three suspects—Herod, Herodias and her daughter—who are all somehow involved in the death of John the Baptist, but Herodias is the one who qualifies as his murderer. Van Soest goes on to note that three motives are usually attributed to Herodias for wanting John's death. First, she has a grudge against him, because John criticized her marriage with Herod. Second, she is a vengeful woman, and third, she is also a castrating woman, a devouring monster. Over and apart from these motives, she actively seeks to have John eliminated. Her daughter, on the contrary, does not seem to have any motives at all to commit this crime and is usually understood to be nothing but a go-between. She is considered too young to decide for herself and, therefore, her mother is ultimately held responsible for the daughter's gruesome request. When it comes to Herod, again three motives are mentioned for his decision to have John killed. The first two considerations are political: Herod has to keep his promise to the girl, because his authority and integrity as ruler are at stake; and, second, he is bound by an oath, which he does not want to break. The third motive is more personal. He does not want to disappoint the girl by refusing to give her what she asks for.

Insofar as Herodias is ultimately held responsible for John's death, Kristeva's interpretation is in line with this interpretation. She states that Herodias uses the charms of her daughter to conquer the hesitations of Herod who, although held responsible for the command given, gets a more sympathetic reading than Herodias does.<sup>13</sup> Kristeva pictures him as ambivalent and hesitant to have John die; thus, ultimately, Kristeva reproduces the dominant interpretation of the text. The question Van Soest raises with respect to that interpretation can therefore be repeated here: Why is an interpretation chosen in which it is *not* possible to call Herod the perpetrator of this crime?<sup>14</sup> According to van Soest, the evaluation of the characters involved is based on a value system in which women are ultimately held responsible for the presence of evil in the world. It reveals a dualistic framework in which the superior male is linked with innocence and the inferior female with guilt. As a result, Herodias and her daughter are associated with the negative side of the equation, while Herod has the benefit of the doubt. On the basis of their gender, mother and daughter thus end up on the same side, but this situation changes when they are compared to each other. Here another element comes into play: a value system in which girls and virgins

6,16-28', in A. Günter (ed.), *Feministische Theologie und postmodernes Denken: Zur theologischen Relevanz der Geschlechter-differenz* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1996), pp. 133-46.

13. Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 73.

14. Van Soest, 'WHO DUNNIT', p. 144: 'Warum entscheiden sie [i.e. die Exegeten] sich in ihrem Bemühen um eine kohärente Interpretation gerade für eine Deutung, in der es nicht möglich ist, Herodes als Täter zu benennen?'

are considered pure and innocent. As a result, the daughter appears innocent and her mother (all the more) guilty. Both value judgments, related to the gender of the characters in question, recur in Kristeva's interpretation under discussion.<sup>15</sup>

### *Cutting Edges*

In order to further determine the impact of the cultural reception of this biblical story on Kristeva's reading, I will now take a closer look at its reception. My point of departure will be Kristeva's own discussion of this story's reception history. She refers to this history at two points in her book: in the chapter entitled 'The ideal figure or a prophecy in action, Saint John the Baptist', where she refers to a number of paintings depicting either John's decapitation or his severed head; and in a later chapter entitled 'Powers of horror', where she discusses the representation of Herodias and Salome in decadent literature at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Several shifts in focus can be noticed between the two chapters in question. First, the focus shifts from the figure of John to that of Herodias and her daughter, from victim to perpetrator. A second shift in focus takes place in terms of the works of art discussed, from visual art to literature. A third shift takes place in terms of the time period under discussion, moving from the thirteenth to seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. Finally, a fourth shift appears in terms of place, from Italy, Flanders, and Germany to France and England. These shifts are mostly justified by the topic under discussion in these chapters, but, as we will see, they prove to be relevant in other respects as well.

In the chapter on John the Baptist, entitled 'The Ideal Figure', Kristeva observes that John's beheading has been a source of inspiration for artists. She illustrates this point with a number of representations of John's decapitation or severed head in an effort, as she explains, to join the image to the text.<sup>17</sup> Taking as her starting point the first known depiction of John's beheading, a mosaic dating from the thirteenth century in the Basilica of Saint Mark in Venice, she offers a quick tour of mostly paintings from the fifteenth to seventeenth century originating from Italy, Flanders and Germany.<sup>18</sup> Her interest in these works of art, however, is philosophical rather than aesthetic, her point being that 'these graphical figurations are true

15. Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 73.

