

A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT



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A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Essays on the Hebrew Bible
in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum

edited by
David J.A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde



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PREFACE

A critical engagement. These two words, we make bold to affirm, enshrine a twin orientation of Cheryl Exum and her work. A severe and demanding critic, reviewer and proofreader, she is even more an enthusiast and a creative spirit, never more herself than when she is wrapped up and engaged with a new idea, proposal or person, or in defence of one of her long-cherished ideals. Those who encounter her in full flight at a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, partying out or charming hesitant contributors into committing themselves to a new volume of collective essays, may not know of the sharp-eyed critical edge that has made her one of the finest and most assured scholars in the field of biblical scholarship.

Born in Wilson, North Carolina, she took her first degree at Wake Forest University (1968), *summa cum laude*, not surprisingly. She was already a voracious reader of literature, and, during her Masters and doctoral work at Columbia University in New York, extended her range hugely with a year in Göttingen immersing herself in German literature from Goethe to Brecht—a year that remains for her one of the highlights of her career.

With her dissertation at Columbia on the Samson saga (1976), she was firmly set on her path in Hebrew Bible study. From 1975 to 1977 she taught in the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies at Yale, and then took up a position at Boston College (1977–1993) where she developed most of the intellectual interests that have occupied her ever since—as well as her taste for metropolitan life and its cultural, gastronomic and sartorial advantages. During sabbatical leaves she twice spent many months researching in Israel, and making many long-cherished friendships (which the roster of contributors to this volume will confirm).

It was a wrench to leave Boston, but the opportunity at Sheffield, in a department focussed exclusively on biblical studies, could not be discounted. From 1993 to her recent retirement in 2009, the second formative sixteen-year appointment of her life, she was Professor of Biblical Studies in Sheffield and an increasingly major figure on the British scene. In 2005–2008 she was appointed as one of the two assessors of all scholarly work in Hebrew Bible in the United Kingdom for the national Research Assessment, spending a long hard summer reading her British colleagues' work from the previous five years, an unenviable task. A less onerous but more visibly honorific appoint-

ment was as President of the Society for Old Testament Study in 2009, culminating in a memorable Summer Meeting in Sheffield.

A volume such as the present will concentrate on the honoree's research, but a word must be said of Cheryl Exum as a teacher. Sometimes diffident about her abilities, she has been in fact an exceptional teacher, always meticulously prepared, infectiously enthusiastic about her subject, and as adept a manager of a participatory classroom as one could imagine. Within the framework of the Sheffield Department's undergraduate degree with its theme 'The Bible in the Modern World', her flagship courses were *The Bible and the Poetry of the Erotic* (Song of Songs), *The Bible and the Literary Imagination*, and *The Bible and the Arts*—exhibiting a rare unity of themes in teaching and research. She gave her students' work the same intensity of critical engagement as she expended on her own, and she was fortunate in having a succession of very talented graduate students to whom she devoted herself.

Cheryl Exum has always been a dedicated member of the Society of Biblical Literature. Even as a younger scholar, she was an Associate Editor of *Semeia* (1981–1987), and a member of the Research and Publications Committee (1982–1984), as well as being a Representative to the Council (1991–1994). There has hardly been a year when she has not been serving as program unit chair for one innovative session or another at the Annual Meetings or International Meetings of the Society. Her unrivalled knowledge of who is who and who is doing what in the field has made her appointment in 2010 to the Nominating Committee a great asset to the Society. She has long been an inspirer of collective work (there are sixteen edited volumes in her personal bibliography), and she has served as an editor of three monograph series, with 95 volumes published to date. But her greatest achievement as an editor has been the journal *Biblical Interpretation*, which she edited from its inception for sixteen years, shaping it into one of the top international journals in the field, none more style-setting, innovative and forward-looking.

In 2004, when she might have been thinking of winding down her energetic facilitation of the work of others, she enthusiastically joined David Clines and Keith Whitlam in establishing Sheffield Phoenix Press, a publishing house devoted exclusively to academic work in biblical studies. Its high standards of academic quality and production values and its edgy list of titles owe much to her judgment and discriminating taste. Taking on herself the prime responsibility for design, she has created an enviably distinctive and creative look for the Press's output, 175 titles to date.

A demonstrator and protestor in the early days of the feminist movement in New York (and active in the anti-Vietnam war movement), she remains indignant, insistent and persuasive on behalf of the women's movement. Feminism is her religion, she avers, and she has advanced its cause notably,

as a role model and an energizer to many women students and scholars. She has done more perhaps than any other scholar to make the question ‘whose interests are being served by this text?’ (with the presumed answer: not women’s!) a standing question every biblical scholar, female or male, needs to be asking.

Cheryl Exum’s oeuvre is so rich, it is hard to know how to begin to characterize it. Her first, and continuing, specialty has been the modern literary criticism of the Hebrew Bible, in its many and various manifestations. Her key work was her *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (1992), a stunningly original monograph that viewed biblical narratives such as those of Saul and of David alongside classical, Shakespearean and modern tragedies and in the light of theoretical discussions of the genre. Beside this work we should also mention her edited volumes, an issue of *Semeia* on *Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible* (1984), a volume of *Semeia Studies* on *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (1989), as well as, with David Clines, *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (1993).

A second major set of writings have been her feminist criticism of the Hebrew Bible; here her notable contributions were *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (1993) and *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (1996), as well as *Was sagt das Richterbuch den Frauen?* (1997). And she edited with Johanna Bos, *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power* (1988).

A more recent, and now almost favourite, theme is the Bible and cultural studies, especially the Bible and art. She edited *Beyond the Biblical Horizon: The Bible and the Arts* (1999), *The Bible in Film/The Bible and Film* (2006), *Retellings: The Bible in Literature, Music, Art, and Film* (2007), and, with Stephen Moore, *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies* (1998), and, with Ela Nutu, *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* (2007). Burke Long, in this volume, has spoken for many in praising her bold example of reaching beyond the boundaries of historically oriented scholarship to embrace the arts. Her plenary paper to the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament Congress in Helsinki in 2010, ‘Toward a Genuine Dialogue between the Bible and Art’, is the capstone on her work in this area, beautifully synthesizing much of her recent thinking into a programmatic piece for a new item in our exegetical toolbox, ‘visual criticism’.

Her fourth area of continuing interest has been the Song of Songs. Despite its patriarchal cast—it is assuredly not a feminist text—its vision of love continues to delight her, and we have surely not seen the last of her disclosures of its poetic genius. Her first article was on the Song, and her commentary in the Old Testament Library series, *Song of Songs* (2005), is a culmination of her work. As in all her writing, her style is delightful, her insights profound, her scholarship refined, her voice persuasive.

Cheryl Exum is one of the finest biblical scholars of our time, distinctive, passionate, exact, forward-looking and collegial. The contributors to this volume are very happy to have this opportunity of paying tribute to her and her talent, and to offer our affectionate good wishes for a long and happy retirement in her delightful Sheffield home, nurturing her perfect English garden with, shall we say, a critical engagement.

David J.A. Clines
Ellen van Wolde

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BDB	Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906).
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches</i>
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>ZAW</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> , Monograph Series
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament
<i>DCH</i>	David J.A. Clines (ed.), <i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , 8 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011).
<i>DDD</i>	Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst (eds.), <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995; 2nd edn, 1999).
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
GCT	Gender, Culture, Theory
GKC	E. Kautzsch (ed.), <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (revised and trans. A.E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary

<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>KAT</i>	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>KHAT</i>	Kurzer Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>KTU</i>	Keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit
<i>Lesh</i>	<i>Leshonenu</i>
<i>LHB/OTS</i>	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>MARI</i>	<i>MARI: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
<i>NCBC</i>	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>NIBC</i>	New International Biblical Commentary
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>OBO</i>	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>OBS</i>	Österreichische biblische Studien
<i>OBT</i>	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OLA</i>	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>SAAS</i>	State Archives of Assyria Studies
<i>SBLDS</i>	SBL Dissertation Series
<i>SBS</i>	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
<i>ScrHier</i>	Scripta hierosolymitana
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
<i>SHR</i>	Studies in the History of Religions
<i>TDOT</i>	G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren and H.-J. Fabry (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 15 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006).
<i>TSAJ</i>	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum, Supplements</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebraistik</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZBKAT</i>	Zürcher Bibelkommentare, AT
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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HIDDEN POLEMICS IN THE STORY OF JUDAH AND TAMAR

Yairah Amit

1. *Introduction*

Viewing the Hebrew Bible as ideological literature, whose purpose is to influence the readership to worship God, does not necessarily mean that the text is one-sided; the opposite can be true, because it might have many levels of complexity. This is so because alongside the over-arching purpose, which is to encourage the worship of one God, Yhwh, the Bible takes various stands on a vast number of issues, which are not always consistent, and sometimes are even contradictory. This complex literary reality can be explained as the result of centuries of collection and integration of different texts, or as the reflection of the background of the various writers who come from different social strata, even though they may have written during the same era. Another possibility is that this is due to a realistic and intentional editorial decision, whose purpose is to produce a document with multiple and even polemical viewpoints that stimulate continued discussion and that can be adapted to changing times. It was in this way that the literature could withstand the test of time. Whatever the explanation, the spectrum of ideological positions underscores the existence of a huge number of polemics that characterize biblical literature as polemical literature.¹

In one of my recent articles I treated in depth the central, overt polemic in the episode of Judah and Tamar, i.e. the campaign against foreign women.² In that article I demonstrated that a systematic analysis that takes into account all the components of the story—from the plot structure, through any unusual features, to the fine points of style, syntax and language, including the characterization of the main protagonists and the discourse that takes place among them—reveals that above all, the purpose of the episode of Judah and Tamar is to put marriage with foreign women (even the Canaanites) in a positive light. In doing so, a stance is taken on the polemic of national identity, an issue that was debated about the time that this text was

1. On biblical literature as polemical literature, which is the background for the development of a variety of polemics differing in contents and forms, see Amit 2000.

2. Amit 2009.

composed. It is in the nature of this polemic that the time was the period of the exile and the subsequent return to Zion. This time is characterized by distinctions that separate the population of the province of Yehud and criticizes its different ethnic groups and the problematic relationships that developed among them.³

In this article I want to examine covert polemics that I discovered in the story of Judah and Tamar, and their implications. But in order to do that, I want to clarify what I mean by the term 'hidden polemic'.

2. Polemics in General, and Hidden Polemics in Particular

My use of the term 'polemic' assumes that in biblical times the subject under discussion was a bone of contention in a public debate, in which the viewpoints were divided and for which we have evidence of the existence of such a controversy. I also suggest a typology of polemics, consisting of three categories. The first I call overt (above-board) or explicit polemics; the second type I refer to as indirect polemics; and the third type are covert or hidden polemics. The categorization depends on how the text relates to the subject of the polemic and to the stance it expresses.⁴ Several examples follow:

a. Overt Polemics

A polemic is overt when there is no question about the subject and the stance that is taken by the text, because they are presented in such a clear and explicit manner; thus there are no disagreements and the reader does not hesitate as to the subject of the polemic and the stance taken. For example, in reading Exodus 16, a reader is in no doubt that a central subject under discussion is the Sabbath in the life of the Israelite people, and the stance taken in this story is unambiguous: the people of Israel must observe the Sabbath. This stance is clear from what God and Moses say after some Israelites go out to gather manna on the Sabbath:

And the Lord said to Moses, 'How long will you men refuse to obey my commandments and my teachings? Mark that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore he gives you two days' food on the sixth day. Let everyone remain where he is: let no man leave his place on the seventh day.' So the people remained inactive on the seventh day (Exod. 16.28-30).

But was the Sabbath actually the subject of the polemic? I will limit myself to one example, in order to show that not all the Israelites were interested in observing the Sabbath. Nehemiah states that he censured '... the nobles of

3. Brett 2000; Dor 2006. See especially the 'Second Part: Who Were the Foreign Women?', pp. 99-154.

4. See above n. 1.

Judah, saying to them, "What evil thing is this you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day!" (Neh. 13.17). In subsequent verses he mentions his struggle for the observance of the Sabbath and the preservation of its holiness as one of the subjects for which he requests from his God to be remembered for the good (Neh. 13.18-22).

b. *Indirect Polemics*

A polemic is indirect when the subject is explicit but the stance taken vis-à-vis the subject is not clearly explicated by the author or by one of the reliable characters. The stance is indirectly conveyed as for example during the plot development, the characterization, the creation of an analogous infrastructure, etc. The polemic over intermarriage in the book of Ruth is a good example of a position taken in an indirect manner. Not even once is there any explicit mention that marriage with a Moabite woman or with any foreign woman is welcomed, but the delineation of the character of Ruth as a woman of outstanding loving-kindness, who comes from the foreign Moabite nation is emphasized (Ruth 1.4, 15-17, 22; 2.2, 6, 10, 21; 4.5, 10). The plot is designed such that Ruth receives the confirmation of Providence (4.13-17) and analogs are invoked in which Ruth is not a continuation of the line of Lot's daughters (Gen. 19.30-38) or the daughters of Moab who enticed the Israelites to idolatry (Num. 25.1-3). Rather she represents the continuation of the line of the founder of the nation, Abraham, because she also left her homeland, her birthplace, and her father's house and went to join a people whom she did not previously know (Ruth 2.11). All these are just a few of many examples that portray the marriage of Boaz and Ruth the Moabite as a positive event that is given the biblical seal of approval.

The technique of indirect polemics has several rhetorical advantages. In the absence of explicit statements, the readers of the text which is designed as an indirect polemic may well find that they, of necessity, must become very active readers who must support one stance or another by deconstructing the text into its components, and by weighing the character and meaning of each component and its contribution in the shaping of the polemic.

The means for expressing an indirect polemic, e.g. the plot and style, are also indispensable components of the story. However, in stories which contain overt polemic, these means contribute to underscoring the explicit position and to the strengthening of its impact. This can be seen in Exodus 16, where in addition to an explicit declaration, the plot development constitutes a form of exercise in Sabbath observance. Moreover, Moses is described as a leader who takes command; the style is similar to that of a public rebuke; and all these contribute to the story's underlining of the centrality and importance of the Sabbath and its observance in this story.

c. *Covert Polemics*

We can now understand in what way hidden polemics are unique and different from the two aforementioned types, since in hidden polemics the subject at issue is not mentioned, but throughout the narrative there appear hints pointing to the subject and enabling the reader to discern it. On the other hand, despite the fact that the topic is not mentioned explicitly, the view that the text takes with respect to the topic is clear. See for example the story of the concubine in Gibeah (Judg. 19–21), which I analyzed and presented as a hidden polemic against King Saul. Even though Saul's name is not mentioned there, indicators are scattered throughout the narrative and the anti-Saul stance of the text is crystal clear. This position is conveyed through direct and indirect criticism of Saul's city Gibeah and its inhabitants, and of his entire tribe, Benjamin.⁵

It goes without saying that to understand hidden polemics we must pay attention to the way in which this tool functions. Why the camouflaging? Why should material that could be stated openly be sequestered between the lines? In my estimation, this literary genre can take two different approaches, each having its own goal.⁶ The goal of the first approach is a kind of censorship, that is, to disguise sensitive subjects due to social or political implications. The writers sense that the circumstances are not ripe for a full-blown treatment of the subject. Nevertheless they do not want to ignore it completely. This ambivalence results in the subject being treated via hints. With respect to the goal of the second approach, the polemic only seems to be hidden, because the hints are so strong that even the commentaries in different generations are of one mind about what is the topic. Nevertheless, the topic is never spelled out clearly. This reflects an intentional effort to avoid delineating the topic. The use of this type of hidden polemic, which we could call a 'seemingly hidden polemic', is intended to lead the reader to remove the camouflage, to pause and think: why is the subject only hinted at, and not clearly enunciated? Avoiding any clear-cut mentioning of the subject is a type of defamiliarization, with which the reader can discover, not only what subject the text points to as its foregone conclusion, but also the techniques for covering it up, and the fact that what we have here is a polemical issue shaped by the principles of the hidden polemic. In this manner I explained, for example, the non-explicit mentioning of the Sabbath in the description of the seventh day of creation (Gen. 2.1-3) at the end of the creation narrative which opens the book of Genesis (Gen. 1.1–2.4a).⁷ It is clear to the reader that the paragraph concluding the description

5. See Chapter 3 in Amit 2000: 'Criticism of Saul's Kingdom—A Formula for Character Assassination', pp. 169-88.

6. On hidden polemic as a sub-genre, see Amit 2003.

7. Amit 2000: 224-40.

of creation is about the Sabbath, because of the multiplicity of hints woven in it. But the discovery that the Sabbath is not explicitly mentioned in a clear-cut manner, and the attempt to explain this, lead to the conclusion that we have before us a polemical subject with respect to which the narrative takes an unambiguous stand, to the extent that the entire creation is designed as a seven-day project, at whose conclusion God himself is described as sanctifying and observing the Sabbath.

Since the non-mentioning of the subject of the polemic is a gap which can be filled in different ways, and different readers can fill it in keeping with their own needs, therefore in my attempts to expose the hidden polemics I have limited myself to three constraints. (a) The subject of the polemic must be related to a controversy that is reflected in other biblical texts; (b) The text under discussion must be studded with hints related to the polemic; (c) We must show that there have been commentators who raised the possibility that the specific polemic was alluded to in the text under study. The purpose of the first constraint is to prevent the discovery of polemics foreign to the world of the Hebrew Bible, and that reflect the worldview of a later commentator. The second constraint is to insure that, indeed, the author or the editor of the text under discussion really had a specific polemic in mind, and therefore left signposts. The purpose of the third constraint is also to insure that we are not dealing with creative statements of some later reader, but that in fact in the text contains a hidden polemic, which we can point to, and therefore alongside the exegetical tradition there is at least one traditional commentator who also identified its covert existence.

3. *Hidden Polemics in the Story of Judah and Tamar*

In the Judah and Tamar narrative there are two hidden polemics.

The first is in the exposition of the story (Gen. 38.1-12) and this polemic is reflected by the avoidance of any explicit mention of Tamar's origins (v. 6). This loud silence is especially conspicuous against the background of the unambiguous statement that the wife of Judah was a 'daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua', who was from 'there' (*sham*, v. 2). This area was evidently Adullam, where Hirah resided (v. 1), he being termed an 'Adullamite man'.⁸

The second polemic is hinted at through the mechanism of non-explicit mention of David's genealogical tree going back to Judah. In contrast to Ruth, where David is not only mentioned specifically as a grandson of Obed (Ruth 4.17), but where the scroll concludes with the genealogy of ten

8. On the tendentiousness of this avoidance of mentioning Tamar's origin see Menn 1997: 51-55.

generations, tracing backwards to Perez and going forward to conclude with David (4.18-22).⁹ The book of Ruth even connects itself with our Judah/Tamar narrative quite bluntly in the blessing by the elders: 'May your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah—through the offspring which the Lord will give you by this young woman' (v. 12). However, our narrative, which concludes with the birth of Perez, does not mention David, although it does go out of its way to scatter hints that show us that there was an awareness of the connection Judah–Perez–David and at the same time that there was a desire to hide it.¹⁰

a. *The Unknown Origin of Tamar as a Subject for Polemic*

The background of Tamar is not revealed and this presents for us a double polemic: if she is a Canaanite, then her ethnic origins are related to the explicit polemic about intermarriage; however the decision whether she is a Canaanite is an exegetical polemic too.¹¹

As I have already mentioned, the Canaanite origins of the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, are not in doubt. This gets additional emphasis in Chronicles, where she is referred to as the 'Canaanite woman': 'The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, and Shelah; these three, Bath-shua the Canaanite woman bore to him' (1 Chron. 2.3). We could also assume that just as the wife of Judah was a Canaanite, Tamar also was from the area where Hirah and Shua lived, because when Judah arrives at the sheep-shearing festival for his flock in Timnah, his friend Hirah the Adullamite also arrives, and this is immediately known to Tamar. She forthwith goes into action, masquerades as a

9. From my viewpoint, it is irrelevant whether the genealogy was written by the author of the story, or was added by a later editor. The important point here is the desire to present the generational genealogical connection. On the possibility that this is a late addition, see for example Sasson 1995: 178-90. Although LaCocque (2004: 148) argues that the genealogy 'must be considered an integral part of the book', he admits that 'the final genealogy is nevertheless considered secondary—indeed 'inauthentic'—by almost all commentators. But there are notable exceptions', and see p. 148 n. 100.

10. See Menn's puzzlement: '... even the status of Genesis 38 as a story of royal origins must be deduced from the position of Perez ... in genealogies from other biblical books. But once one has determined that the story concerns David's lineage, its unseemly aspects become even more disturbing.' Van Wolde (1997: 28) emphasizes that the reader has to infer what is the identity of Tamar, for nowhere is it explicitly stated whether she is a Canaanite or not.

11. Already in the *Testaments of the Tribes* (T. Jud. 10.1), and also in *Jub.* 41.1, Tamar is described as being Aramean, and thus she is associated with the origins of Abraham. On the clear preference for marrying spouses of Aramean background, assuming Tamar was Aramean, see Werman, 1997: 3. Van Wolde (1997: 27) emphasizes that Tamar's origin is a matter for the reader's decision.

harlot, and sits 'in the entrance of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah' (Gen. 38.14).¹² Her swift actions, possibly due to the locations being in close proximity, are portrayed in a series of action verbs, which appear one after the other in v. 14: 'she took off ... covered her face... wrapped herself up, and sat down ...'.¹³ After this, when Judah sends his friend the Adullamite to redeem his pledge, the locals know nothing about a holy harlot (*kadeshah*) in the area. The location where all this takes place is on the eastern plains around Adullam, and the residents in the period that is considered the era of the forefathers were the Canaanite peoples, so that Judah—who had 'gone down from his brothers' (*vayered*, Gen. 38.1)¹⁴—lived in their surroundings and was friendly with them.¹⁵ Moreover, we are not told that Tamar is descended from one of the children of Jacob. Neither was she, as Rebekah was, brought over from Aram-naharaim, the city of Nahor (Gen. 24.10), which is described as the birthplace of Abraham (v. 4).¹⁶ Similarly, the location of her father's home, to which Judah dispatches her when Onan dies (38.11), is not mentioned, though it is reasonable to assume it is also on the plains of Judah, from where Judah had brought Tamar to be the wife of Er, and where the news reached Tamar about Judah's arriving in the region. Therefore there is no reason not to assume that Tamar, who was from that locality, did not belong to the Canaanites, seemingly to her mother-in-law, the daughter of Shua.¹⁷ Hence those who argue that Tamar was a Canaanite

12. According to Ahituv (1995: 259) Ainam, mentioned in Josh. 15.34, is the Enaim of the Judah and Tamar story. Although it has not been definitely identified, it is assumed to be adjacent to Adullam (see Emerton 1975: 341-43). For a discussion of the problematics in identifying Timnah, see Emerton 1975: 343-44. He is also persuaded that Judah lived in the eastern plains near Adullam (1979: 404).

13. See also v. 19, which describes her alacrity in removing the harlot's garments and donning of her widow's clothing, along with her return to her previous abode and status.

14. Rashi, following the midrash (*Tanh.* [Buber], Vayeshev 12; Gen. R. 85.3) interprets this descent as a lowering of social status, 'to teach us that his brothers brought him down from his high position'. But the majority views this as a geographic term, going down from the mountainous area to the plains; see Wenham (1994: 366). Kiel (2003: 72) who follows Rabi Elazer (aforementioned Gen. R.), emphasizing that the use of the root *yrd* connects this story with the previous one (Gen. 37.25) and the following one (Gen. 39.1).

15. On the Canaanite origin of Tamar and the Canaanite environment of Judah see von Rad (1963: 352-53); Emerton (1976: 90; 1979, where there is additional bibliography). This approach is taken by later scholars, see for example Wenham (1994: 366): 'Nothing is said about her background, but she would appear to be a Canaanite'.

16. See Brett (2000: 113), and the footnote above on Menn's puzzlement about the unseemly aspects of the genealogy.

17. Leach (1966: 58-59) argues that Tamar is 'pure-blooded': 'Tamar's ancestry is unspecified but, by implication, it is pure not foreign'. Emerton (1976: 90) adds and

woman base their reasoning on the shaping of the narrated world which the biblical characters inhabited, especial on the geographic parameters of the events. Nevertheless, we have to give thought to the fact that this information is not revealed by the text.

Reservations are expressed about Judah's connection to his Canaanite surroundings as described in our passage, connections on the social, economic, and familial planes. An early example is the comments of Onkelos who widens the meaning of the term 'Canaanite' (38.1) beyond its ethnic connotation, and translates it as *bat gvar tigma* meaning 'daughter of a merchant', thus distancing the daughter of Shua from the rubric of the ethnic Canaanites.¹⁸ Similarly, this reservation emerges from the attempt by the Sages to distance Tamar as well from the Canaanites: 'Tamar was the daughter of Shem' (*Gen. Rabbah* 85, 11). This exegesis emerges from the approach that rejects marriage with the local Canaanite women (*Gen.* 24.1-9, 37; 28.6-9) because their influence can lead to assimilation (*Exod.* 34.16; *Deut.* 7.4), and this reflects an ideology that looks favorably upon isolating Judah and his family as much as possible from the surrounding ethnic group, i.e. the Canaanites.

It seems that in contrast to the traditional commentaries, modern critical research increasingly tends to emphasize the Canaanite origins of Tamar. I also tend to accept this view, mainly because of the geographic distances that are described in the chapter. Moreover, there is no explicit indication that connects Tamar with other foreign peoples such as the Arameans, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites, or Egyptians. Since she is not identified as belonging to any other ethnic group or nation, the only remaining option is to conclude that Tamar was a local woman, which means—Canaanite. The fact that we are not dealing with an explicit statement but with inferences, enables discussing the issue and leads us to the same conclusion, and also demonstrates the rhetorical power of the hidden polemic to stimulate thinking and discussion.

The conclusion about Tamar's Canaanite origins serves well a positive stance in the intermarriage polemic, because Tamar the Canaanite is deline-

criticizes this approach: 'If Leach is here using the word "pure" in the same sense as elsewhere, he presumably means that Tamar is an Israelite. He advances no argument other than the words "by implication", and he does not seek to justify his claim by explaining how it is implied.' According to Emerton (1979: 412) the story was told in Canaanite circles and this 'helps to explain why the narrator does not state Tamar's origin ... his hearers would naturally suppose that Tamar belonged to their own community'.

18. See *Hos.* 12.8; *Isa.* 23.8; *Prov.* 31.24; *Job* 40.30. Compare with the comment of Rashi. Ibn Ezra brings this explanation and prefaces it with 'some say ...' but ends with 'it may be that this is the meaning'.

ated as one who attaches herself to Judah's family and adopts its customs, and sees in it the place where she belongs to. Thus, despite her being dispatched from Judah's home back to her family, she continues to wear her widow's clothing in deference to the request of Judah as head of the household (Gen. 38.11). She continues to declare her allegiance to Judah's family and to express her expectations that they will deal with her as is customary in this family. Moreover, Judah also sees her as an undifferentiated part of his family. Therefore when rumours reach him that Tamar is pregnant, it is Judah, and not her father, who is the authority responsible and who renders judgment and a verdict. Thus Tamar returns to the family of Judah and is part and parcel of it. This chain of events bolsters the view which assents to intermarriage with foreign women, even if they are Canaanite.

b. *The Hidden Presence of David*

It seems that there is no commentator who does not connect our story with David. This is so from the era of the Sages until contemporary times. But if we assume that there are earlier and later texts in the Bible, and that our story was written before the book of Ruth or before Chronicles which contains the family tree that leads to David (Ruth 4.18-22; 1 Chron. 2.1-17),¹⁹ then it is not sufficient to mention Judah and Perez in order to point in the direction of David. In other words, the connection with David must be based on something additional. For example, those who read the list of Israelites who went down to Egypt (Gen. 46.12) or the census in the plains of Moab (Num. 26.19-23), where Judah and Perez are mentioned, would think that those passages are there in order to lead up to David only if they would find there additional evidence to anchor the claim about David. The connection with David in our story is woven throughout the text itself, by means of a string of hints which provide an alternative basis, and which are supported by relatively early materials that include, mainly, the Deuteronomistic composition along with the texts of an eighth century prophet.

1. Adullam, a place name, is used as another name for Hirah (38.1, 12, 20) and it is the place where Judah arrives (*sham* 'there', v. 2). This place marks the beginning of the independent leadership of David. It is there that David finds refuge from Saul, and there he is made an officer over four hundred men who gathered around him. There are those who find a connection between the Adullam mentioned in the prophecy of Micah as a place of refuge (1.15) and the stories of David (1 Sam. 22.1-2).²⁰ Therefore it seems

19. In Amit 2009 I reached the conclusion that the story of Judah and Tamar serves as an ideological and poetic basis for the book of Ruth, and not vice versa. Wellhausen (1958: 171-72) already discussed the late dating of Chronicles, which relies on the Pentateuchal books.

20. Rashi goes in this direction, following the Midrash (*Gen. R.* 85.1). See also Vargon

that the choice of Adullam as the center of events in our story is in order to hint at David.

2. The friendship with Hirah, whose name reminds us of Hiram, is similar to the name-pair Abijah–Abijam [Aviah–Aviam] (1 Kgs 15.1; 1 Chron. 3.10), which alludes to the unique connection between David and Hiram: ‘For Hiram had always been a friend of David’ (1 Kgs 5.15).²¹ Thus it seems that the friendly relationship between Hirah and Judah is intended to be a hint for the future relationship between Hiram and David.

3. The expression *bat Shua* means, literally, daughter of Shua, and in this case it emphasizes that Judah’s wife was the daughter of the Canaanite Shua. Alternatively, this expression can also be interpreted as a first name: ‘A long time afterwards, Bat-shua, the wife of Judah, died’ (Gen. 38.12).²² There is no question that the sound of this name reminds us of the name of David’s wife, Bathsheba, mentioned in the books of Samuel (1 Sam. 11–12) and Kings (1 Kgs 1–2).²³ Therefore the use of the combination Bat-shua and the avoidance of mentioning her actual name can be understood as a hint about Bathsheba who was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Note that her origin is unclear, too.

4. Is it a coincidence that Tamar, the name of the heroine of our story, is a name that reoccurs in the family of David? Tamar was the comely sister of Absalom (2 Sam. 13.1–22). Her life was also affected by intimate relations forced on her in a family context, and in the wake of that she ‘remained in her brother Absalom’s house forlorn’ (2 Sam. 13.20). We can surmise that the situation of Tamar, his sister, drove Absalom to name his own daughter Tamar. Similarly, in Genesis 38 the fate of the heroine is determined by intimate relations that reality forced upon her. Furthermore, she too did not merit normal life: ‘And he [Judah] was not intimate with her again’ (Gen.

(1994: 60) who thinks that ‘the respected leaders in Judah will be exiled or will flee to the area of Adullam in order to find shelter there and to escape the enemy. The kingdom of Judah will return to the low level it had earlier, when David, the founder of the dynasty of the kingdom of Judah was hiding with his people from Saul in the cave of Adullam.’ In the commentary to v. 14 he adds: ‘The prophecy of Micah also points to a connection between Achziv and the kingdom of Judah. This connection can be explained by 1 Chron. 4.21–23 ...’ For more recent analysis see Waltke (2007: 84), who rejects correcting the text, according to which we have to drop the ‘d’ as a dittography and read ‘*ad ‘olam*’ (‘until eternity’) because of the danger of losing the delicate allusion to David’s exile in Adullam.

21. Compare Gen. R. 85.5. See also van Dijk-Hemmes (1989: 154–55).

22. Actually the writer of 1 Chron. 2.3 does not see this as the daughter of Shua. See §a above.

23. In 1 Chron. 3.5 Bathsheba is mentioned as Bat-shua: ‘These were born to him in Jerusalem ... four by Bat-shua daughter of Ammiel’. In the Septuagint and the Vulgate and in one of the Mesorah manuscripts the name Batsheba appears here.

38.26).²⁴ We can see that again the choice of name, in this case Tamar, is a hint about the family of David where the name reappears twice.²⁵

5. At least two of the items that Judah gave Tamar as pledges, the seal and the staff, are symbols of authority and governance. Jezebel uses the seal of the king (1 Kgs 21.8). The staff (or alternatively the rod) symbolizes the government, as in the words of Ezekiel: '[the nation] is left without a mighty rod, a scepter to rule with' (19.14 and also vv. 11, 12).²⁶ And we know that governance and the house of David were closely related.

6. There is an explanation of the name Perez in our story: 'What a breach (Heb. *peretz*, a breaking through) you have made for yourself! So he was called Perez' (Gen. 38.29). This reminds us of an explanation of a place name associated with David after the conquest at Baal Perazim (2 Sam. 5.20): *paratz Adonay et oyvay lefanay k'feretz mayim* ('The Lord has broken through my enemies before me as water breaks through a dam'. The meaning of the root *prt*z is to break through, to penetrate with force, to split asunder,²⁷ and the placement of the name explanation (*midrash shem*) in our text can trigger the memory of David, the victor.

7. There is also a clue in the plot of Genesis 38. The dramatic turning point comes after Tamar holds up for public view the pledges that unambiguously indicate to Judah who is responsible for her pregnancy, and Judah admits that justice is on her side (38.25-26). In a parallel situation, the episode of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11-12) reaches a dramatic high point at the meeting between the prophet Nathan and David, where the prophet points out the responsibility and blame fall on David, and David admits as much.²⁸

The impact of all these hints is in their cumulative effect²⁹ resulting in a David who is the subject of many polemics in biblical literature—and

24. There are some more points of comparison between the story of the rape of Tamar and our story: in both stories a friend (*rea'*) appears, a trick motivates the plot, the garb of the heroine is mentioned, and the men prefer not to have sexual relationship with the heroine any more.

25. Van Dijk-Hemmes (1989: 153-55) suggests that Tamar story in Genesis 38 can be read as a midrash on the story of the first Tamar in 2 Sam. 13.1-22.

26. Kasher (2004: 377) notes in this regard that the promise that Jacob enunciated 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet' (Gen. 49.10) is contradicted by the prophecy of Ezekiel. Also see Gen. R. 85.10: 'your seal is royalty'; other examples there.

27. Compare to Akkadian *parāsu* and to Mic. 2.13; 1 Kgs 11.27; 2 Kgs 14.13; Isa. 5.5; and other places. On the connection between the military use of the term *peretz*, see Eph'al 1984: 346-47.

28. See Brueggemann 1982: 311; Auld 2011.

29. See Sarna (1989: 264) who discusses the non-randomness in this list of hints. Van Dijk-Hemmes (1989: 154-55) brings forward some other similarities between Judah in Genesis 38 and David.

therefore most of his sins and failures are covered by the Chronicler³⁰—and who has a hidden presence in our narrative of Judah and Tamar. David's presence in our story is not doubted in the exegetical literature. Moreover, it is based mainly on materials in the books of Samuel and Kings which are usually classified under the rubric of the Deuteronomistic writings,³¹ and maybe also on the book of Micah which, despite its late editing, represents relatively early material and traditions.³² Thus I can say that it is our narrative which served as the basis for the later units in the Writings: the books of Ruth and Chronicles.

4. *What is the Contribution of the Hidden Polemics?*

The story of Judah and Tamar, which is the only narrative devoted solely to Judah in Genesis, contains two hidden polemics, each with its own background and goal. While the avoidance of mention of the origin of Tamar has a rhetorical function, the absence of David can be interpreted as a result of socio-political considerations.

a. *The Intermarriage Polemic*

The polemic over intermarriage is quite obvious in this story, since we are told explicitly about Judah's marriage to a Canaanite woman. The vagueness associated with the question about Tamar's origin strengthens the issue of intermarriage, because it forces the readers to confront and ruminate over the problem and leads them to the logical conclusion that Tamar was also a Canaanite. In this case the utilization of a hidden polemic is for rhetorical purposes and readers who reach the conclusion that this is a marriage to a Canaanite will naturally examine very carefully the behavior of Tamar. Readers will become aware that Tamar is described as someone who has done what she has done as a one-time event, not to meet her own needs or

30. The beginning of this trend is in the book of Kings where David is presented as a criterion for comparison with other kings who followed him (e.g. 1 Kgs 11.6; 15.11). Close examination of the character of David in Chronicles reveals him as someone who was exonerated, as well as criticized. See Japhet 1989: 467-78.

31. According to the methodology of Noth (1981) these books are part of a composition from the period of exile in Babylonia. There are those who even date it earlier, e.g. Cross (1973: 274-89) and Nelson (1981). According to my approach the hard core of the book of Samuel, along with Judges, is pre-Deuteronomistic (Amit 1997: 42-48).

32. According to many researchers, the verses in Mic. 1.8, 10-16 reflect the destruction in the wake of Sennacherib's sweep through the plains of Judah. See for example Mays 1976: 23, 53; Hillers 1984: 30; and lately Waltke 2007: 35, 87. Andersen and Freedman (2000: 244) date it even earlier and connect the prophecy to the period of war of Israel and Aram against Judah in 735 BCE.

because she grew up in the depraved Canaanite culture (Lev. 18).³³ Rather she is depicted as having done it because she is an exemplary human being from the local peoples who has attached herself via marriage to Judah's people and she identifies completely with the laws and customs of the people whom she has joined. Against this background her loyalty to the family of Judah is even more prominent, and further underscores the position that marriage with Canaanite women who have the qualities and character that she had is not forbidden and does not necessarily threaten or undermine the tradition of the ancestors.

The polemic over intermarriage is related to the issue of assimilation and isolation which was accelerated due to the conditions of exile in Babylonia, and continues to plague the returnees to Zion when they encounter the different sectors of the population whom they find upon their arrival have settled in the land. This is a central motif in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 1.9-10; Neh. 9.1; 13.1, 23-30; and also Mal. 2.11-12).³⁴

b. *The David Polemic*

The Judah–David polemic in our story is more complicated. Many commentators over the generations see the delineation of the character of Judah, a forefather of David and the central hero of the story, in an apologetic light, and adopt various and even labyrinthine strategies to defend him.³⁵ One example of such labyrinthine explanations will suffice, that of Kiel: 'With respect to the appearance of "a stain" in the descendants of Judah, it seems that we have to apply here the saying of the Sages: Why did the reign of Saul not continue? Because there was no stain on him, and therefore the kings from his line might be too arrogant over their subjects. But David comes from Ruth the Moabitess, and Rabbi Yohanan said, "You do not appoint as community leader someone who doesn't have an unsavory past (lit. a box of reptiles [Rashi: family stains]) on his back, because if he will become

33. In order to persuade readers that this is a one-time event, the scene depicting the meeting between Tamar and Judah opens with the statement, 'So she took off her widow's garb' (v. 14) and ends with 'and again put on her widow's garb' (v. 19). Similarly, the statements about the outer clothing of her widowhood conveys to us the notion that Tamar plans to continue to demonstrate her belonging to the family of Judah. It seems that Tamar took the measures that she did specifically, and only, for Judah, and she did this only to break out of the social circle into which she had been shunted by Judah who did not intend to fulfill the demands of the *yibum* (Levirate) laws (Deut. 25.5-10).