16. Kristeva, *Visions*, pp. 111-39: 'Pouvoirs de l'horreur'. The title of this chapter also refers to the earlier work of Kristeva with the same title (see n. 2).

17. Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 71.

18. Kristeva mentions works by the following artists: Andrea Pisano, Lucas Cranach the Elder, Claude Vignon, Giambattista Tiepolo, Hans Memling, Albrecht Dürer, Caspar de Crayer, Michelangelo and Rembrandt.

“economics”, in the sense that icons give to that word: transsubstantiations of the prophet tortured into traits, and of traits into perceptible incisions’.<sup>19</sup>

As already noted, in the later chapter on powers of horror her focus shifts to the representation of Herodias and Salome in nineteenth century France and England. For Kristeva, the way Salome is depicted by the artists at the end of the nineteenth century forms the most convincing proof that the power of horror would not mean much without the horror of the feminine. Salome in this case represents the sublime female, the castrating woman. She is the heroine of decadence, offering male protagonists an excuse for derision and morbid exaltation, but she also represents the sexual misery and the moral crisis dominating the *fin de siècle*. The images of Salome produced during that period can therefore be considered symptomatic.<sup>20</sup> The conflict Kristeva perceives here is one between two powers, identified as the virtue of the prophet and the irresistible vice of women, as exemplified in Gustave Flaubert’s story ‘Herodias’<sup>21</sup>—although Mallarmé is the one who, in his hymn about Herodias, shifts the focus away from the daughter to the mother.<sup>22</sup> Still, in Kristeva’s appreciation, both Flaubert and Mallarmé resist the powers of horror in the feminine, albeit without escaping them.

In this chapter Kristeva again selects and discusses her material from a specific angle. She is mostly interested here in how women are represented/representative as powers of horror. Salome and Herodias appear as icons, interchangeable in so far as they have become vehicles carrying the same meaning, related to the time in which they figure so prominently, the *fin de siècle*. A notable difference with the chapter on John and interesting for our discussion, however, is that when Kristeva characterizes the fascination for these figures as symptomatic, she takes as her point of departure the cultural context from which they emerge. Images are understood to be contextual, as they reflect the ideas and views of their time. If that is indeed the case,

19. Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 78: ‘Ces figurations graphiques sont de véritables “économies”, au sens que les icons ont donné à ce mot: des transsubstantiations du prophète supplicié en traits, et des traits en coupures sensibles’.

20. Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 127. She more specifically mentions the following artists here: Barrès, D’Annunzio, Péladan, Lorrain, Swinburne, Moreau, Huysmans, Rops, Wilde, Beardsley.

21. See Gustave Flaubert, ‘Herodias’, in idem, *Three Tales* (trans. R. Baldick; London: Penguin, 1961), pp. 89–124. The story was originally written and published in 1877. For a discussion of his version of the story, see further Vander Stichele, ‘Murderous Mother, Ditto Daughter’.

22. Stéphane Mallarmé, ‘Hérodiade’, in S. Mallarmé, *Collected Poems: Translated and with a Commentary by Henry Weinfield* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 25–37. According to Weinfield, Mallarmé started working on this poem in 1864, but it remained unfinished at his death in 1898. Only the second part of it, entitled ‘Scène’, was published during his lifetime. Cf. Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, p. 168.

as Kristeva suggests, then the question arises to what extent her own interpretation reflects or resists the cultural reception of her own time. For an answer to this question I will now take a closer look at some other sources she has used for interpreting the biblical story.

### *Loose End(ing)s*

As noted, Kristeva combines information from the different gospels with information gleaned from Josephus. She is, however, not the first one to do so. Others before her have paved the way. This is the case, for instance, with some of her more indirect sources of information about John the Baptist. As Kristeva points out, Flaubert similarly used multiple sources to provide background information for his story 'Herodias', among them Josephus and Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus*, a romantic historical reconstruction of Jesus' life.<sup>23</sup> Kristeva herself, however, used works of two other French biblical scholars for her chapter on John the Baptist. The first one is a work by Jean Daniélou, entitled *John the Baptist: Witness of the Lamb*; the second a work by René Laurentin, entitled *John the Baptist: Concise Life of John the Baptist*.<sup>24</sup>

The influence of these works on Kristeva goes further than the fact that they refer to Josephus, as they also seem to have informed her reading of the biblical story, even if selectively so. Kristeva's presentation of John, for instance, is very close to the picture drawn by Daniélou, who likewise presents John as precursor, witness, prophet and martyr.<sup>25</sup> The same goes for the way she understands Herod.<sup>26</sup> Daniélou stresses the complexity of Herod's character, who considers John to be a threat but is also troubled by him, as he recognizes in John the presence of God. As a result, Herod appears divided.<sup>27</sup> A similar observation can be made with respect to Laurentin, who seems to have informed Kristeva's understanding of the relationship between Josephus and the gospels. Laurentin presents a harmonizing reading of the data from Josephus and the gospels. In his view, Josephus simply provides a different interpretation of the same events. This allows Laurentin

23. Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 129. Cf. Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus* (Paris: Lévy, 1863).