34. See Dor (2006: 99-154). For a study in how the book of Genesis reflects the ethnic tensions during the Persian period, see Brett (2000).

35. See Menn (1997).

arrogant, you can say to him: look at what you have in your past” (Talmud, *Yoma* 22b).³⁶

The understanding of contemporary researchers with respect to the character of the story and its purpose is a function of how they relate to Judah, i.e. the analysis of his portrayal in the text. Scholars who feel that Judah comes across in the story as a negative character point to every detail possible in order to criticize him and emphasize that he ignored the mourning of his father and left his family; preferred the company of foreigners and married a Canaanite woman; prevented his son from performing the precept of Levirate marriage (*yibum*); and actually deceived and abandoned Tamar. As if that were not enough, he also had relations with harlots, and got involved in an incestuous relationship. On top of all that, despite the fact that he did not intend to marry Tamar to Shelah, when he learned of her pregnancy, he rushed to pronounce a verdict of death by fire. Thus, the aforementioned critics claim that we have here a story that originates in northern Israel and comes to discredit Judah.³⁷ However, on the basis of indicators in the story, I think that this is not an anti-Judah document, but a story whose author uses a variety of poetic and rhetorical devices—from the positioning of the subject of Levirate marriage, which is related to the legal infrastructure of the nation, in the center of attention; through the use of a multiplicity of techniques to explain the behaviour of the characters throughout the length of the story; to the conclusion of the story, which closes with a reversal ending.³⁸ Thus Judah in the story is not punished on account of his relations with the Canaanites, and his sons are not evil in the eyes of God because of their Canaanite connections but rather because of their own personal misbehavior.³⁹ The author gives his readers to understand that the Lord has a

36. Kiel (2003: 93) and see also his n. 35 there.

37. The researchers who interpret every action of Judah negatively include Shinan and Zakovitch (1992) and Gunn and Fewell (1993). The former (p. 220) present the story as ‘an anti-Judah narrative which makes fun of the founder of the tribe of Judah, the ancestor of King David... Whoever planted chap. 38 in the heart of the Joseph sequence, after chap. 37, is trying to diminish Judah ... and we cannot ignore the possibility that it is also aimed against Perez—one of the ancestors of King David—who comes from this chapter.’ (A similar approach was taken earlier by Rendsburg [1986: 444-45].) Gunn and Fewell present the story from a feminist angle, which sees in every action of Judah clear signs of inconsiderate, masculine, patriarchal behavior. For the portrayal of Judah unsympathetically as a background to post-biblical Jewish commentary see Menn (1997: 35-41). For a critique of Judah’s behavior, going back to chap. 37 and continuing through chap. 38, see Brett (2000: 112-15).

38. For an expanded discussion of these poetic measures see Amit 2009. On narratives ending in reversals in general, and on the reversal in Genesis 38 in particular, see Amit 2004.

39. The sin of Onan is explicitly stated (Gen. 38.9), and from this the reader can

hand in these matters, and Divine providence is at work guiding the plot. Thus the story concludes with Judah earning a Divine blessing: the birth of twins, a kind of compensation for the death of his sons.⁴⁰

Indeed, viewing Judah in a positive light gives further prominence to the question why David, the most important of his descendants, is not mentioned. There are those who would say that the reason for this avoidance is because of anachronism wariness of editors, who are sensitive to historiography.⁴¹ But this reasoning does not hold up under the test of criticism because biblical literature does not avoid anachronisms; and the concept of 'there is no early and no late in the Bible' means that the stories are not told in a precise chronological order. I will mention, for example, the way the texts relate to the city whose name is later on 'Dan' (Gen. 14.14; Deut. 34.1 and Judg. 18). It seems to me that the main reason for omitting any explicit mention of David is related to the doubts of the writer vis-à-vis the place and status of the house of David during the period after the destruction, a period of uncertainty about whether there is a future for the Davidic dynasty and whether to see them as the vehicle for the hopes of redemption. The hesitation is therefore mainly a socio-political one of censorship.

The destruction of Judah, the destruction of the Temple, the loss of independence and sovereignty, and the life in exile all hurt the status of the members of the Davidic dynasty, who were distanced from the monarchy. An expression of this disappointment can be found in the prophecies of the prophets of the Babylonian exile and return to Zion: Ezekiel, the Second Isaiah, Haggai, and Zechariah. Ezekiel minimizes the importance of the role of future rulers from the house of David, whether it be by increased intervention by and providence of God (Ezek. 34–37), or by the preference for using the term *nasi*, 'president' (especially in chaps. 40–48, and also in 34.24 and 37.25). Furthermore, Ezekiel distances any future ruler from the Temple (45.7–8; 48.21–22), from its rituals (46.2), and from legal authority (44.24).⁴²

infer that Er was also evil (v. 7) in the eyes of God, and was punished for his own actions, and not for being the son of a Canaanite woman.

40. In biblical literature, every pregnancy is a sign of divine intervention, as we can learn from the description of Hannah's pregnancy: 'Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the Lord remembered her, and at the turn of the year Hannah conceived and bore a son ...' (1 Sam. 1.19–20). In the Septuagint the order is different: Elkanah knew, the Lord remembered, Hannah conceived and at the turn of the year she bore a son. The order of the clauses in the Septuagint emphasizes God's intervention even more. On the role of God throughout the story, see Menn (1997: 41–48).

41. This is similar to the arguments of a number of researchers who attempt to explain the absence of Jerusalem from the Pentateuch. See Amit (2000: 133–40).

42. Kasher (2004: 668–69) emphasizes that 'in the term *nasi* (president) are reservations about the historic kings of the house of David, and Ezekiel refers to a leader who is not an absolute king. The longing for and the use of David's name reflect the reser-

In the prophecies of the Second Isaiah the house of David is mentioned only once (Isa. 55.3), and even in this place the emphasis is on the nation as one party to a covenant, while the house of David appears only as an historic memory: 'the enduring loyalty promised to David' (*hasdei David ha-neemanim*).⁴³ Apparently Cyrus, who is termed 'my shepherd' or 'his anointed one' (Isa. 44.28; 45.1), replaces the house of David in the prophecies of the Second Isaiah.⁴⁴ The appearance of the term 'governor' for Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel in the prophecies of Haggai (1.1, 14; 2.2, 21), without any mention of the relationship with the house of David, reflects the status of Judah as a vassal state in the Persian empire and of David's descendants as loyal to the Persian rulers. The diminished status of the Davidic line is conspicuous in Haggai's prophecies against the background of the rise in status of the priest who appears usually in tandem with the royalty, a kind of dual leadership (Hag. 1.1, 12, 14; 2.2, 4).⁴⁵ The prophet Zechariah has an interest in using a riddle-like style that is nebulous (3.8; 4.6a-10a, 10b-14; 6.12), and it is not even clear from his prophecies whether Zerubbabel is the 'governor of Judah', whether he is from the Davidic line, or whether he is at all the 'son of Shealtiel'.⁴⁶

Therefore, it seems to me that the lowering in status of the house of David, which culminates eventually in its disappearance, and the uncertain reality that obtains, bring the author of our story to have reservations about any explicit mention of David. On the other hand, we must recognize that

variations about David's historic descendants...' Kasher even claims that invoking the term *nasi* is intended to limit the status of David and to see in him a 'first among equals'.

43. Paul (2008: 395) points out that "'the enduring loyalty promised to David' is also mentioned in 2 Sam. 7.15-16 ... and is the same loyalty that is transferred now from David to the entire nation'.

44. Paul (2008: 212) emphasizes that 'the prophet is conducting a polemic against those who believe that a king from the house of David is the shepherd who is chosen by God' and refers then to Ezek. 34.23. See also in the same work, pp. 215-16.

45. See Meyers 1987: xxxviii.

46. Liver (1959: 64-87). Even if we claim that the source of the name *tzemach* appears in the prophecy of Zechariah (3.8; 6.12), it is a name that Jeremiah gave to the righteous king who will come from the house of David in the future. The fact is that the prophet does not explicitly mention the connection to the house of David. But the analysis of hints in the prophetic literature necessitates a separate discussion. According to the approach of Meyers and Meyers (1987: xli) there are differences between Haggai and Zechariah regarding the expectations for the house of David. In Haggai the hopes are pinned on the house of David (especially in 2.20-23) whereas in Zechariah the relationship is unclear. The differences can be understood against the background of the changes in the reign of Darius. On the specific references to Zerubbabel in v. 10a they write (1987: 272): 'In our opinion it reflects the prophet's awareness of and sensitivity to feelings of loyalty to the house of David'.

the story of Judah and Tamar does not reflect a total ignoring of David, and its author planted hints throughout, which indicate that all hope was not lost. The book of Chronicles is testimony to the meaning and effect of this hope.

5. Summary

There are three advantages that accrue to the exposure of the hidden polemics in the story of Judah and Tamar.

The first is the revelation of the poetics of the story in particular, and of biblical narrative in general. Readers learn that hiding the polemic is one of the many poetic means available to the biblical authors. This literary device is outstanding for rhetorical and censorial purposes.

The second advantage is that our example increases the number of hidden polemics that can be found in the Bible, and it gives additional support to my claim that we are not discussing some rare phenomenon but that we have before us an entire sub-genre of hidden polemics in the biblical literature.

Thirdly, hidden polemics help us date the composition. The search for the historical-social background behind the topics of the polemics—in our case: the stances taken on Gentile women and the disappointment with the house of David—leads us to understand that this story can be assigned to the period after the destruction, a time when marriage to Gentile women constituted a critical and growing challenge and thus was a subject of polemics, and a period during which the disappointment with the Davidic dynasty and the uncertainty about it did not lead to complete estrangement from hopes that a leader would emerge from among the descendants of the royal family, but that there would be other solutions. The prophecy of Haggai, for example, reflects hopes for some future when the ‘crown would return to its former glory’, while still showing awareness that such an era was far off in the future, and its realization would be preceded by the day of the Lord with changes in nature that would accompany this day (Hag. 2.21-23 and also vv. 6-9). In contrast, Zechariah uses the technique of a camouflage containing hints, indicating that there is disappointment together with hopefulness.

We can therefore summarize: the story of Judah and Tamar does not forego completely any discussion of the house of David, yet does not mention him directly. Its author prefers to use the poetics of the hidden polemic, combining camouflage and clues that point to disappointment, and at the same time to optimistic anticipation. This ambivalence gives way to more explicit statements in the later writings that transmit hopes for concrete or messianic redemption.⁴⁷

47. On the controversy whether to see Chronicles as an expression of concrete hopes

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CONTEXTS FOR TAMAR: SAMUEL AND THE SONG OF SONGS

A. Graeme Auld

Among Cheryl Exum's monuments are her study of *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, in which David and his family figure largely, and her commentary on the Song of Songs.¹ The Tamar whose contexts I am seeking to explore was daughter of David, sister of Absalom, and half-sister of David's eldest son Amnon who also raped her. Women play a critical although not a large part in the Samuel narrative. There is one small cluster of female characters in 2 Samuel 11–14. David's Tamar could be said to be framed there between Bathsheba who says not a word (11–12) and the wise woman from Tekoa who gives excellent advice (14). And Tamar's story has not a few interesting links with the Song of Songs. In other papers, I have argued that this Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 was prior—in the history of the writings in the Hebrew Bible—to the Tamar who was daughter-in-law to Judah (Gen. 38).²

While preparing a study of Samuel for the same commentary series, I have come to focus on four broad stages in the making of that book. These can be relatively easily indicated. The earliest, the old David story, starts with the death of Saul (1 Sam. 31), and contains—in fact is largely defined by—the 'synoptic' material preserved also within 1 Chronicles 10–21. The second stage is the Saul-and-David story. It had started with the episode of the lost donkeys (1 Sam. 9), and included the first draft of 1 Samuel 9–24 and of 2 Samuel 11–19. The third and largest stage might be styled the Samuel-Saul-and-David story. This starts still earlier with the story of Hannah, contributes all of 1 Samuel 1–8; 1 Samuel 25–2 Samuel 4; and 2 Samuel 9 and 20, and includes several doublets and smaller additions to earlier drafts

1. J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *Song of Songs. A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005).

2. 'Samuel and Genesis: Some Questions of John Van Seters' "Yahwist"', in S.L. McKenzie and T. Römer (eds.), *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Bible* (BZAW, 294; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), pp. 23–32 (= Graeme Auld, *Samuel at the Threshold* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004], pp. 205–11); 'Tamar between David, Judah and Joseph', *SEÅ* 65 (2000), pp. 93–106 (= Auld, *Samuel*, pp. 213–24).

of the book. And the fourth stage is constituted by the messianic songs inserted near beginning, middle, and end (1 Sam. 2.1-10; 2 Sam. 1.19-27; 22; 23.1-7). I am in no sense suggesting that Samuel was composed in as few as four steps, but simply that the results of these four out of many steps can be more readily identified and compared. At each new narrative stage, the story of David had not only been developed and expanded, but also set in a still more ancient context.

The oldest of these three identifiable narratives starts with Israel making David king (2 Sam. 5) straight after his predecessor's death in battle. Saul had not died alone, but along with his presumptive heir and two other sons (1 Sam. 31); and David had previously led Saul's army. Stage II opens with a rather straightforward extension forwards from the older David story (I) into an earlier period. It offers an account of the kingship of Saul from its beginnings, including his relations with David; and it explores a number of questions left open in I. Stage III, like stage II, takes us still further forward in time, reporting the beginnings of the Samuel whom Saul had consulted about his lost animals at the beginning of II; and it also features an earlier episode in the story of the ark which David would bring to Jerusalem (as already reported in I). But 1 Samuel 1-8 are not just a development forwards in time: along with the many doublets introduced at this stage (such as 1 Sam. 15; 19.19-24; 26; 27), they also involve a transposition of the subject-matter into a new key. Samuel is not simply a 'seer' associated with the beginnings of kingship in Israel—he is who first represents developed later-biblical prophecy. And his mother Hannah is featured as the mother of 'classical' prophecy, just as Ruth is remembered as the ancestress of the Davidic line. King David may be the singer of the several songs in 2 Samuel; but it is Hannah at the culmination of her song who foreshadows the divine establishment of an anointed king (1 Sam. 2.10).

There is only one woman in the oldest David story, the 'synoptic' narrative preserved in both Samuel and Chronicles (I); and she could not even be said to have a 'walk-on' part. We have but one tantalizing glimpse of Michal in 2 Sam. 6.16, where she is introduced not as wife to David but as 'daughter of Saul'. We already know from the start of the story (1 Sam. 31) that her father and brothers are dead; and we now see their daughter and sister looking through a window, and despising the new king David dancing as the divine ark is brought into Jerusalem. But Michal's role develops through each main narrative stage from this small but significant seed. Her fresh introduction in the central strata of the book (II) is very different. Here too David has triumphed; and Israel's women are celebrating him as ten times more successful than King Saul (18.6-7). But on this occasion (1 Sam. 18.20) Michal clearly shares their enthusiasm, and becomes enamoured of the young hero who has killed the Philistine giant. She becomes his wife; and, when he must flee from her father, she helps him to escape (19.11-17).

Then, in the final drafts of the narrative (III), at some point after she has assisted David's escape, her father remarries her to Palti[el] (1 Sam. 25.44); but after Saul's death, David insists on her return to him as part of Abner's negotiations to deliver all Israel to him (2 Sam. 3.12-16). A new conclusion to the older synoptic 2 Samuel 6 develops the scene of Michal seeing David through the window. 2 Samuel 6.20b-23 could have been written at stage II or III. Like the women of Israel before her, who had celebrated David's victory over Goliath, 'she came out to meet' him, but what she uttered was a very sarcastic congratulation: 'How the king of Israel has honoured himself!' David rejected her contempt of his enthusiastic dancing in sight of the women; and, now again in his house and his power, Michal remained childless till her death. The daughter of Saul was to produce no claimant to her father's throne.

These retellings of Michal's role in the developing story of David are doubly unique within Samuel. As the only woman at all in the oldest version, it follows that only her depiction could be developed over all the rewritings of the book (like those of David and Saul and Jonathan and Joab). But more than that, each of the other women belongs to only one major narrative stage.³ At least part of what each new Michal author was doing was answering questions which a previous version had left open. Why did the daughter of Saul despise the new king of Israel (I)? Because she had once been in love with him, and had married him (II). What happened after she helped her new husband to escape from her father (II)? Saul married her to another man (III). Then what was their formal relationship when she saw David from the window and despised him (I)? David had insisted after Saul's death that she return to his house: he did not want any rivals from the family of Saul (III).

This king's daughter regularly takes the initiative. She was already in love with David when her father determined to use his daughter's love against David (1 Sam. 18.21). And in the final Jerusalem scene, she followed up her private scorn by going out to confront the new king. The longest scene concerns David's escape. His flight from Saul (1 Sam. 19) took him at first no further than the fragile security of his own house. The precise sequence of the following events is not made clear. Did Michal have inside information, or did a daughter simply intuit her father's next move? Did Saul intend that the prisoner be kept under guard in his own house overnight, or brought to the royal guardroom before being finished off the next day? Did Saul even intend his rival's death, or only his ignominious escape? Did Michal's pre-

3. David's ten concubines may represent an exception: they are left in Jerusalem to guard his house (2 Sam. 15.16) and are violated by Absalom (16.20-22)—probably both at stage II; but their imprisonment as if perpetual widows (20.3), suggestive of the situation of Michal, may belong to stage III.

science enable David's escape before Saul's men arrived? Or was she able to contrive his escape from a building they were already guarding? Were the men sent to take David (v. 14) the same as those sent to guard him (v. 11)? Much more important than the questions the text does not answer is what it does say. Michal first tells David that being rescued is not something which happens to you—it is something which you yourself have to do something about (v. 11). And then by her actions she adds as a rider—or it is something which your wife has to do for you. Her excuse to her father, that David had threatened her life if she did not cooperate, is plausible. But her ruse with the sacred object in David's bed, by which she wins him time to get clear away, surely demonstrates her complicity.

The first extensions forwards of the story of Michal (within 1 Sam. 18–19) are located soon after the fresh start in stage II of the David story (1 Sam. 16–17). The other three principal female roles in this stage are clustered (2 Sam. 11–14) at the beginning of the stage II development of the theme of David as king in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 11–19). And in a somewhat similar way, each major block of new text at the third stage of writing (1 Sam. 1–8; 1 Sam. 25–30 + 2 Sam. 1–4) has a prominent female role at its start: Hannah in 1 Samuel 1–2, and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 quickly followed by the medium at En-Dor (1 Sam. 28). Michal's role at the window at stage I is hauntingly minimal. At the opposite end (stage III), Hannah and Abigail and the unnamed medium feature prominently in narratives that contribute powerfully to major themes of the book of Samuel as we know it: prophecy ahead of kingship, protecting the legitimacy of the Davidic succession, emphasizing the illegitimacy of Saul's throne. The female roles are few, but each is highly significant.

Apart from Michal and the swooning crowds who shared her admiration for Goliath's nemesis, the only other female candidates for a place in the central strata of the book (II), are Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–12), Tamar (2 Sam. 13), and the wise woman from Tekoa (2 Sam. 14). Bathsheba is very beautiful, and is seen and taken by David. She sends a message to David announcing her pregnancy; and we are told that she laments her dead husband, Uriah. But any speaking she does is offstage; and even that is simply to give instructions for the delivery of the two-word message: 'I'm pregnant'. The lovely Bathsheba, mother of King Solomon, who has fascinated artists over the generations, is evoked for us by the story-teller; but we never hear her. By contrast, the unnamed woman from Tekoa is recruited precisely for a speaking role. Though Joab coached her in the words she should speak, she demonstrated her personal wisdom by holding her own in debate with the king. And her role is twice resumed by two women in the final strata (III) of Samuel. One is the similarly anonymous wise woman from Abel (2 Sam. 20), who takes the initiative herself, when her town is under siege by Joab. She urges Joab to prefer a peaceful outcome, and then persuades her fellow towns-

folk to cut off just the one head necessary to save the whole town. Then Abigail (1 Sam. 25) anticipates important elements of the Tekoite's independence and good sense even more fully. It is Bathsheba and the Tekoite who provide the immediate context within Samuel (stage II) for Tamar.

The first thing we are told about Absalom's sister is that she is beautiful. And this makes an immediate link with what has happened with Bathsheba. In order to intuit the connection, we do not need to know the report of Nathan's warning to David of the threat to his household from within (2 Sam. 12.10-11). Tamar's half-brother fell in love with her, just as Michal and Jonathan and others of Saul's circle fell in love with David; but doing something to her was [too] wonderful in his eyes (13.2b). It is not made clear just how the description of Tamar as *btlh* (often rendered 'virgin') relates to what Amnon experienced as 'wonderful'. *pl'* is often associated with the 'marvellous' (miraculous) actions of Yahweh. Was doing something to Tamar part of a delicious fantasy, or something that in his eyes would have required a miracle? Was it because, though of marriageable age, Tamar was not married? Had she been married, like Bathsheba, might she have been more rather than less available to a senior male in the royal house? Or did Amnon, like some men, have fantasies about deflowering virgins?

He is advised to make himself out to be ill so that David would visit him. When his father came, he should ask him to allow Tamar to come and prepare food for him in his sight. This happens; and when she delivers it to his chamber she is raped. The relatively extended dialogue between Amnon and Tamar both before (13.10-13) and after (vv. 15-16) this act makes us notice, if we have not already, that in more than fifty verses of 2 Samuel 11-12 not a single word of direct speech has been reported between David and Bathsheba. Was it a matter of different status? Was Bathsheba just the wife of one of David's officers, while Amnon and Tamar as half-brother and half-sister shared the same royal blood and had equivalent status?

The keenest challenges to the reader and to the translator relate to the food to be prepared. Amnon is advised to make the following request to his father: 'Pray let Tamar my sister come, and "nourish" me with food, and make for my eyes the "nourishment", in order that I may see and eat from her hand'. There is no suggestion that Tamar has a reputation as preparer of a particularly sustaining recipe; but there is something linguistically special about the provision. What I have rendered above by 'food' (*lhm*) and 'eat' (*'kl*) are among the commonest words in the language. But the neighbouring *bryh* and *brh*, though prominent in this story, are very rare elsewhere. I have rendered the noun as 'nourishment' and the causative of the verb as 'nourish', rather than simply 'food' and 'feed'—and for several reasons: (a) The immediate context is food for the sick-bed. (b) Elsewhere in the David-story the verb is used of 'nourishment' offered to him (2 Sam. 3.35) or refused by him (2 Sam. 12.17) after or during fasting. (c) The only other context where we

find it in the Hebrew Bible is of desperate mothers reduced to keeping themselves going by eating their children (Lam. 4.10). (d) The word looks and sounds like *bry'*/*br'* (fat/fatten); and it could even be a by-form of this similar word. In English we often talk of 'fattening up' a recuperating patient; and when David 'did not take nourishment' (2 Sam. 12.17), what we actually read is not the expected *l' brh* but *l' br'*. And yet, important though the nourishment itself may be, what is said about this special food is set in a striking narrative frame of Tamar 'coming' to Amnon, of her preparing food 'for his eyes', and of his 'seeing and eating from her own hand'. Plainly the hoped-for 'messenger' will herself be no less important than her 'message'.

When the king actually came to see his sick son, Amnon began his request exactly as advised ('Pray let Tamar my sister come...'); but he continued it differently, supplying his own words: '... and let her *lbb* for my eyes two *lbbwt* that I may take nourishment from her hand'. It is not easy to render the play on these words in vv. 6 and 8 related to 'heart' (*lbb*). At one level, *lbbwt* may have simply been heart-shaped cakes, or dumplings which were supposed to give one heart or hearten one—just as 'cordial' is so called because of its presumed benefit to the *cor* (Latin for 'heart'). And the piel *tlbb* may, quite as innocently, have been the cognate verb which signified making such beneficial heart-shapes or heart-cures (or even stuffed hearts?). Culinary historians naturally look to the dough, the kneading, and the boiling (v. 8), for clues to the nature of the *lbbwt*. It is only here in all of the Hebrew Bible that verb and cognate noun are used together—in fact it is only in this story that the noun is found at all. And yet, even within the context of the book of Samuel, an approach by way of culinary or medical history does not seem wholly appropriate.

Amnon's adviser, though knowing that his prince wanted Tamar herself, had suggested he ask his father for *bryh* (nourishment) from Tamar (v. 5). But what the prince quite specifically requested was *lbbwt* (v. 6). And the shifts in wording within the next two exchanges mirror these in the first. David now instructed Tamar to go to Amnon's house and make for him the *bryh* (v. 7). And she in turn went and prepared *lbbwt* there (v. 8). After ensuring privacy (v. 9), Amnon asked Tamar for 'nourishment' from her hand, and she served 'heart-??' in his chamber (v. 10). Clearly Tamar, no less than Amnon, intuited that a request to prepare nourishing *bryh* implied, at least in this situation, the making of *lbbwt*. Both prince and princess expected that providing this sort of 'nourishment' would involve 'heartening'.

In fact, attempting to locate *lbbwt* in a history of medical cuisine may be as pointless as determining the botanical species of Jack's beanstalk or Jonah's quickly growing *qyqyun* (4.7-10). It is possible that the main textual function of these unique *lbbwt* may simply consist in underscoring *tlbb*. Mutually reinforcing cognates (whether paired verb and noun, or paired finite and infinitive verbal forms) are a feature of the book of Samuel, and especially of

its direct speeches. It is more than the outcome of this baking-and-eating scene that should make us realize that something altogether more suggestive than ‘cordial’ is intended.

This heartening food is prepared ‘for [Amnon’s] eyes’ (13.5, 6, 8); and this is no dead metaphor for ‘in his presence’.⁴ By far the commonest preposition used in Hebrew with ‘eyes’ is *b-*. The threefold use here of the much rarer *l-* appears significantly between Nathan’s report of the divine threat against David and its fulfilment. He will take David’s wives not away from his eyes but ‘for [his] eyes’ to see, and another will lie with them ‘for the eyes of this sun’ to see (12.11). And Absalom duly ‘came to’ his father’s concubines ‘for the eyes of all Israel’. *l’yny* is used only once more in 2 Samuel: as Michal rebukes the dancing David of exposing himself ‘to the eyes of his servants’ maids’ (6.20). Whatever good Tamar’s nourishment may do to Amnon’s heart or stomach, Tamar herself and what she does by way of preparation will be a feast for his eyes. In each case, the sexuality seems to be overt.

The noun *lbbwt* is otherwise unknown in the Hebrew Bible; but the verb (again in *piel*) is used just twice more in one single context, and again with a feminine singular subject (*lbbtyny*), this time within some lines of the Song of Songs (4.9-10). And these and the verses around them have several other word-links with this portion of Samuel:

You have heartened me, my sister, bride;
 you have heartened me with one [glance] from your eyes,
 with one jewel from your necklace.
 How beautiful are your endearments, my sister, bride;
 how much better are your endearments than wine.

‘Heartened’, ‘sister’, ‘eyes’, and ‘beautiful’ are all part of the immediate context in 2 Samuel 13. And ‘your endearments’ (*ddyk*) is assonant with both *dwd* (David) and with *ydyd-yh* (Jedidiah or ‘Yahweh’s beloved’), Solomon’s alternative name according to 12.25. The emphasis on Tamar as Amnon’s (and not just Absalom’s) sister (2 Sam. 13.5, 6), the use of ‘sister’ in parallel with ‘bride’, and the need for Amnon to see her as she prepared for his eyes what would hearten him constitute a remarkable echo of the words of the lover in the Song. David sent Tamar to Amnon’s house, asking her to ‘make the “nourishment” for him’. Then, just as Amnon had understood the implication of his advisor’s recommendation, so too Tamar knew what was implied in her father’s orders: ‘she took the dough, and kneaded [it], and heart[en]ed [it] for his eyes, and boiled the heart[-dumplings]’.

It is not easy to suppose that writer and readers of the story of Amnon and Tamar were ignorant of these lines of the Song, or at least of the traditional

4. The possibility of double meaning is noted by Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Das Zweite Buch Samuel. Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar* (BWANT, 9/16; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009), p. 128.

love-poetry and love-language on which the classic Song had drawn. Who knew such poetry? If the prince knew it, then his restating of his counsellor's advice was all the more erotically fraught. If King David knew such poetry, then his response to Amnon's request suggests complicity. Was it only men who made up the audience when love-poetry was recited? Did Tamar know the Song? Was she fully aware of the stakes, when she visited her half-brother to bring heart to his eyes? Did she consider that she was sailing close to a dangerous wind? Or was she herself keen to do Amnon's heart good? When she told the prince to wait, and to ask David properly for her, was she desperately playing for time in order to get away? Or did she fully expect that the king who had sent her on such a loaded mission would not withhold her from her senior half-brother and crown prince (v. 13)? When she charged Amnon with rash misbehaviour (vv. 12, 13), was she finding fault with the liaison itself or simply his precipitate action? Unlike Bathsheba, Tamar was not a silent actor. She spoke to withhold her consent; and so what followed was rape. And she spoke again as she was being thrown out of Amnon's house. And so we are left wondering whether she would not have made a protest earlier, had she too not been complicit in the initial love-making of preparing heart-cakes for her half-brother.

Amnon would not listen to Tamar (v. 14). 'Was not willing' (*l' 'bh*) is a feature of this chapter (vv. 14, 16, 25), and also of its immediate neighbours (12.17; 14.29).⁵ This expression of refusal is on each occasion part of the narrator's report; and in each of these five cases the refuser is male: David (12.17; 13.25), Amnon (13.14, 16), and Joab (14.29).⁶ On Amnon's side, the hatred that followed the snatched liaison was greater than the love which led to it (v. 15). And, for Tamar too, being sent away by Amnon was worse than what Amnon had done 'with' her (v. 16). When she says 'with her' and not 'to her', she may be pleading that a future together should be the result of what they have done together. Amnon appears instead to confirm his own knowledge of the Song only by subverting it: when his love becomes hate, so the 'locked garden', there an image of the sister-and-bride (Song 4.12), becomes his quite literal door—locked against the sister he has forced. Apart from 2 Sam. 13.17-18 and Song 4.12, 'lock' (*n'l*) is used only once more in the Hebrew Bible (Judg. 3.23-24). And further links appear to confirm the literary connection: (a) The very next verse of the Song begins

5. In the Book of Two Houses, 'was not willing' is used only in 3ms (1 Sam. 31.4; 2 Sam. 23.16, 17; 2 Kgs 8.19—and possibly also 2 Sam. 6.10, cf. 1 Chron. 13.13; and 1 Chron. 19.19, cf. 2 Sam. 10.19). In 3ms, it is found in [other] Samuel-Kings pluses also in 2 Sam. 2.21; 12.17; 13.14, 16, 25; 14.29; 1 Kgs 22.50; 2 Kgs 13.23; 24.4—and with other subjects in 1 Sam. 15.9; 22.17; 26.23.

6. Uniquely in Gen. 24.5, 8 the verb has a female subject: 'if the woman is not willing ...'

with *šlhyk* (your shoots, or channels), cognate with *šlh* (send), a key verb of 2 Samuel 13 (vv. 7, 16, 17, 27). (b) Amnon's heart being good with wine (*kṭwb lb-'mnwn byyn*, 13.28) recalls 'how much better are your endearments than wine' (*mh-tbw ddyk myyn*). (c) The female singer in the Song also wears a tunic (*ktnt*, 5.3). And (d) she is the only other biblical character to admit to being 'love-sick' (*whlt 'hbh*, 2.5; 5.8). Given all the suggestive talk of *lbbwt*, it seems a particularly unfeeling choice of words when Absalom urges his sister not to 'put her heart' to the situation (20).

We may hear Tamar speaking all the louder after Bathsheba's silence. However, Tamar's explicit 'No, my brother!' may equally send us back to reconsider Bathsheba and the much more compact account of her first coming together with David. The whole train of events from David sending for her to her sending him the message that she was pregnant is told in only some twenty Hebrew words of which half are verbs (11.4-5). Of these, 'sent ... took ... came ... lay ... returned ... conceived ... sent ... reported ... said', are all commonly used and uncontroversial. But 'he lay with her' is followed by the much more puzzling participial clause *why' mtqdšt mṭm'th*. Since ancient times, it has been widely supposed that this means 'and she was consecrating herself from her uncleanness', and that the washing which David had observed from his roof (11.2) had been connected with her monthly period. The phrase is puzzling, in that sanctity and purity belong to different spheres. It is also true that our oldest surviving witness to the text (4QSam^a) does not attest *mṭm'th*; and that suggests that our interpretation of the scene should concentrate on *mtqdšt*.

Unless there is a clear indication to the contrary, the action described in the participle *mtqdšt* should be understood as contemporaneous with the action in the previous main clause '[and he lay with her] while she was ...' The hithpael of a Hebrew verb can describe what one does to or for oneself: *mtqdšt* could mean 'was consecrating herself'. But a verb in the hithpael can also indicate showing oneself (whether rightly or wrongly) to be in a certain state (as with Amnon's 'sickness' in 13.2, 5). She might either have been demonstrating that she was *qdš*, or making herself out to be such. Only once else in the Hebrew Bible can we find a singular subject of the hithpael of *qdš*⁷—and there (Ezek. 38.23) it is none other than the deity⁸ who is showing himself great (*whṭgdlti*), showing himself holy (*whṭqdšty*), and letting himself be known (*wnwd'ty*)—not through speech, but by means of a series

7. Normally it is priests (and Levites) in the plural who 'consecrate themselves' or 'demonstrate their consecrated state'.

8. The fresh discussion of 2 Samuel 11 by J. D'ror Chankin-Gould and others, 'The Sanctified "Adulteress" and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba's Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11', *JSOT* 32 (2008), pp. 347-48, notes the parallel with Ezek. 38.23, but does not develop it.

of powerful demonstrations. There was no one to whom Bathsheba could appeal against the king, when David himself was making advances on her⁹—no one except God and her own conscience. ‘While she was declaring herself holy’ may fairly be read as implying Tamar’s explicit ‘No!’.

We should also consider what light the Tekoite throws back on Tamar. In each story, the king is deceived and a woman becomes involved as an agent in a man’s ploy. The Tekoite is recruited because of her reputation for wisdom, while Tamar’s introduction stresses her beauty. When Amnon grabs her and asks her to lie with him, she refuses in lengthening pleas:¹⁰

- No, my brother (2 words)
- Do not force me (2 words).
- For it is not done so in Israel (3 words).
- Do not do this shameless folly (3 words).
- And I—where would I take my disgrace? (4 words).
- And you—you would become like one of the shameless fools in Israel (5 words).
- Well then, please speak to the king, for he will not keep me back from you (7 words).

Tamar appeals to her brother; she appeals to the stronger; she appeals (twice) to a national context; she asks Amnon to envisage the personal implications for them both; and she begs him to appeal to David, not as their father, but as the king. The Tekoite’s contrived appeal to David also starts with strife between two siblings, and moves to a wider national context. She does not, like Tamar, invoke an explicit ‘Israel’ dimension; but she does blame David for scheming against ‘the people of God’ (14.13), and her appeal is framed to prevent her and her son being cut off from ‘the heritage of God’. Her choice of language serves to suggest to us what had been implied in Tamar’s double invocation of ‘Israel’. And the narrator probably makes a double reference back to Tamar and her words when he notes (14.25) that ‘in all Israel’ there was not ‘a beautiful man’ to compare with Absalom.

Shameless folly (*nblh*) and the culpable fool (*nbl*) appear twice as often in the poetry¹¹ as in the prose texts¹² of the Hebrew Bible; and this language may have been more originally at home in the broad wisdom tradition

9. Steven L. McKenzie, *King David. A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 157.

10. There is no unanimity over how to count separate lexical units in Hebrew; but the brackets after each rendering give a fair impression.

11. Deut. 32.6, 21; Isa. 9.16; 32.5, 6; Jer. 17.11; 29.23; Ezek. 13.3; Ps. 14.1; 39.9; 53.2; 74.18, 22; Prov. 17.7, 21; 30.22; Job 2.10; 30.8; 42.8.

12. Gen. 34.7; Deut. 22.21; Josh. 7.15; Judg. 19.23, 24; 20.6, 10; 1 Sam. 25.25; 2 Sam. 3.33; 13.12, 13.

represented in these poetic/prophetic materials. Job provides the closest parallel to one of Tamar's charges, when he criticizes his wife: 'Like the speaking of one of the foolish [women] you would speak'. In the development already sketched above of the book of Samuel, 2 Samuel 13 belongs in stage II, but 1 Samuel 25 and 2 Samuel 3 in stage III. It is also arguable that all of the other narrative texts—not only Joshua 7 and Judges 19–20 but Genesis 34 as well—draw on Samuel, rather than the other way round.¹³ This Tamar story may be the point at which such base folly was first named in the narrative tradition preserved in the Bible—in the mouth of the female character who immediately precedes the wise woman from Tekoa. Amnon's adviser and the woman from Tekoa are both introduced as wise (13.3; 14.2); and, between these introductions, Tamar rebukes Amnon using language from the wisdom stock.

Most of the prose 'anticipations' of Tamar's words continue to link *nblh* with Israel: Gen. 34.7; Deut. 22.21; Josh. 7.15; Judg. 20.6, 10; Jer. 29.23. And this can give the [false?] impression that there existed a special class of [mis]behaviour which was known as 'folly within Israel'. The narrative in Judg. 19.22–30 helpfully points in another direction. There, *nblh* is twice used (vv. 23, 24), without 'Israel' in the immediate context, to identify the scandalous mistreatment meted out at Gibeah. However, the function of 'in Israel' in the other *nblh* narratives is still clearly indicated at the end of Judges 19, when the concubine dismembered in twelve pieces is sent through all Israel so that all Israel is asked whether such behaviour has been witnessed in Israel since the departure from Egypt. It was so scandalous that it should not happen in Israel.

This tribute to Cheryl Exum has suggested that Bathsheba, Tamar, and the unnamed wise woman from Tekoa were all introduced to the story of David at the same broad stage of its development. Independent of that judgment, yet also reinforcing it, we have noted how each of these neighbouring characters may help readers to understand the other two. And beyond these immediate and wider contexts within the book of Samuel, Tamar's words and actions find illumination from both didactic and love poetry in the Hebrew Bible.