24. Jean Daniélou, *Jean-Baptiste. témoin de l'Agneau* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964); René Laurentin, *Petite vie de Jean Baptiste* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1993). Both can be considered more popular works, written by two well-known Roman Catholic biblical scholars. In a footnote (*Visions*, p. 73 n. 96) she also refers to the traditions related in *The Golden Legend* for the fact that John would have been decapitated at Machaerus. Cf. Jacques de Voragine, *La légende dorée* (trans. M.G. Brunet; Paris: Garnier, 1906), p. 307.

25. See Daniélou, *Jean-Baptiste*, pp. 157. 163 and Kristeva, *Visions*, pp. 71-72.

26. Cf. Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 73 and Daniélou, *Jean-Baptiste*, pp. 157-72.

27. Daniélou, *Jean-Baptiste*, pp. 161-66.



to combine both reports under the presumption that they are historically accurate. Thus, on the one hand, Josephus provides information that is missing from the gospels, such as the reference to Machaerus as the place where John was imprisoned. On the other hand, the gospels contain information that is somehow absent from Josephus. The fact that, according to Laurentin, Josephus 'ignores the reproaches of John about the marriage of the tyrant' is, for instance, a view adopted—quite literally—by Kristeva.<sup>28</sup>

Still, although she reproduces the views and interpretations of these authors, Kristeva only does so selectively. If she largely depends on Daniélou for her depiction of Herod, and on Laurentin for the way she reads Josephus, she does not follow these authors in their depiction of Herodias. Although Kristeva presents Herodias as the one who takes the initiative, both to leave her former husband and to instruct her daughter, she does not demonize her to the extent Daniélou and Laurentin do. Daniélou, on the one hand, compares Herodias to Jezebel. Herodias sees John as a threat to her ambition and is ready to destroy every obstacle in her way. In the end, her ambition is so strong that she actually puts her daughter into play in order to achieve her goals.<sup>29</sup> Laurentin, on the other hand, portrays Herodias as rancorous and driven by hatred. She is willing to use all possible means to get rid of John.<sup>30</sup> These portraits resemble the one drawn earlier at the end of the nineteenth century by Flaubert, followed also by Jules Massenet in his opera entitled *Hérodiade* (1881).<sup>31</sup>

The gap filling taking place in ascribing particular motives to the characters in question thus seems largely informed by this trajectory in the tradition of interpretation. Kristeva explicitly engages this tradition in her discussion of *fin de siècle* art. Still, as I would argue, she reproduces this image in her own reading of the biblical material, in so far as Herodias is ultimately held responsible for John's gruesome death. Although Kristeva resists the culturally dominant reading which blames Salome as *femme fatale* for John's death, she nevertheless ends up embracing the alternative interpretation supported by biblical scholars who blame Herodias instead.

28. Laurentin, *Petite vie*, p. 96: 'Il ignore les reproches de Jean sur le mariage du tyran, ...'. Thus also Kristeva, *Visions*, p. 73: 'Flavius Josèphe ignore les reproches de Jean sur le mariage du tyran, ...'.

29. See Daniélou, *Jean-Baptiste*, pp. 162-68. For the comparison between Jezebel and Herodias, see also Caroline Vander Stichele, 'Response to Heather McKay: "Killer Queens"—the Recycling of Jezebel and Herodias as Fin de Siècle Phantasies', in A. Brenner and J.W. van Henten (eds.), *Recycling Biblical Figures: Papers Read at a Noster Colloquium in Amsterdam, 12-13 May 1997* (STAR, 1; Leiden: Deo Publishing, 1999), pp. 192-204.