13. This claim is set in a wider context in Graeme Auld, 'Reading Genesis after Samuel', in T. Dozeman, K. Schmid and B. Schwartz (eds.), *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (FAT, 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); 'Reading Joshua after Samuel', in J. Aitken, K.J. Dell and B.A. Mastin (eds.), *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies* (BZAW, 420; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 305–15.

‘IF THERE ARE SUCH THINGS AS
MIRACLES, ISRAEL HAS TO BE ONE!’:
NARRATIVES FROM THE HOLLYWOOD VAULT

Alice Bach

You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you (Leviticus 26.7-9).

In 1947 the Holocaust was not yet described in textbooks, memoirs, novels, or the History channel; it *was* in newsreels projected in American movie theaters, so that visual images of the horrors were beginning to be imprinted on our cultural memory. The state of Israel was coming into being and there was vigorous debate with President Truman shortly overruling his own trusted advisers, including his Secretary of State George C. Marshall, in giving recognition to the nascent Jewish state. The Holocaust created the picture of Jewish victims, impossible to erase, along with this hideous reality came the Jewish determination that such a cataclysm would never happen again. Always stalwart in protecting those perceived as victims, Americans began to take an interest in post-World War 2 issues as they affected Jewish people, particularly American Jews and the European survivor immigrants who were streaming into the Holy Land. In the postwar tension between the egalitarian promise of American society and its reality, many American Jewish leaders saw that skills, power to assimilate, and accumulated experience of commerce and literacy would give them the cultural capital to succeed in the new Promised Land. This article will examine some of the literary and cinematic supports that enabled the Jewish minority to form a successful, cohesive whole, with power far exceeding their numbers.

Anti-Semitism was one of the first social issues related to Jews to be raised before the American movie audience. It is difficult for today's audience to appreciate the impact of *Gentlemen's Agreement* in 1947. This film, based on Laura Hobson's best-selling novel of the same title, won the Academy Award for best picture and, created among its viewers a 'significantly more favorable attitude toward Jews'.¹ The movie stars Gregory Peck as a journal-

1. Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005; Kindle edition, K3755-60).

ist who decides to pass as a Jew to uncover signs of prejudice in the upper crust WASP community in New York and commuter Connecticut in which he lives. According to director Elia Kazan, no one wanted to make the picture. 'All the rich Jews in California were against it. There was a hell of a lot of people who said to Zanack, 'We're getting along all right. Why bring this up?'² Clearly the movie was Hollywood's version of social-consciousness—dressed up, well-coiffed people who looked like illustrations from ladies' magazines struggling to be pleasant to people who were encroaching on their private territory. *Gentleman's Agreement* was the most commercially successful of the spate of 'passing films', e.g., in another Kazan film, *Pinky*, the protagonist was played by Jeanne Crain passing as a white nurse in the South, *Lost Boundaries*, in which Mel Ferrer plays a light-skinned African-American doctor who must pass as white in order to practice medicine, *Home of the Brave*, a story of racism in the military, and *Crossfire*, another film dealing with anti-Semitism are also passing films of this era. In each of these films the passing-for-white character is played by a white actor. Similarly, no one ever raised the question of why Gregory Peck, Christian to the core, the man in the gray flannel suit, was the hero of the *Gentlemen's Agreement*. Even Mr Peck has his doubts about the casting as he stares at his reflection in the mirror and wonders if he looks *Jewish enough to pass*. At best Peck delivers a dispassionate and somewhat casual performance of a crypto-Jewish journalist. Why didn't the script call for a Jewish protagonist to have to wrestle with mean prejudice in the workplace, to slump away humiliated when chic restaurants and clubs had no table for him? John Garfield plays Peck's Jewish army buddy, who teaches him about the ugliness of anti-Semitism, which at first comes as a surprise to Peck, reinforcing his un-Jewishness for the audience.

Clearly the film was a main-dish love story between Peck and his ultra-WASP fiancée, Dorothy McGuire, with bland bigotry on the side. Rather than having to swallow the issue of anti-Semitism as a genuine issue, the Christian audience could accept these temporary film-star Jews for a couple of hours, and the Jewish audience could be pleased with their new level of positive visibility. The film nibbled at questions—it may have surprised people, but it did not shock them. The relative gentleness of the film helped to ease the movie-going public into the idea of identifying with Jews and supporting them as neighbors in postwar suburbia. Thus the gentlemanly solution provided a win-win situation since the non-Jewish audience was not alienated by having to directly tackle the issues of anti-Semitism, and the upwardly mobile Jewish moviegoers could smile about the issue as they bought up land to establish Jewish country clubs as a temporary solution to the problem.

2. Eli Kazan, *A Life* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), p. 152.

Less than a year later, the state of Israel came into being, a major historical development especially as the American press portrayed Israel as a democracy similar in background and institutions to the United States. If one part of American Jewry wanted to assimilate into its New Promised Land, the United States of America, another element longed for a different nationalistic identity, a return to the biblical Holy Land, through Zionism. Either way it became clear that American Jews had gained more power. The American Jewish image was now entangled with biblical myth, the Holocaust, and suburban anti-Semitism. American movies and narratives reflected their new tough-guy image. While there had been images of tough Jews rising up from the slums, like *A Stone for Danny Fisher*, set in the Thirties in Brooklyn, and other fighter and gangster films that emphasized the tough guy, a new Jewish body politic developed muscle after Leon Uris's book and film of *Exodus*, the trigger for the pan-Jewish tough-guy experience.³

The Book of Exodus probably has more to do with American support of the state of Israel than any other single cultural artifact. The Book of Exodus in which Moses leads his people out of Egypt, very close to the Jordan river, which God has determined will reveal the Israelite Promised Land? No, not *that* book of Exodus. Leon Uris's *Exodus* (1958). *Exodus* was on the *New York Times* best-seller list for more than a year, in first place for more than five months. This resilient novel has never been out of print, and is, by the author's own evaluation, 'about fighting people, people who do not apologize either for being born Jews or the right to live in human dignity'.⁴ Uris claimed that his research involved thousands of interviews, thousands of miles traveled within Israel, and more than two years of research and writing.⁵

The astounding success of *Exodus* led to a film adaptation of the novel in 1960. Previously films had been made of Uris's earlier books glorifying the American military grit from basic training to the front lines of WW2 (*Battle Cry* 1955, dir. Raoul Walsh, starring Van Heflin and Aldo Ray) and *The Angry Hills*, (1959, dir. Robert Aldrich, starring Robert Mitchum and Stanley

3. Leon Uris, *Exodus* (New York: Bantam Paperback edition, 1983). The film *Exodus* (1960, directed by Otto Preminger, starring Paul Newman, Eva Marie Saint, Jill Haworth, Ralph Richardson, Leo J. Cobb and Ralph Richardson). Running time: 220 mins.

4. Kathleen S. Cain, *Leon Uris: A Critical Companion* (New York: Greenwood Books, 1998; Kindle Edition K 3-4).

5. Midge Dector (1961) claimed that by 1960 Uris had 'become the master chronicler and ambassador of Jewish aspiration not only to the Gentiles but to the Jews themselves' (p. 358). By the time *Mila 18* was published, Dector claims, it was 'unlikely that more than a handful of literate Americans [had] not either read one of his Jewish novels or been engaged in at least one passionate discussion about him with someone who [had]' (p. 358). Cited in Cain, *Leon Uris*, K120-29.

Baker) but the movie of *Exodus* was an Otto Preminger spectacular. *Exodus* was more than entertainment: it inculcated in the viewing public the history of anti-Semitism and the founding of Israel. The hero, Ari Ben Canaan, forcefully, albeit much too neatly, played by an always well-shaved Paul Newman, is a tough guy of few words. He is quick and sure with command decisions, spitting out orders from an expressionless face. Brave in battle, but laconic as any John Wayne Western hero, it is hard to gather precisely where Paul Newman stands or what distinguishes him as a Jew. He is secular, uninterested in belief. Like the Western hero, he makes camp for a few hours and then before the stars have left the night sky, he is saddled and away, riding across the desert to protect his people. Like the desert itself, he is ascetic; the metaphor of how hard it is to bring this struggle into bloom.

Eva Marie Saint, the bloom in the desert, is desperately wrought up and impressively earnest as Kitty Fremont, a young American war widow and trained nurse who takes up with the Jewish refugees in Cyprus and goes on to fight and fall in love with them. But she, too, lacks the depth and fullness that might be had if the film took more time with her. She is a pale image of the heartland of American fantasy. Her lovely face wears a heat-worn and heart-worn expression throughout the picture. Well-schooled in romantic movies, the audience knows that somehow, on the Mediterranean Sea or in the Holy Land, Paul Newman will get his girl in the final frames.

The plot in a nutshell: Paul Newman, American film star, plays a Haganah rebel, who during World War II had served as a captain in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army. As a Haganah 'resistance fighter', plotting against the British during the Mandate period, the Paul Newman character is in reality a terrorist, although that term is never used in the picture to describe the underground freedom fighters of the Haganah. Nor are audience eyebrows raised at the continuous stream of arms shipped from European supporters to help the Haganah members plot against the British and secondarily the uncivilized Arabs.⁶ In *Exodus* our hero, Ari Ben Canaan, obtains a cargo ship and is able to smuggle 611 Jewish inmates out of the camp for an illegal voyage to Mandate Palestine. When the British find out that the refugees are in a ship in the harbor of Famagusta, they blockade the harbor. The refugees

6. According to the official Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) website, 'during World War II, The Haganah Organization was the main and central military organization before the establishment of the State of Israel'. The heralded Haganah later became a core part of the IDF upon the founding of the State of Israel, Six commanders of the Haganah went on to become IDF Chiefs of Staff, and 27 Haganah commanders eventually became Major Generals in the IDF. In 2010 the government of Israel launched a celebration of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Haganah (<http://idfspokesperson.com/2010/09/14/leaders-of-the-haganah-organization-celebrate-90-years-since-its-founding-14-sept-2010/>).

stage a hunger strike, during which the camp's doctor dies, and Ari threatens to blow up the ship and the refugees. The British relent and allow the *Exodus* safe passage. The film reaches its anticipated heroic conclusion, as Arabs on horseback, looking like the Indians riding down from the hillsides in American Western films, are slaughtered by Paul Newman and his cohort. A neat cinematic wrap-up, totally anticipated, since the Israeli characters are American movie stars.

Uris credits himself with changing the image of the Jew in American popular culture. In an interview soon after the novel first appeared, Uris bragged, 'We Jews are not what we have been portrayed to be. In truth we have always been fighters.' Philip Roth countered Uris's assertion succinctly: 'So bald, so stupid, and uninformed is the statement that is not even worth disputing'.⁷ Even Captain Yehiel Aranowicz, the commander of the actual blockade-running *Exodus*, disputed Uris's claims. 'Israelis were pretty disappointed in the book, to put it lightly', he said in an interview in *Time* magazine. 'The types [military, heroic, powerful] that are described in it never existed in Israel. The novel is neither history nor literature.'

But the masses could not get enough of the heroes who saved the Holy Land. On the heels of the American premiere of the film, a highly successful packaged tour was organized, from New York to Israel. It purported to trace the route of events in *Exodus*; the following year the Israeli airline, El Al, announced a 16-day tour, which promised to cover every place where Otto Preminger and his film crew had shot the scenes of the film. By 1960 the selling to Americans of the Holy Land as a Jewish theme park had begun in earnest.

Uris never gave up his fashioning of tough Jews as the Jews with power. On the inside cover of the 1983 Bantam Books paperback edition, he informs his readers that

...All the cliché Jewish characters who have cluttered up our American fiction—the clever business man, the brilliant doctor, the sneaky lawyer, the sulking artist ... all those good folk who spend their chapters hating themselves, the world, and their aunts and uncles ... all those steeped in self-pity ... all these have been left where they rightfully belong, on the cutting-room floor.

Ironically two major World War 2 novels written by Jewish-American authors are not thought of as 'Jewish' books, in the way that *Exodus* was. Neither Norman Mailer's *Naked and the Dead* nor Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* had the propagandistic element so prevalent in Uris's writings. Both Mailer's and Shaw's books, published in 1948, the year in which the state of

7. Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1990), p. 54.

Israel was founded, are gritty war novels, with all the manly toughness that genre requires. Both writers served in the army during the war and the major characters are Jewish. Thus, the tough Jewish male image floats from author to narrative to readers, although the Zionist element is not primary in either book. However, the books were early crossover books, and served to cement Jewish Americans, who had served in large numbers in World War 2 to non-Jewish, suburban-bound, veterans. The common war experience was a stronger bond than the anti-Semitism of prewar America had been a deterrent to acceptance.

Westward Ho! To Jerusalem

The second element in binding the loyalty of non-Jewish Americans to Jewish issues was the founding of the state of Israel, which is treated as a pioneering, manifest destiny narrative that parallels that of the USA. The American Westward expansion, killing of the indigenous people because God had led the European immigrants to this new Promised Land turns back on itself, a reminder that God had given the first Promised Land to the 'Israelites' in the biblical narratives, so familiar to the American people. And then, in 1948, a mirror image of the American success, as European immigrants and Holocaust survivors claimed the land of Palestine as their own. According to Sarna, 'the answers to the most critical questions concerning the future of the Jews everywhere [were] determined by the attitudes and position of the five million Jews who are citizens of the American Republic'.⁸ And to the Midwestern President of the American Republic, Harry Truman, the Bible itself led him to doing the right thing, handing over the new state of Israel to the forlorn European Jewish survivors, the people of the Old Testament, and ignoring the people of the land, the 'Indians' of Palestine.

Hollywood's mirroring of the mythic pioneering films of the settling of the American West is the forerunner of the settling of Israel, as well as the ways in which these films gave Americans a strong connection to the state of Israel's 'struggle for independence'. With stars such as Paul Newman and Eva Marie Saint (*Exodus*) and Kirk Douglas, Yul Brynner, John Wayne and Frank Sinatra (*Cast a Giant Shadow*), it is difficult for the American viewer to separate these films from American war stories, larded with Hollywood passion and romance. The miracle of the new Israel is thus already familiar to an American audience. It is the mythic American narrative revisited. Such depictions—of righteous, civilized Israelis facing wicked, backward Arabs—are the building blocks of a polemic told tirelessly by Israeli, American and Western media. Most often, it goes unchallenged, thus defining the

8. Sarna, *American Judaism*, K3755-60.

West's understanding of Israel and its moral 'right to exist'. The argument is rooted in the horrors of the Jewish holocaust; however, Israel's handlers have managed over time to turn deserved sympathy for that tragedy into an unwarranted assertion, somehow equating Palestinians with the Nazi attempts at Jewish extinction. Shocking though it is, this theme resurfaces as a justification for a constant state of war in the name of Israeli self-defense.

Let's return to the film structure of *Exodus* to see how Jewish novelists and filmmakers fashioned the creating of the Jewish state in the non-Jewish American psyche. The Arabs are portrayed like the Indians in most American Westerns, sullen, costumed, treacherous, lazy, fanatical. In the late 1940s and the 1950s, who wouldn't remember a line of movie warriors—spotted horses, feathered chief in the lead, and war paint—suddenly appearing on a ridge? Both enemy groups function as props, bits of local color, textural effects. As people they have no existence. Clearly the Arabs are the villains, predictably, threatening the children playing merrily in the kibbutz schoolyard, ready to garrote the Irgun soldiers creeping down the hillside, kaffiyas billowing around them, waiting to leap out from the night shadows while Paul Newman is whispering with his men on the other side of a rockscape. Yes, the Arabs are a particularly dangerous form of local wildlife, as were the Indians of the old American West.

Jewish-American Films

The popularity of war movies continued during the Fifties, but filmgoers also witnessed a comeback of lavish Biblical epics, including *David and Bathsheba* (1951), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *Solomon and Sheba* (1959).⁹ All these films were Hollywood interpretations of Old Testament narratives, containing proto-Jewish characters safely distanced by the passing of centuries and Hollywood casting. As usual, such pictures concentrate upon sprawling spectacles, luxuriant sets, and expensive costumes that mask superficial ideas, cardboard characterization, and weak dramatic development. Although I have written about this in earlier works, I must mention one more time Victor Mature's Brooklyn accent as the curly haired tough-talking Samson, a hapless victim of the flirtatious foreign woman, Hedy Lamar, a Delilah for our times. Filmmakers Henry King, Cecil B. DeMille, and King Vidor make no attempt to connect Jewish religious or cultural heritage with these costume dramas. The biblical narratives were shared culturally between Christians and Jews.

9. In reviewing these Sword and Sandal films, I could not help remembering the many delightful conversations Cheryl and I had during and after watching these films. They are not half so much fun watched alone.

If the biblical epics had little Jewish identity, the moviemakers of the Fifties also glossed over lower-class traditional Jewish occupations, of the early New York ghettos. Few star figures are cast as peddlers, factory workers, or numbers runners. *I Can Get It for You Wholesale* (1951) based on Jerome Weidman's novel, focuses on garment workers, but Susan Heyward is a fashion designer, cutting her way to the top in a man's world. Paddy Chayefsky's *Middle of the Night* (1950) uses the rag trade as the setting for a romance between Fredric March, a lonely Jewish garment manufacturer, and Kim Novak, a young restless divorcée. Jewish doctors appear: in *Not as a Stranger* (1955) Robert Mitchum is poker-faced, arrogant, and very successful! He is mentored by Broderick Crawford, who warns him that as a Jewish doctor, Mitchum is 'part of the five percent they let in here because they can't keep us out entirely'. Never cracking a smile, he marries a shy Scandinavian nurse who supports his lengthy training, after which the movie devolves into a standard medical drama. Mitchum dumps the nurse for a steamy siren. Dark with remorse, the greedy doctor sees the errors of his ways and returns to wife. No Jewishness *per se*. In *The Last Angry Man* (1954), Paul Muni plays Sam Adelman, a heroic doctor. His combination of absolute integrity and self-defeating belligerence has prevented him from achieving much success in the professional world, yet he will not change. He would rather give up his opportunity for fame, adulation, and a new house, than to feel he has accepted charity. Sam Adelman's motto, 'The bastards just won't let you live', makes him a hero in the broken Brooklyn neighborhood he continues to serve. While he is a man of impeccable integrity, there is no insight into how his Jewish heritage strengthened his profound sense of duty and honor.

More sentimental than analytic, Fifties films with Jewish characters and plot elements rarely ventured beyond conventional situations, stereotypical characters, and Jews achieving the assimilated American dream. These films were totally American, with scant mention of the Holocaust, the state of Israel, or Zionism. It would be difficult to overstate what Berman calls 'an accident of geography'. Even as American Jews in the 1950s confronted the immensity of the violence that had destroyed European Jewry, they also created comfortable and secure lives in the postwar suburbs of the cities of the United States. According to Brodtkin, this was the period in which Jews began to speak as whites and Jewish intellectuals contrasting themselves with a mythic blackness of the inner city.¹⁰ *Marjorie Morningstar* (1958) must

10. Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White People and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999; Kindle edn). In most of the book Brodtkin tends to romanticize the Jewish American ascent into the suburban hierarchy. Further, she adopts the post-Holocaust denial that there is a 'Jewish race'. However, she argues convincingly that the stereotypes of the American Princess, such

be mentioned, however briefly, because the eponymous main character brought into American culture the figure of the Jewish-American princess (JAP), played to narcissistic perfection by Natalie Wood, later refined with a dash of cynical wit by Ali MacGraw (*Goodbye Columbus*, 1969), and finally a caricature of herself, Goldie Hawn going from princess to tough warrior in this giggly woman's American army (*Private Benjamin*, 1981). Middle-class, non-religious, totally assimilated into an American culture of narcissistic women looking for the perfect dress and the right caterer to cover themselves with glory and acceptance, these Jewish upper-class women had achieved whiteness, leaving behind the not quite white lives of their immigrant parents. One might call them Jewish lite. Philip Roth spares no one in his narrative of a nouveau riche family from New Rochelle. Jack Klugman plays a crude, clunky Jew, Ben Patimkin, who swills milk from the carton, hollers at his wife and kids, and brags about his financial success as the owner of a plumbing supply company. As Brenda Patimkin, Ali lives in a large house cluttered with new-moneyed tchotchkes. A year later, MacGraw plays a somewhat parallel figure, the Italian Radcliffe girl, Jennifer Cavalleri, in *Love Story*, with one major difference. The Jewish Ali survives, ends her relationship with a confused Richard Benjamin, and lives a predictable American life in Westchester, more a mirror image of her mother, and Marjorie Morningstar, than she had hoped to be.

With the publication of the collection *Goodbye Columbus*, Philip Roth's work revealed a fierce tension in the Jewish community, and a term that has never died, *self-hating Jew*. Interestingly enough, the term is slapped only on those writers or journalists who develop the unattractive side of Jewish characters, Jews with attitude. I have never heard any of the novelist Johns—Marquand, Cheever, or Updike—similarly referred to as self-hating WASPs for portraying martini-swilling suburbanites swimming in neighbors' pools. Of course the WASPs were hegemonic; the Jews were worried that Roth would reveal their secrets.

The late Fifties and Sixties showed how much more comfortable Jews were with their identity and their position within American culture. Films began to present the Holocaust, of course, but also examined Jewish criminal figures, and the plight of the alienated Jewish intellectual. The criminal

as Marjorie Morningstar and Brenda Patimkin, may well represent Jewish men's projections on to Jewish women of their own ambivalence about assimilating into the materially alluring but often culturally and spiritually shallow postwar mainstream American culture.

For a different view of the racialization of Jewishness as a central tenet of ideas about race in American culture, see Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). Goldstein's work presents a compelling view of a century and a half of Jewish 'negotiation' of whiteness.

figures were paralleled by their Italian and Irish counterparts, continuing the insistence of Jewish assimilation into all elements of American culture. Individuality was pushing sameness into the shadows. People began to proclaim their uniqueness, their ethnic qualities and beliefs. The Jewish intellectual angst of Woody Allen and the suburban Baltimore middle-class Jewish world of Barry Levinson repeated in film after film made the Jewish figure as familiar to non-Jewish Americans as members of the family. The myth was equally divided: from ghetto to suburb, from streetcar to automobile, from working two jobs to playing golf on the weekends. The older generation of Jews, like Irish Catholics and other European immigrant groups, tried to hold on to tradition while the younger generation wanted to trade in tradition for a house and half an acre of land.

At the same time as these suburban Jews had their focus upon real estate, and joined their non-Jewish counterparts in the economic boom of the Fifties, the shock of the Holocaust and the madness of the German villains were seared into the minds of all Americans, particularly through the scalding cinematic portraits of its victims, primarily Jews, but also gypsies [sic], Russians, Slavs staggering out of the concentration camps in striped uniforms. The poorly focused footage with barely living individuals afraid to lift their smudged-eyed gaze to the camera brought Jewish people into the consciousness of American culture. Jews were presented in a new and more sympathetic light. Tolerance was emphasized, especially in community 'Judeo-Christian' study groups. The term was probably used earlier, but it was in 1952 that President Dwight D. Eisenhower was speaking of the 'Judeo-Christian concept' being the 'deeply religious faith' on which 'our sense of government ... is founded'.¹¹ The shibboleth was reiterated in education, mass communications, public philosophy and political life. Public school children colored pictures of dreidels and menorahs alongside their traditional Christmas colored-paper chains, candy canes, and mangers. President Ronald Reagan often intoned, 'We're all children of Abraham'. Chosen-ness is most likely at the root of this connection. The ancient Israelites were the chosen of the biblical God, and the Americans felt themselves to be the chosen people of the New World. Clearly chosen-ness implies triumphalism. And now American Jews had a piece of American Christian domination. Martin Marty has long been concerned about the difficulty of the term Judeo-Christian as a pluralism that rejects many groups. 'What happens to the "Judeo-Christian tradition" when the Muslim constituencies get chaplains, or, in civilian life, when California's Senate chaplain is a Buddhist?', Marty

11. Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a speech to the Freedoms Foundation in New York. 'Our sense of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion that all men are created equal.'

wonders.¹² In spite of the theological illogic of the phrase, the comfort of Judeo-Christian is clear: it erases pogroms, persecutions, and anti-Semitism in our present culture. In the United States, as the story goes, we can all assimilate as equals, especially if we are white, of European descent, and middle-class.

By 1961, the date of the release of *Judgment at Nuremberg*, the Second World War had already established the United States at the center of world power and American Jews at the center of world Judaism. The film version of the trial sealed the deal. The real victory was the absorption of Jewish characters and narratives into Christian America, which served to blur the boundaries of a single dominant cultural narrative. Director Stanley Kramer's fictionalized account of the Nazi war crimes trials held in Jerusalem, centers on a military tribunal in which four judges are accused of crimes against humanity for enacting Nazi law. The film examines the questions of individual complicity in crimes committed by the state. The film is notable for showing actual historical footage filmed by American soldiers after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps. Shown as evidence during the trial, the footage of huge piles of naked corpses laid out in rows and bulldozed into large pits was exceptionally gruesome for a mainstream film of its day. This visual Holocaust formed a permanent picture of horror in the minds of all Americans, Jews and non-Jews alike.

Settlers of the Old West and the West Bank

The landscapes of the Old West and the Holy Land have many similarities. Many biblical epics were filmed east of Santa Monica and in the desert areas in southern California. The rugged landscape implies the power of nature; the miles of sand and brush invite only the bravest men to merge with it. The cowboy and the Haganah fighter knew pain and hardship. In both ongoing narratives, the protagonists are imitations of John Wayne and Paul Newman, whose faces have been tanned by the sun and whose eyes have permanent squint lines from scanning the landscape. One fought a range war against the farmers and land war against the Indians; the other exploded British hotels and Arab towns. Both triumphed. Even today, more than fifty years later, the world of movies is intercut with the world of reality in the state of Israel. One drives northeast of Jerusalem, along the border of the Judean desert, into the Jewish settlement Ma'ale Adumim. This city of 35,000 Jewish residents is a verdant surprise, after the pale sandy hills of the desert roads. Inside Ma'ale Adumim one drives along winding mini-streets lined with red-roofed houses, green lawns and borders of red begonias, and

12. Martin Marty, *The Christian Century*, 5 October, 1986, pp. 858-60.

wonders if one is on a back lot at Metro, or perhaps in a wealthy suburb of LA itself. Deeply tanned teenagers dive off the high board and swim underwater to pop up near the prettiest girl. Older singles in bikinis lie in deck chairs like unwrapped boxes of candy. Five miles away in the dust and drought of the Mount of Olives, Arab housewives hoard in clay jars their supply of water.

Another half an hour through the Jordan Valley, travelling on Highway 443, a modern 4-lane highway forbidden to Palestinians, one sees more illegal Israeli settlements, with costumed Haredim, and busloads of curious Christian Zionists. Highway 443, a well-kept road, contrasts sharply with the rutted and worn roads allowed to the Palestinians. Even walking along the shoulder of Highway 443 is prohibited. Instead, Highway 443 is used chiefly by Israeli settlers and commuters looking for a shortcut from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv through the West Bank. On one side is an Israeli settlement mushrooming on a hilltop. Turn the other way for a glimpse of an Israeli detention center for Palestinian prisoners. The tough guy image is written in concrete barriers and 20-foot walls. No Arab villains on horseback will ride down these hillsides.

As the story goes, Israelis made the desert bloom. Israel is now the miracle the biblical account had promised. American novels and movies continue to reinforce the account, right down to the inhabitants of Sesame Street, who have taken up residence in a happy Technicolor street in Tel Aviv (*Rechov Sumsum*) in *Sesame Shalom*. The home video/DVD sold more than one million copies making it the best-selling Jewish children's video of all time. Three episodes aired on PBS and were viewed by an estimated 20 million people. Encouraged by their success, and supported by private Jewish donors, Sesame Workshop produced an additional 40 episodes of launched on Channel HOP! in December 2009.¹³ In one segment, Grover explores Jewish identity, and the brightly colored Hebrew letters jive to a jazzy beat. Watching Grover learn the Hebrew alphabet has a comfortable familiarity to American

13. According to the heavily promoted series, 'these projects address the common needs of children in Israel and the Diaspora to learn about personal identity and to value social diversity. The two new series are part of a comprehensive, educational initiative that also includes a new interactive *Shalom Sesame* website for pre-schoolers and their parents, and outreach materials that create meaningful connections between Jewish-American and Israeli schools, families, communities and individuals' (http://www.sesameworkshop.org/inside/pressroom//journal_content/56_INSTANCE_PRES/10174/64719?_56_INSTANCE_PRES_back=true).

Cheryl Exum and I wrote two books of Bible stories for children: *Moses' Ark* and *Miriam's Well*. As I was screening some of the *Shalom Sesame* DVDs for this project, I wished Cheryl and I could watch them together, especially *Be Happy*, *It's Purim*, and *It's Passover*, *Grover*. Perhaps by the time the new improved super-sized HD version of *Grover Learns Hebrew* is released, we shall be able to share the delights.

children. In another episode, two new characters Moishe Oofnick the grouch, and Kippy ben Kipod, a large porcupine, take the children on a guided tour through the underground tunnels of the Old City, cranking out The Old Historicism for tikes. Of the episodes I have viewed, one minor aspect of Israeli life has been overlooked: Palestinians and Israeli Arabs. *Rechov Sumsum* is clearly in a red-lined neighborhood. Beyond its original goal of assimilation of a variety of ethnic groups in the urban Sesame Street USA, the Sesame Street Workshop in building *Rechov Sumsum* has become a tool of Israeli propaganda.

As Grover and his Muppet friends prove so well, Jews are no longer merely passing in a non-Jewish world. Unlike their centuries of wandering through Europe, Jews have found their Promised Land. Jonathan Sarna defined this new land succinctly. 'America allowed them to be Jews'. For the first time, Jews felt assimilated into the nation into which they had immigrated. Their period of wandering had ended. Jews had found the Promised Land. Even though this promised land offered Jews the possibility to identify as non-Jewish, more than half of them, even in the suburbs, continue to do so, particularly within social groups. Since the history of the United States is a history of immigrants, the heritage of Jewish immigration fits perfectly into the American cultural story, that is the immigration pattern for European, white, educated immigrants.

MAURICE HALBWACHS, MEMORY, AND THE HEBREW BIBLE¹

Hans M. Barstad

I. Background

The reason why biblical scholars have taken an interest in the French pioneer sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) is mainly due to his reputation as a ‘memory’ pioneer. Halbwachs, it has been claimed, deals with ‘memory’ in three different books.² In the present context, I will deal mainly with *Les cadres sociaux*. The reason for this restricted choice is not only due to lack of space, but it is also a result of the complex publication history of *La mémoire collective*.³

The least complicated of the three volumes is *La topographie légendaire* published in 1941. As a ‘popular’ Holy Land travel guide, this book belongs

1. It is a great pleasure to present these thoughts on an important pioneer in the humanities to Cheryl Exum, who has written so many groundbreaking studies in the field of Hebrew Bible.

2. Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine; Paris: Albin Michel, new edn, 1952; first published in 1925); *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte. Étude de mémoire collective* (Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1941); *La mémoire collective. Édition critique établie par G. Namer préparée avec la collaboration de M. Jaisson* (Bibliothèque de L'Évolution de l'Humanité; Paris: Albin Michel, new rev. and expanded edn, 1997; first published posthumously in 1950).

3. See preface and postscript in the first critical edition by Gérard Namer referred to above for the publication story of this book. There is also a list of ‘variants’. To make the whole issue even more complicated, the critical edition of 1997 is based on the second revised edition, Paris, 1968, published by Presses Universitaires de France. *La mémoire collective*, therefore, was not only published posthumously, but the way the book has been produced has as a consequence that it cannot really be regarded as a unified volume. Each and every chapter has to be studied separately. In addition, one may query whether this is really a book by Halbwachs or not. This does not mean that there are not many insights to be gained, but great care has to be taken when we use this volume to find out what phase they fit into in the larger intellectual context of Halbwachs. See also the remarks by Marie Jaisson, ‘Temps et espace chez Maurice Halbwachs’, *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1 (1999), pp. 163–78 (165 n. 9).

to a clear genre. The first chapter of *La topographie légendaire* deals with *Itinerarium burdigalense*, one of the earliest comprehensive descriptions by a traveller to the Holy Land in the time of Constantine (272–337). This anonymous work was written in 333. The other chapters deal with Bethlehem, the Cenacle and the tomb of King David, Pilate's court, Via dolorosa, Mount of Olives, Nazareth, and the Sea of Galilee. Basically, *La topographie légendaire* is not very different from the work of other high quality authors who wrote similar 'travelogues' in the interwar period.

The book shows not only Halbwachs's versatility as a scholar, but demonstrates also that he is well read, and familiar with the contributions of leading contemporary scholars in the particular areas that he is writing about. The main sources in *La topographie légendaire* are few, but among the leading authorities of the time: Felix Marie Abel (1878–1953), Gustaf Dalman (1855–1941), Ernest Renan (1823–1892), and Louis Hugues Vincent (1872–1960). Typical for Halbwachs is the way he uses his sources. Quite often, he follows the secondary literature rather closely, almost in a paraphrasing way.⁴

His very long conclusion, however, inspired above all by Renan, deals mostly with problems in relation to the historical Jesus. The relationship between memory/tradition and groups (collective psychology) that we find in *La topographie légendaire* is quite illustrative for Halbwachs's overall programme. Therefore, the views on 'memory' found in *La topographie légendaire* in 1941 are not far from those of the earlier volume *Les cadres sociaux* published in 1925.⁵

However, none of the so-called 'memory' books can be separated from the rest of his authorship. Anyone who wants to understand the significance of Halbwachs for today needs to see his views on 'memory' within the context of his wider publishing programme. The way Halbwachs uses 'memory' appears to be rather far away from how some recent scholars use the terminology.

4. For this reason, it is an anomaly when a second edition (Maurice Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte. Étude de mémoire collective. Préface de Fernand Dumont* [Bibliothèque de sociologie contemporaine; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971]) has been expanded with an 'updated' bibliography. The reason is not only that a purist may dislike the adding of a bibliography. The academic writing style of Halbwachs (and others who lived and published scholarly monographs in this period) was very different from what we are used to today. None of Halbwachs's books (not even his two doctoral dissertations) have bibliographies or indices. Also, there are very few footnotes, and hardly any 'proper' referencing in the footnotes. For this reason, the second edition of *La topographie légendaire* from 1971 has an unclear rationale. A state of the art 1941 book cannot be updated by adding a few random state of the art 1971 bibliographical references.

5. On this, see further below where I discuss *Les cadres sociaux*.

II. Halbwachs in Context

Maurice Halbwachs may be best known as a student of Durkheim (1858–1917).⁶ He belonged, with François Simiand (1873–1935) and Durkheim's nephew Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), to the 'inner Durkheim circle'.⁷

Throughout his career, Halbwachs published extensively. He wrote several books, as well as articles and reviews in a long series of scientific journals within a variety of different disciplines.⁸ His two Paris doctoral theses, one in law (1909) and one in the humanities (1912), are both published.⁹ Apparently, the lasting impact of these works on the social sciences of today is not so impressive according to some.¹⁰ Like all intellectual works that were published a hundred years ago, they bear the mark of time.¹¹

6. Secondary literature on Halbwachs is growing quickly, and not much can be mentioned here. The short (but succinct) popular book by Gilles Montigny, *Maurice Halbwachs. Vie, œuvres, concepts* (Les grandes théoriciens; Paris: Ellipses, 2005) has selected literature. There are also some fine studies in English. However, since I only deal with the French Halbwachs debate in the present contribution, I have not taken these into consideration here.

7. Halbwachs was introduced to the Durkheim group through his friendship with Simiand, whose political views he shared. He became an eager collaborator in *L'année sociologique* already from 1905. See Olivier Martin, 'Raison statistique et raison sociologique chez Maurice Halbwachs', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1 (1999), pp. 69–101 (70–71).

8. For a detailed (quite critical) review of the value of Halbwachs as a social economist, see Philippe Steiner, 'Maurice Halbwachs: les derniers feux de la sociologie économique durkheimienne', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1 (1999), pp. 141–62. Even if this paper has a lot of useful perspectives, one may feel occasionally that it is written a little too much from the point of view of hindsight knowledge.

9. Halbwachs, *Les expropriations et le prix des terrains à Paris (1860–1900)* (Société nouvelle de librairie et d'éditions; Paris: Cornély, 1909); Halbwachs, *La classe ouvrière et les niveaux de vie. Recherches sur la hiérarchie des besoins dans les sociétés industrielles contemporaines* (Paris, London and New York: Gordon & Breach, 1970, reprint of the first edition, Paris: F. Alcan, 1912). Mention should here be made also of the complementary volume by Halbwachs, *La théorie de l'homme moyen: essai sur Quetelet et la statistique morale* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1913). I have not seen the volume on Quetelet. The reference is taken from the online catalogue of the *Bibliothèque nationale*.

10. For an evaluation of these monographs, see Christian Topalov, '«Expériences sociologiques»: les faits et les preuves dans les thèses de Maurice Halbwachs (1909–1913)', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1 (1999), pp. 11–46. See also the useful survey by Martin, 'Raison statistique et raison sociologique', for how Halbwachs uses mathematics and statistics in the social sciences. In my view, some of the limitations that Halbwachs has indicated for the use of statistics in the social sciences are valid also today (cf. also below).

11. 'Les thèses de Halbwachs, par leur forme autant que par leur programme, sont donc le fruit d'une conjecture intellectuelle, institutionnelle, et personnellement

The basic training of Halbwachs, however, was in philosophy and psychology. Here, he received a life-long influence from Henri Bergson (1859–1941). He taught philosophy at the University of Caen (1918), and his first book-length publication was on Leibniz.¹² Moreover, as Halbwachs read very widely, he was quite a polymath. He also travelled extensively abroad.

In 1919 Halbwachs became a professor of sociology in Strasbourg. Among his colleagues were Marc Bloch (1886–1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878–1956). In 1935 Halbwachs left Strasbourg for a chair at the Sorbonne, and he was attached to this institution for the rest of his life. The title of his Paris chair varied for different reasons, and only from 1939 to 1941 did he hold the chair of sociology.¹³ Already quite early, Halbwachs had shown an interest in a position at the *Collège de France*.¹⁴ He finally succeeded, and on 10 May 1944 he was elected to the chair of *psychologie collective*. The title of the chair, suggested by Halbwachs, stands as a motto for his whole life in the academy.¹⁵

Throughout his career Halbwachs considered himself to be a psychologist.¹⁶ Again, we should remember how psychology and sociology in those pioneering days did not exist as separate branches of learning. Both were specializations within and sub-disciplines under philosophy. Halbwachs therefore always taught both subjects to philosophy students. Also, under the influence of Durkheim (and Simiand) his focus changed from individual to collective psychology. Nevertheless, despite the weight Halbwachs put on the psychology of groups, his interest in individual psychology persisted

nettement datée. C'est sans doute pourquoi elles sont aujourd'hui plus souvent citées que réellement lues: elles appartiennent à un autre temps que le nôtre' (Topalov, '«Expériences sociologiques»', p. 18).