30. Laurentin, *Petite vie*, pp. 84-93.

31. For a more detailed discussion of Massenet's opera, see further Vander Stichele, 'Murderous Mother, Ditto Daughter'.

In her discussion of art, Kristeva identifies Salome and Herodias as powers of horror in the feminine, but her own interpretation does not escape that identification. Her earlier representation of Herodias as the one who is ultimately held responsible for John's death becomes in fact all the more striking in light of her earlier essay on abjection. In that essay she notes that 'any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility'.<sup>32</sup> In manipulating Herod to obtain John's head, Herodias therefore appears abject. In her essay Kristeva further argues that the maternal is the abject par excellence; and her interpretation of the role Herodias plays in the story confirms that image of the abject mother. However, since Kristeva herself nowhere identifies Herodias as such, the intriguing question becomes why, in her own interpretation, she does not transcend the powers of horror in the feminine. Is it because she does not escape the powers of social memory, which present us with the only choice between mother and daughter? Or is it more likely that, as Kristeva herself states in *Visions capitales*, 'For such is the power of horror: it subjects, it creates adepts, it creates sects. One starts being its explorer but ends up becoming its believer'?<sup>33</sup> It may well be both. Still, if her interpretation reproduces an already existing interpretation, it also adds to it. In bringing John's story back to memory, Kristeva contributes to its afterlife. More important for me, however, is that her own interpretation carries the seeds of its own subversion, in that she makes it possible to unmask the powers of horror in the feminine as a 'trick' to shift away the gaze (and blame) from the male protagonists in the story: Herod and the severed head of John the Baptist.

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32. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

33. Kristeva, *Visions capitales*, p. 122: 'Car tel est le pouvoir de l'horreur: il subjugue, il fait des adeptes, il crée des sectes. On commence par en être l'explorateur, et voilà qu'on en devient le fidèle'.

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## AFTERWORD: PERSPECTIVES IN RETROSPECT

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The present collection of essays brings together a wide range of different views and activities, all under the double heading of 'memory' and 'narrative'. The wide range brings into focus the most important aspect of all questions relating to this complex of issues, its immense breadth and evasiveness. On the face of it, the theme of 'Narrative and Memory' is self-evident. Biblical narrative largely occupies itself with the past, and thus represents memory, the collective memory of the social groups addressed, and the cultural memory of the Judean commonwealth. But in spite of appearances, this theme hides an infinitude of diversities. No two narratives are the same. It is easy to speak of the memory of Abraham, the Exodus, David or, for that matter, the Apostles. But the categories involved, collective and cultural memory, can only be useful if this innate diversity is taken into account.

Memory could be described as the articulation of the past in the present. If we think of Huizinga's definition of history, as the 'intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past',<sup>1</sup> we cannot disregard the difference, as history relates to factuality and to actual situations, processes and event sequences in the past, whereas memory implies set of mind, value judgment, and, more than that, one's attitude to the past thus evoked.

Narrative is always performance. In the oral world, it is the act of the performing narrator or the singer of tales in the presence of an audience, whereas written literature requires the separate performances of author and reader. Thus, given the diversity of performing narrator, hearer and reader, performance in itself means diversity. Moreover, as a work of literature, narrative is incomparably more intricate, rich and suggestive than a mere accumulation of events or a plot summary. The wording and the texture of the discourse feed the imagination of audience and reader, and when the narrative is oral, one may add the narrator's poise and gesture.

1. Johan Huizinga, 'A Definition of the Concept of History', in Raymond Klibansky and H.J. Paton (eds.), *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936; repr. New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 1-10 (8-9).

Thus even before considering the relationship between narrative and memory, we must confront immense diversity and variability. The connection to the social framework of memory and, ultimately, identity, does not make things easier. The way in which persons define their relationship to one of the many intersecting social groups to which they attribute themselves, is as much related to the person as it is to the given social group. The term 'social group' by itself indicates a variety of subgroups. If you have a nationality that is not your only identity, for you are resident of a county, a town, a village, a neighbourhood, all implying different loyalties, interests and social contacts. The present author has an Israeli, a Jewish and a Dutch identity, and may affiliate himself to Amsterdam, to Jerusalem, to Tel Aviv, or to Matzuva (a kibbutz in the western Galilee), to the neighbourhoods of Nayot (Jerusalem), the park in the Eastern quarter of Amsterdam, or to Ramat Aviv, where the campus of Tel Aviv University is situated. That is in geographical terms. In social terms one may add family connections, networks of friends and colleagues, and a wide array of former contacts. Each of these circles associates itself with different kinds of memory and different narratives. Thus even in the actual, personal sphere memory is variable, and is enacted, performed in relation to its social contextualization (which also is a performance by acting persons).