12. M. Halbwachs, *Leibniz* (Les philosophes; Paris: P. Delaplane, 1907).

13. On the intricate history of the different chairs of Halbwachs at the Sorbonne, see Laurent Mucchielli and Jacqueline Pluet-Despatin, 'Halbwachs au Collège de France', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1 (1999), pp. 179–88 (181).

14. For the various problems in relation to Halbwachs's long road to this most prestigious of academic institutions, see Mucchielli and Pluet-Despatin, 'Halbwachs au Collège de France', pp. 179–88.

15. Halbwachs's own story of his preparations for the election in 1944 is now available in his 'Ma campagne au Collège de France', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1 (1999), pp. 189–228. This story becomes dramatic reading when we know today that he in fact was elected, but was unable to take up his position. Halbwachs was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944, and died in Buchenwald in 1945.

16. Apparently, Halbwachs's strong interest in psychology already in his early days reflected his wish to become a psychologist. See Laurent Mucchielli, 'Pour une psychologie collective: l'héritage durkheimien d'Halbwachs et sa rivalité avec Blondel durant l'entre-deux-guerres', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1 (1999), pp. 103–41 (108).

throughout his life. The reason for this was that he regarded individual and collective psychology (for Halbwachs, *mémoire*) as mutually independent.¹⁷ For this reason, Bergson should be regarded as equally important as Durkheim for his intellectual development.

Among the lasting impacts of Halbwachs for the intellectual debate today is his anti-positivism. It should be noted that Halbwachs here also takes part in, or touches upon, the wider 'biology versus society' debate that is still very much ongoing. Here, Halbwachs is considered today to be an improvement over Durkheim whose theoretical base was regarded as problematic already in his own time. Halbwachs is far less rigid (and less positivistic!) than Durkheim himself in these matters.¹⁸

Here, a quote from Halbwachs himself is illustrative: 'Dans notre livre: *La théorie de l'homme moyen: essai sur Quetelet et la statistique morale* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1913), nous critiquons en détail l'application de la lois des grands nombres aux faits biologiques et sociaux'.¹⁹ When Halbwachs is making an anti-positivist statement like this, he is no maverick, dabbling in unfamiliar disciplines. He was, in fact, trained as a statistician, and he regarded statistics and mathematics as important tools for the social sciences.²⁰

Bergson's anti-positivist reflections on time had an enormous influence on the intellectual elite in France (and abroad), not least on writers of fiction. It was above all his distinction between clock time (external time) and experienced time that made a great impression.²¹ Halbwachs shares this influence

17. See typically Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, pp. 51-96. See also further below.

18. See Laurent Mucchielli and Marc Renneville, 'Les causes du suicide: pathologie individuelle ou sociale? Durkheim, Halbwachs et les psychiatres de leur temps (1830-1930)', *Déviance et société* 22 (1998) pp. 3-36. In his book about Durkheim's famous classic on suicide, Halbwachs turned against Durkheim's unwillingness to take social and individual differences into consideration. He also turned against contemporary psychiatric deterministic theories (p. 25).

19. Halbwachs, *La classe ouvrière*, p. 152 n. 1.

20. Martin, 'Raison statistique et raison sociologique', gives a useful survey of various aspects of this particular issue in Halbwachs's writings. From Martin, we also learn of the scientific anti-positivism in Halbwachs. Pierre Bourdieu, who held the sociology chair at Collège de France from 1982 to 2001, did not, as far as I know, refer often to Halbwachs. Among the 'Durkheimians', Bourdieu appears to be more influenced by Durkheim and Mauss. We note with interest, therefore, that he supports Halbwachs in his view on the limitations of statistics. See Pierre Bourdieu, 'Espace social et genèse des «classes»', in his *Langage et pouvoir symbolique. Préface de John B. Thompson* (Paris: Fayard/Seuil, 2001), p. 295 n. 3. This essay was first published in 1984.

21. Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à [sic] l'esprit* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982 [93rd edition, based on the 7th edition, Paris, 1939]). However, Bergson published on memory also in other publications. For Bergson on memory, cf. also Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000), pp. 30-36. Halbwachs is referring to time in many different contexts. See, conveniently, *La mémoire collective*, pp. 143-92.

from Bergson with a series of famous French authors (Claudel, Gide, Proust, Valéry) who created a new, very popular type of fictional narrative.²² We should realize that the influence of Bergson on Halbwachs is wide-ranging, and concerns not only his views on time and memory, but also, not least, on philosophy and psychology in general. As we shall also see below, the 'change' from Bergson to Durkheim is also a movement from individual psychology to group psychology. However, Halbwachs always combined the two kinds of 'memory', and regarded them as interdependent. However, the 'memory' of individuals (psychology) is very different from the 'memory' of groups (sociology). Therefore, there is no consistent idea of 'memory' in Halbwachs's works that can be identified, extracted, and transplanted to the debate today.²³ Each and every statement by Halbwachs has to be discussed in context before it will be useful for other considerations.

Of interest as 'background' is also Halbwachs's relationship to the *Annales* 'School'. The reason for this is that it is commonly assumed that Durkheimian sociology, together with Vidalian geography and *la nouvelle histoire*, made up the most important ingredients of the movement behind *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. Today, we have access to new, highly interesting information on the birth of the *Annales* movement thanks to the recent edition of the correspondence between Febvre and Bloch.²⁴ In the letters, there are numerous references to Halbwachs, quite often unenthusiastic.

Febvre (who founded *Annales* with Bloch in 1929) wanted Halbwachs, who was his colleague in Strasbourg, to become a member of the editorial board. This proposal, however, was opposed by the geographer Max Leclerc (1864–1932), editor of the *Annales de géographie*. Leclerc regarded sociology as a science to be too young, and not yet fully developed methodologically. It was above all the students of Durkheim whom he regarded as belonging to this underdeveloped methodology.²⁵

22. Robert J. Paradowski, 'Henri Bergson', in *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism* (2 vols.; London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), I, pp. 119–22.

23. See also Mucchielli, 'Pour une psychologie collective', pp. 108–109, for how this represents a variant of now outdated Durkheimian thought. For a critical evaluation of this part of Halbwachs's work, see further Mucchielli, 'Pour une psychologie collective', pp. 130–35. According to Mucchielli, Halbwachs is representing a Comtian dualism that cannot any longer be upheld. This may or may not be the case. See also the critique in Jaisson, 'Temps et espace chez Maurice Halbwachs', p. 165.

24. Marc Bloch, *Lucien Febvre et les Annales d'Histoire Economique et Sociale. Correspondance*, Vol. 1 (1928–1933), Vol. 2 (1934–1937), Vol. 3 (1938–1943) (ed. Bertrand Müller; Paris: Fayard, 1994–2003).

25. Leclerc held very strong views on this, and he accused sociology as a discipline for being more politics than science ('... oscille vers la politique plus ou moins militante ...'). For this quotation and its context, see Müller in the introduction to *Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre et les Annales*, I, p. xxvii. Both Simiand and Halbwachs were active socialists.

When Leclerc died, Febvre was able to invite Halbwachs to become a member of the board of the *Annales*. However, Halbwachs was never very active. There may be various reasons for this.²⁶ In particular, the Durkheim stamp would have remained a problem in relation to Febvre especially for the whole time of their relationship. Even if Febvre had supported him against Leclerc, there was never a good relationship between the two. There is some evidence that Febvre was not too fond of the Durkheimians.²⁷ Later on, also Bloch was to be dragged into it.²⁸

The strained relationship between the inner *Annales* circle and Halbwachs was also fuelled by the subsequent infighting among the Strasbourg colleagues for a chair at the *Collège de France*. When Febvre was elected in 1932 (*Chaire d'histoire de la civilisation moderne*) he sent a letter to his friend Bloch and practically promised that he (Bloch) should be the next candidate.²⁹

In 1935, following the sudden death of Simiand, there was another opening at the *Collège de France*. When Halbwachs's candidature was announced, Febvre is again very supportive in his letters to Bloch.³⁰ Despite the apparent support in his letters, however, Febvre did not at all back Bloch (whose name was not on the official list of candidates for the *chaire histoire du travail*). Halbwachs was on the list, but did not get enough votes because Febvre supported Edouard Dolléans. In a long letter to Bloch, Febvre tries to explain why he voted the way he did and why he was unable to support his friend Bloch.³¹

That the relationship between Febvre and Halbwachs was not good may also be gleaned from Halbwachs's own report on his campaign for his second (or third?), and finally successful, attempt to be elected to a chair at the *Collège de France*.³² Here, he characterizes Febvre quite negatively.³³

However, as far as I am aware, there are no traces of any obvious political ideology in their publications.

26. For the different views of history of Halbwachs and the *Annales* group, see Topalov, '«Expériences sociologiques»', pp. 21-23.

27. Among the several indications in Marc Bloch, *Lucien Febvre et les Annales*, see, for instance, I, p. 381; II, pp. 188-89; II, pp. 269-70.

28. Bloch wrote a quite positive review of *Les cadres sociaux* the same year as it appeared. See Marc Bloch, 'Mémoire collective, tradition et coutume. A propos d'un livre récent', *Revue de synthèse historique* 40 (1925), pp. 73-83.

29. Marc Bloch, *Lucien Febvre et les Annales*, I, pp. 321-22.

30. Marc Bloch, *Lucien Febvre et les Annales*, II, pp. 256-59; II, pp. 315-16.

31. Marc Bloch, *Lucien Febvre et les Annales*, II, pp. 326-32.

32. See also above, p. 48.

33. Halbwachs, 'Ma campagne au Collège de France', pp. 196-99.

III. *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925)

The first part of his early work on the social frames of memory, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, is a treatise in psychology.

In Chapter 1 (*Le rêve et les images-souvenirs*), Halbwachs deals with dreams. His style of writing, typical of him as an author, is autobiographical, narrative, eclectic and synthesizing. A series of (mostly) contemporary scholars are taken into consideration. The authorities referred to are, in alphabetical order, John Abercrombie (1780–1844), Henri Bergson, Alfred Binet (1857–1911), Charles Blondel³⁴ (1876–1939), Alexandre Brierre de Boismont (1797–1881), Mary Whiton Calkins (1863–1930), Henri Delacroix (1873–1937), Joseph Delbœuf (1831–1896), Emile Durkheim, Marcel Foucault (1865–1947), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Friedrich Heerwagen (1864–1941), the Marquis d'Hervey de Saint Denis (1822–1892), Albert Kaploun, Alfred Maury (1817–1892), Daniel Mornet (1878–1954), Henri Piéron (1881–1964), Maurice Pradines (1874–1958), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Serge Serguéieff (1821–1891).

Halbwachs's major point is that dreams are unreliable as representations of our personally experienced past events. His authorities represent the state of the art of contemporary psychology, and remind us yet again how psychology in those pioneering days used to be a branch of philosophy.

In Chapter 2 (*Le langage et la mémoire*), Halbwachs deals, despite the title of the chapter, basically also with dreams and only towards the end of the chapter, with language and memory. Bergson and Freud are main figures in this chapter, too. Also mentioned are: Alain (= Emile Chartier, 1868–1951), Blondel, Eugenio Rignano (1870–1930), Adolf Kussmaul (1822–1902), Piéron, and Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920). Wundt has some relevance for the Hebrew Bible. This great pioneer in psychology was a major inspirational source for important work by Gustav Hölscher (1877–1955) on prophetic ecstasy. To Halbwachs, Wundt would be of interest because of his work on the psychology of nations.

The latter part of Chapter 2, where linguists are referred to, deals with aphasia. Scholars used by Halbwachs in this section are Jules Déjerine (1849–1917), Henri Delacroix (1873–1937), Charles Foix (1882–1927), Marcel Granet (1884–1940), Henry Head (1861–1940), Pierre Marie Kussmaul (1853–1940), Antoine Meillet (1866–1936), Raoul Mourgue (1886–1950), François Moutier (1881–1961), and Willem van Woerkom. Again, we notice how the names referred read like a catalogue of the foremost contemporary authorities on aphasia. However, they all belong very much to the history of the discipline, and not to the present-day state of the art.

34. Blondel was the psychology colleague of the sociologist Halbwachs in Strasbourg. On their scholarly disagreements, see Mucchielli, 'Pour une psychologie collective'.

Chapter 3 (*La reconstruction du passé*) deals with the reconstruction of the past. Again, we are dealing with a purely psychological approach to ‘memories’. However, this chapter has also a strong personal and autobiographic aspect.

Halbwachs deals with memories in relation to childhood, adulthood, and old age, as well as with memories and social relations. Again, his choice of scholars is eclectic, but in this chapter he refers only to Bergson, Samuel Butler (1835–1902), Anatole France (1844–1924), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), and Rousseau. Mostly, however, he paraphrases and quotes Bergson throughout the chapter, above all his theories on the two memories. He uses Bergson critically, however.

In conclusion, this chapter stresses the experience that a person’s memories of former stages of one’s life cannot be trusted. They are unstable and illusionary. Here, we notice a clear anti-positivist trait in Halbwachs. The past is simply not available to us. It has to be reconstructed. And the reconstructed past is not at all truthful. These observations on individual psychology are important as Halbwachs later uses them as a model also for the unreliability of collective psychology.

Chapter 4 (*La localisation des souvenirs*) deals with the localization of individual memories. This, too, is a treatise in psychology, and again Halbwachs builds a lot on Bergson, sometimes paraphrasing him. However, here as elsewhere, he is positive, but also independent of Bergson. However, it is not correct that he is distancing himself from Bergson when he became a member of the ‘Durkheim club’—as some have claimed.³⁵ Rather, what happened was that when he wrote as a sociologist, he was a ‘Durkheimian’, and when he wrote as a psychologist he was a ‘Bergsonian’. Halbwachs was independent, and he could be critical of Durkheim, too.³⁶ As he quite often refers to his own experiences, there are also autobiographical traits present throughout the chapter.

The other authorities used by Halbwachs in this Chapter are Harald Høffding Butler (1843–1931), Alfred Lehmann (1858–1921), Théodule Ribot (1839–1916), and Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893). Yet again, we are reminded how deeply embedded academic psychology in those days was in philosophy and in the philosophical debates of the time. At the same time, there is little doubt that Halbwachs follows the international contemporary debates closely, and that he makes adequate observations.

35. See, for instance, Jaisson, ‘Temps et espace chez Maurice Halbwachs’, p. 165. From Jaisson we also learn how the concept of ‘social space’ that was not a part of Durkheim’s ‘toolbox’ represents an innovation by Halbwachs. For Halbwachs on space, see conveniently, *La mémoire collective*, pp. 193–236.

36. See also Topalov, ‘«Expériences sociologiques»’, p. 22.

Towards the end of Chapter 4, Halbwachs introduces, very briefly, group memories, and he refers to the relationship between individual memories and those of groups (pp. 144-45). It is quite clear that Halbwachs's overall interest is in collective memory (cf. also his remarks in the preface to *Les cadres sociaux*, pp. v-viii). However, the fairly long treatise on psychological memory in the first part of the study (pp. 1-145) deals overwhelmingly with individual memory. The problem here is that the connection between the two parts of the volume may seem a non sequitur, or it is at least unclear. This is probably a major weakness of the book, and it makes the concept 'collective memory' in Halbwachs's work difficult for others to use.

Summing up, very briefly, the first half of *Les cadres sociaux* (Chapters 1-4), we can say that this is a treatise on memory purely from the point of view of psychology (and philosophy). Throughout this first half, Halbwachs is also dealing with concepts of time, mostly in a philosophical (speculative) way.³⁷ When we compare this study with today's neuropsychology and neurophysiology, we see how dated this part appears.³⁸ This, however, does not at all imply that the notion of 'collective memory' (= 'tradition') is outdated. What one needs to do is to take great care when using this term from Halbwachs in present-day memory debates. Each and every instance has to be assessed and evaluated separately.

With Chapter 5 (*La mémoire collective de la famille*) starts the sociological latter part of the book (pp. 146-272). Whereas Halbwachs in the first four Chapters deals with individual memory, he now changes to group memory. The reason he gives for this is that individuals live in groups, and that it therefore is legitimate to talk about collective memory now that he has dealt thoroughly with individual memory in the first part of the book.

Halbwachs's style of writing remains the same as in the first part, paraphrasing, narrative, autobiographical and philosophical. This style has been a problem to some readers today (and also of earlier times) who have regarded him as 'less scholarly'. This negative assessment, however, is somewhat anachronistic as Halbwachs simply is a typical representative of his generation, or even a *primus inter pares* within early psychology and sociology. Both of these subjects were taught to philosophy students, and did not exist as independent academic disciplines. He does not deserve, therefore, to be negatively assessed with the wisdom of hindsight.³⁹

37. For Halbwachs on time, see also *La mémoire collective*, pp. 193-236. For history, see *La mémoire collective*, pp. 97-142.

38. Something that does not prevent also scholars of today from quoting Halbwachs as a classic in this particular area. See Jacques Roubaud and Maurice Bernard, *Quel avenir pour la mémoire?* (Découvertes Gallimard Philosophie; Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 102-103.

39. See, for instance, Martin, 'Raison statistique et raison sociologique', pp. 96-98. Too negative, in my view is also Steiner (see footnote above).

Halbwachs starts out, as we see, with the family as a group. Throughout Chapter 5, Durkheim appears as the main theoretician. However, Halbwachs is also occasionally critical of Durkheim. Moreover, when we read the chapter, we learn that most of it is rather an essay in family sociology, and that it deals very little with 'memory'.⁴⁰

His authorities in Chapter 5 are a mixed lot. Besides Durkheim, authors referred to are Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), Butler, François-René Chateaubriand (1768–1848), Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830–1889), Paul Lacombe Granet (1834–1919), and Hermann Usener (1834–1905). One interesting figure for historians is Paul Lacombe. His views on history were later taken up by the influential figures behind the *Annales* circle, and they formed also very much the views on history that we find in some of Halbwachs's works.⁴¹

The most important issue in this chapter concerns the relationship between individual and collective memory. However, Halbwachs here simply presupposes that there is a connection between the two—individual and collective.⁴² He does not really take into consideration that psychological and sociological 'memories' are two different animals. It is a little unclear how they relate to each other. One consequence of this seems to be that 'memory' (already an imprecise term) relates to a different issue in the first half of the book than it does in the second.

Chapter 6 on collective religious memory (*La mémoire collective religieuse*) starts out with the work of the historian of ancient civilizations, Fustel de Coulanges (who also appeared in the chapter about the family above. Halbwachs discusses early (classical) Greek and Roman religion, as well as mystery cults. The other authorities for this part are all major contemporary figures in the classics and in the history of ancient Greek and Roman religions: Jane Harrison (1850–1928), André Piganiol (1883–1968), William Ridgeway (1853–1926), Erwin Rohde (1845–1898), Michael Rostovtzeff (1870–1952), and Usener.