How do we bridge the gap between the rich, almost protean polyphony of personal and social memory to the relative stability of cultural memory? We may mourn the loss of individual reminiscences with the passing away of the persons carrying those memories. And even when such reminiscences persist within the family or in another social context, in the end only few memories are actually passed on along the generations. With regard to biblical narrative we could think of the role of Gideon, and consider how reminiscences of Gideon, Jerubbaal (if they were different figures) and Abimelech were passed on within a regional context. But we also would have to ask ourselves how the merging of Gideon and Jerubbaal could originate within a family in which the genealogical framework was preserved. Thus we have to consider the workings of preservation outside the framework of the family.

This is where literary art comes in. Greek literature, and Homeric poetry in particular, preserves the memory of a Mycenaean kingdom long after the collapse of that empire and the demise of Hellenic culture. The memory of the battle of Kosovo, in which the Serbian forces suffered decisive defeat at the hands of the Ottoman army (1389), and its aftermath have survived the centuries in Serbo-Croatian oral poetry. Whatever the shifting political powers providing the platform for the literary performance, and whatever the interests served by that platform, it is the success of the performance and performer that keeps the memory of the event alive. It is the narrative that makes incidents moving and memorable, and invites people to identify with one or more of the narrative characters.

On the one hand, then, narrative, whether in prose or in poetry, is the main channel for the performance of memory.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the image of the past is profoundly affected by narrative. If history is a formless interplay and endless succession of occurrences, narrative imposes order and plot, and turns incidents into motifs that serve to build and to concretize the plot. Reminiscences of historical persons, however vague and fuzzy, are rebuilt as narrative characters with a definite role within the plot. Characters and motifs are embellished, enriched and restructured. Thus, the structurization of memory is arranged along the lines of narrative design and literary imagination. Literary design itself is from the outset in negotiation with political, socio-cultural and religious contexts. The literary codes are infused with the cultural and religious mindset of the society in which the narrative is performed, and are in constant interaction with the perceived interests and ideals of the social strata that supply the platform for the performance, of the audience and of the projected reading public. The threefold dialogue of memory with narrative design, socio-cultural mindset and socio-political interest, in itself infused by mindsets and ideals, continues throughout the generations in ever-changing contexts, as long as memory lasts.

In consequence, any narrative enactment of memory has a depth that is to be recovered by literary analysis and historical, social and cultural imagination. Though we will never be able to recover this depth in full, the depth of the tradition itself is an important aid. The variegation of the enactments along the generations is suggestive of the richness underlying the biblical text, and helps us, like all reception history, to free ourselves of the inevitable limitations and preconceptions imposed by present sociopolitical and cultural contexts. Study of the memory of the past reveals the human activity involved in the shaping of the memory and facilitates an assessment of that activity.

Still, we must avoid two dangerous pitfalls. First, we should refrain from putting up straw 'elites' that presumedly dominate social discourse and whose alleged interests determine the shape of cultural memory. After all, the infinite diversity of biblical memory at the outset forbids any attempt to determine identity/identities of those dominant circles, of their relation to the centers of economical and political power, of their 'interests', of the way they perceived their interests (for interest is always cultural, psychological and dependent upon human subjectivity), of their mindset, and of their relation to the great themes of biblical memory. In this situation any mention of the 'elites' is hardly more than a hollow reference to anonymous straw men,

2. Visual evocations of memory, such as sculpture or history painting, are dependent on the narrative they enact, and so is ritual. By the same token narrative is alluded to by street names and other places of memory.

set up as substitute for a socio-cultural context that still awaits analysis, or rather, still awaits the discovery of the data and methods that will enable such analysis. Secondly, the enactment of memory is not to be confused with literary fiction. The act of remembrance, even though misguided, fallacious, or fed by a failing memory, propagandistic motives or the inability to comprehend the events, implies an intention to tell some kind of truth. Thus our evaluation of memory has to show how the performer reacts to and copes with the represented event sequence, the representation of the remembered past. The grand themes of biblical memory involve severe crises, bitter suffering and great turning points. If our notion of cultural memory centers on the performance of remembrance and narration, we are not allowed to reduce these themes to a figment of imagination only. It is the remembered themes' factuality, partial and limited as it may be, which supplies the ultimate explanation for the grappling with perceived reality that is implied in the enactment of memory.

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