40. This is despite Halbwachs's use of the terminology 'mémoire familiale' (*Les cadres sociaux*, pp. 161, 168, 175, 177).

41. I have touched a little upon the problem of history in Halbwachs in another essay. See Hans M. Barstad, 'History and Memory: Some Reflections on the "Memory Debate" in Relation to the Hebrew Bible', in *The Historian and the Bible. Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe* (ed. Philip R. Davies and Diana V. Edelman; Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, 530; London: T. & T. Clark International, 2010), pp. 1–10.

42. 'A présent que nous avons reconnu à quel point l'individu est, à cette égard comme à tant d'autres, dans la dépendance de la société, il est naturel que nous considérions le groupe lui-même comme capable de se souvenir, et que nous attribuions une mémoire à la famille, par exemple, aussi bien qu'à tout autre ensemble collectif (*Les cadres sociaux*, p. 146).

Halbwachs has a lengthy section on Christianity, where he starts out discussing the letters of Paul and the Gospels. He underlines strongly the Jewish roots of Christianity. He further discusses myth and ritual, and Buddhism. However, he mostly discusses Catholicism and the Catholic faith. Halbwachs is aware of many of the debates of his time, and he has a sound and adequate view on theological issues. His authorities in this part are quite mixed. We find references to Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), Delacroix, Louis Duchesne (1843–1922, whose works he paraphrases over many pages), Durkheim, Charles Guignebert (1867–1939), Yrjö Hirn (1870–1952), Martin Luther (1483–1546), Jules Martha (1853–1932), Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920), and Pierre Pourrat (1871–1957).

From Chapter 6, we see also that Halbwachs has a fairly conventional (positivistic) view of history. Again, this would be typical for his time. We also learn of his views on the historicity of religious (but in reality *all*) traditions, by Halbwachs called ‘collective memory’. Possible historical events that may hide behind ancient traditions are not any longer available to us. Traditions are non-historical; they belong to a past that is no longer available to us.⁴³

Summing up Halbwachs’s chapter on religion, we may say that he for the most part deals with Christianity, and that he presents (yet again) a fairly comprehensive treatise in the form of rather loose, but highly adequate reflections. Again, it is difficult to see that the title of this Chapter is very precise. Yet again, he does not really deal with ‘memory’ as such. Collective memory has become far too general, and does not have a useful meaning. It is clearly more a motto and a programme than anything else. Nevertheless, I would say that the chapter on religion is absolutely worthwhile. However, it represents viewpoints, tastes and mentalities that were current a century ago,

43. For how traditions reproduce the past in a non-historical way, see for instance, Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux*, pp. 187, 194, 204. See also his introduction to the volume, pp. vi–viii. This ‘double’ attitude to history (positivistic traditional and at the same time with a stress on the non-historicity of traditions) is also found in his *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles*. Here, Halbwachs (pp. 4–8) supports strongly contemporary historical-critical work on the Bible (Abel, Dalman, Renan, Vincent). At the same time, he writes (p. 9): ‘Si, comme nous le croyons, la mémoire collective est essentiellement une reconstruction du passé, si elle adapte l’image des faits anciens aux croyances et aux besoins spirituel du présent, la connaissance de ce qui était à l’origine est secondaire, sinon tout à fait inutile, puisque la réalité du passé n’est plus là, comme un modèle immuable auquel il faudrait se conformer’. If one exchanges ‘collective memory’ with ‘traditions’, and replaces an older state of the art with the names of a few more recent historians and archaeologists, many biblical scholars of today could probably subscribe to this statement. However, the history problem is not solved in this way, it is only hidden. On the other hand, some of the problems in relation to history raised by Halbwachs are valid also today.

and it is difficult to see that it for this reason is very useful today. I do not write this to belittle the work of Halbwachs whom I admire and enjoy reading. As we have seen, there are quite a few of his ideas that still have relevance today, but every topic has to be dealt with separately and in its proper context.

The last chapter of *Les cadres sociaux*, Chapter 7, bears, tellingly, the title 'Social Classes and their Traditions' (*Les classes sociales et leurs traditions*). The title might as well have been 'Social Classes and their Memories'.

In this chapter, Halbwachs takes his starting point in the debate whether contemporary society is class-less. He deals with various classes like the army, functionaries, judges, lawyers, and the legal system. He shows how the bourgeoisie continues the use of the collective family memories of the nobility. Further, Halbwachs deals with personal wealth, economy, business, the bourgeoisie transformation of classes, capitalism, industry, urbanism, and the countryside.

This is an advanced essay for its time, and his main authorities are William Ashley (1860–1927), Charles Benoist (1861–1936), Gilles-André de La Roque (1598–1686), Adhémar Esmein (1848–1913), Charles Loyseau (1566–1627), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Jean Rochette (1560–), Gaston Roupnel (1871–1946⁴⁴), Le comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), Max Weber (1864–1920), Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), Lujo Brentano (1844–1931), Henri Pirenne (1862–1935), Georges Weill (1865–1944), Sébastien Charléty (1867–1945), and Georges Dereux.

Halbwachs's final conclusion, pp. 273–96, summarizes the whole volume at some length. Among the details, we notice how language is the connecting link between individual and collective (p. 279).

Summing up very shortly the second half of *Les cadres sociaux*, we may say that in this part we find sociological observations and various historical and cultural traditions quite loosely discussed. Quite often, throughout the work, the term 'memory' could have been exchanged with 'tradition' without making any changes in the meaning.

IV. Conclusion

We can see now some of the problems relating to Halbwachs's use of memory for present day purposes. Firstly, we have seen how Halbwachs uses the term 'memory' in multiple ways, also as a synonym for 'tradition'.

Since one cannot refer to his views on 'memory' in a monolithic manner, it is necessary to look into each question separately in order to see whether or not the points that are made can still be said to be valid for us today.

44. Halbwachs is paraphrasing Roupnel in some length. Again, this is another of the historians who were a major inspiration for Braudel.

Secondly, to Halbwachs 'memory' in individuals and 'memory' of groups relate strongly to each other. The notion that individual memory ('psychology') and collective memory ('group psychology') are totally interdependent is found 'everywhere' in his writings.

However, how and to what degree traditions overlap have methodological and theoretical implications. To Halbwachs, the problem was solved through his use of Durkheimian models. Halbwachs's collective memory today, therefore, has to be regarded mainly as an outdated collective psychology.

In sum, we may say that the Halbwachs of today undoubtedly remains a giant as the pioneer of memory psychology and memory sociology. On the other hand, the relevance for Hebrew Bible studies today is not obvious. Among his lasting contributions are his anti-positivism and his anti-historicism.

THE SHULAMMITE'S BURNING BUSH:
PASSION, IM/POSSIBILITY AND THE EXISTENCE
OF GOD IN SONG 8.6 AND EXODUS 3¹

Fiona C. Black

This paper represents a bit of unfinished business on the Song of Songs. In truth, I think one will always have unfinished business with this provocative book,² but the subject matter I explore here, the presence of God in the Song, is an aspect that I have never really engaged with in previous work. A few years ago, however, I was invited to participate in a philosophy colleague's conference on the Proofs for the Existence of God.³ In an effort to be collegial, I investigated how I might adapt my work (then on the Song of Songs) to this field of discussion—though, I did so somewhat circumspectly, since, as I pointed out to my colleagues then, the Bible usually tends to take the matter of the deity's existence as read. The result was a paper on mystical discourse and absent deities, which, though it asked what I hoped were provocative questions, probably did not 'prove' anything in the philosophical sense to my colleagues.

And yet, the subject matter that I explored has stuck in my imagination: the scene at the burning bush in Exodus 3⁴ and the contentious 'flame of Yah' (*šhalhebetyâ*) in Song 8.6⁵—augmented by a chance connection between Teresa of Avila, sixteenth-century mystic and writer on the Song of Songs,

1. My thanks to Andrew Wilson and Francis Landy for their comments on this paper and for discussing the problems that these literary texts pose for philosophy and theology.

2. It seems that once one begins writing on it, one always returns to it. Cheryl Exum's career-long interest in the Song is a case in point. Her diverse and insightful studies have enlivened Song scholarship for many years, with two initial articles in 1973 and 1981, and then a spate of them from 1999, almost up until the present, capped by an impressive commentary in the *Old Testament Library* series (2005a).

3. *Questioning the Absolute: New Readings of Traditional Arguments for God's Existence*, Mount Allison University, May 2006.

4. Exod 3.14 is typically used in the Proofs, notably in two versions, by Augustine (ontologically) and Aquinas (eschatologically).

5. Naturally, I am not the first to put these two texts together in scholarship on the Song. See Landy (1983) and Kearney (2006) as examples of some extended discussion.

and Michel de Certeau, contemporary theorist and critic of mysticism.⁶ In what follows, I reprise those connections, not so much to bring the matter of the Proofs to the fore in this collection of biblical scholarship, but to explore what persists, I think, as a most interesting connection between a book that ostensibly does not name God (except perhaps by fire) and a book with a fire that attempts to name God. For the Song of Songs, the fire is an oft-quoted tribute to the power and enduring nature of 'true love', and yet its relation to death is mysteriously adumbrated here as well, as is its tentative connection to the divine. Mysticism, in practice (Teresa) and in theory (Certeau), provides an intriguing framework against which to explore these two texts and the interconnections of fire, love, mysticism and the divine.⁷

At the heart of this paper is the question of human–divine interactions in the Hebrew Bible. Though this question might have implications for theology and philosophy, it is not those in which I am chiefly interested at this point, but the literary character of Yahweh, who appears to desire to communicate with Moses and Israel—but who thwarts that desire—and whose presence or absence may have implications for the subject of desire in the Song. My intention here is to ponder what this flickering nature of the divine person indicates for human–divine (covenantal) relations and human erotic relations, both. I propose that the divine character is tentative in his overtures towards humankind, not at all an expert and accomplished communicator (or lover); rather than paradigmatic, he seems to be a wary participant in relationships in his own right.⁸ If this is possible, then his use as

6. I made a preliminary exploration of these texts and theoretical works in my earlier work on the Song (2009), but I have not really explored the significance of the burning bush for that picture yet.

7. One needs to be cautious about generalizations of mysticism. Certeau is very aware of the need to frame those whom he studies against their socio-historical context, though he does also acknowledge that it is difficult to access that context fully. My work here, then, interacts with a particular conceptualization of mysticism, which is Western and Catholic (Certeau is not explicitly religious, but Teresa and the others he works with are, of course, Catholic). Certeau's work made theoretical sense, given the philosophical beginnings of this project, and it continues to be useful for its intersections with Teresa. My paper does not, as a consequence, deal with Kabbalah, and as Francis Landy has pointed out to me (private communication), my conclusions would be problematic for that framework. At another juncture, it would be useful to explore these texts in terms of their relation to Kabbalah. See Wolfson (2006) for his perspective on the Song and Jewish mysticism.

8. Again, I am not intending a theological observation here, but I do not doubt that my observation might cause some difficulty for theological readings about the nature of God. Perhaps the clearest implication is that, at the very least, a tentative deity could complicate covenantal relationships, rather than passing them off as one-sided, or perfect from the deity's perspective. Textually speaking, the deity seems to depend on human initiative and interest as much as he might depend on the perfection of his law or the righteousness of his judgment.

an exemplar for elaborating the pinnacle of human relationship in the Song (if he is indeed being used in this way by his appearance in 8.6) may be problematic. In whatever state we discover the deity, the point here is not radically to discredit his character, or to render the lovers' relationship ruined or baseless, by virtue of how love is ultimately understood in the Song's final word on it in 8.6. Rather, it is to look at the contours of desire in the Song through the lens of Certeau's *mystics*, finding what I believe may be a complex and dynamic picture.

The Strange Case of the Missing Deity

In Song scholarship, Yahweh's presence has been the subject of a longstanding conversation, since the only possible occurrence of his name is reflected in one contentious word, *šalhebet yā*, in Song 8.6. Beyond this, he is not referred to in the Song overtly, is not present as a literary character, and does not communicate with any of the Song's players,⁹ though naturally, he has been very much a present party in the interpretive tradition through allegory. Scholars are divided on the meaning of *šalhebet yā*. Either the *yah*, joined as it is in one manuscript, is intensive, rendering 'a mighty flame', or it is separate, and as such functions as a scrap of that divine acronym, the tetragrammaton, returned to lay a claim on the love that the poet of the Song of Songs is explicating—love that is as strong as death, as fierce as the grave.¹⁰ Thus, 'flame of Yah'. Proponents of this view usually have strong theological or philosophical readings attached to this literary decision, rarely making the observation for literary reasons alone.¹¹ Others, such as Cheryl Exum, prefer

9. This does not, however, stop biblical scholars from finding other evidence of the divine elsewhere in the Song. See, for instance, Davidson (2005: 143-44), who argues for an oblique reference to the deity in the oath that appears three times in the Song (2.7; 3.5; 8.4). Davidson avers that scholars have long recognized the connection, though I do not find it a prevalent idea in much of the scholarship. The matter of divine presence remains firmly rooted in the contentious phrase in 8.6.

10. Compare Pope 1977: 670-72; Murphy 1990: 191-92, 196-97; Longman 2001: 212-13; Exum 2005a: 253-54. See also the extended discussion in Davidson (2005).

11. See, for instance, Kingsmill 2009; Davidson 2005, 2007; LaCocque 1998; Linafelt 2002, 2006; Kearney 2006. Even Landy (1983) is making theological insights, though his project is not explicitly theological in intent. I am noticing (though have not tested out the theory exhaustively) a rough division between secular/literary readings, which argue for the intensive suffix and theological or philosophical ones, which recognize the divine name. Secular readings should not, of course, have issue with the presence of the deity in this or any text, since he is an omnipresent character in biblical literature. So, what is the issue? Is it the connection of the divine name with the observations about love that make this a theological and not a literary matter? Put differently, I suppose that part of my curiosity here is to ask what the presence of the divine has to say to literary readings of this text.

to leave the question undecided, allowing the suggestiveness of the divine to stand, as with the translation ‘almighty flame’ (Exum 2005a: 254). Which is it to be? If the divine remnant, why is it so marginalized, why spliced on to the back of such a grandiose assertion? Why almost muttered under the poet’s breath?¹² If we follow the other option, an intensive suffix, we have a different kind of problem: the Song is renowned for its poetic mastery. It seems odd that in what is reputed to be its culminating statement on desire/passion, it stumbles around itself, awkwardly searching for synonyms: ‘its flames are flames of fire; mighty fire’. The poet stutters: ‘Did I mention it was burning ... with flames?’¹³

If Yahweh is indeed absent, then his absence is conspicuous, both because of the elevated subject matter of the book—love—and because, naturally, the divine character is so powerfully present in the rest of the biblical story. As a result, this curious absence (or veiled presence) has typically been understood to be a problem for the Song in terms of its canonization; this is especially so given the recent secular turn in Song scholarship that sees the book as representative of human, sexual love. With an absent deity and a secular subject matter, it is often wondered how the Song ever made it in to the biblical canon in the first place. Often R. Akiva is cited as an explanation of sorts: his influential statement that the Song is the ‘holy of holies’ is understood to be a primary factor in the Song’s success.¹⁴ Though this praise of the Song does not specifically address the case of the missing deity in 8.6, one assumes that Akiva’s evaluation, along with the tradition’s general support, indicates the perspective that it is a book not devoid of divine presence, but on the contrary, suffused with it.

The reference (or not) to Yahweh in Song 8.6 does not exist as a solitary observation, either; rather, it is part of a series of three statements by the woman to her lover about love. The first is a request, perhaps urgent (Landy 1983: 122; Exum 2005a: 250) that he somehow mark their love, as one might make a seal, or a mark, to swear by love’s power and efficacy and to signal

12. Of course, proponents of the theory that the divine name is present would not agree at all that it is *hidden* here, but see it as a culmination of other hints at divine presence, reaching an apotheosis with this statement in 8.6. See, again, Davidson (2005). Compare Landy’s reading, which assumes the divine name, but does not seem to have quite as much of an investment in proving its presence.

13. Naturally, my own poetic demands may not be shared by other readers, or by the poet. This is a highly subjective matter, but the poetry does seem a little awkward or repetitive; I do not see the typical parallelism so clearly expressed, for instance, in v. 6b, here in v. 6c. In addition, the length of the colon is shorter than expected (Murphy 1990: 192), causing some to suggest it is a gloss (e.g., Pope 1977: 670-71). See Pope and Murphy especially for discussion of these issues, also Exum 2005a: 253-54 and Landy 1983: 127.

14. The mention of Akiva’s approval of the Song is widely quoted. See, for instance: Exum 1973; Falk 1982; Landy 1983; Pardes 1992; Soulen 1993.

ownership and exclusivity (Landy 1983: 122). What comes next has a different tenor: it is the rationale for the woman's request, and it consists of grand, philosophical statements. In general, the two ideas, the assertions approximating love to death (v. 6b) and the intensity of the flame (v. 6c), are taken as separate concepts.¹⁵ To be sure, commentators see that they are related, but discussion of them is undertaken separately, since the focus is understandably on the referent, love. But their proximity, especially as joint rationales for the request in v. 6a, raises the question of their poetic relation: what, if anything, do flames have to do with death? Are they in a causal relationship? Or are they parallel—or antithetical—statements? Should one be looking to understand how death's intensity is like a flame's, or quite unlike it? Or do these represent two divergent, but equally important aspects of love?

Traces I: Starting Fires—Theoretical Sparks

In a previous project on the Song (2009), it was not fire that led me to Certeau's work on mysticism, but strangeness: I used his essay, 'Mystic Speech' (1986), and subsequent monograph, *The Mystic Fable* (1992), as a way to investigate the metaphorical language which describes the lovers' bodies, but which seemed to me to be speaking of other things. To be sure, all metaphor is speaking of other things: here, however, not only does odd language from nature and daily life appear to be delineating the body, it also appears to be exploring more complex ideas too, such as love and permanence, and perhaps darker themes as well. My idea was that the images in their strangeness transplanted the lovers (and also the readers) to another plane, where they were able to access some of the inexpressible aspects of their beloved, and of their love. So, Certeau's *mystics*¹⁶ became a useful way to explore the alterity of language; or, as I referred to it, speaking *other-ly*. This alterity, in sum, is crucial to the Song's understanding of love.

To summarize Certeau's project¹⁷ briefly: he begins with Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1510), observing that he 'loses his way

15. Fox 1985: 169-71; Pope 1977: 668-72; Murphy 1990: 197; Longman 2001: 212-13; Bloch and Bloch 1995: 212-13; Exum 2005a: 251-54. Landy (1983) is an exception. See discussion below.

16. Certeau uses the term *la mystique* to differentiate from *la mysticisme*, which is perceived by the translator, Michael Smith, to be far too generic a term (Certeau 1992: ix-x). *Mystics* is used by Smith to give a sense of Certeau's choice; it reflects a kind of science of mystical history and discourse. The term is italicized in this paper to differentiate from the plural noun, which refers to people who engage in mystical practices.

17. Certeau's project has a range of interests, including the difficulty in defining *mystics*, the gap between the observer and the subject, the heavily symbolic and highly specialized nature of *mystics* as discourse, the loss of meaning, the dissolution of the subject, and the like.

in it'—there is no guide, no external frame of reference. It is like alchemy, where the signs of Bosch's time are taken up and made to function differently. He explains: 'The painting modifies these signs by assigning them to the ambivalent capacity of still being understandable as fragments of meaning systems, even though they are already set within a different space, one that "converts" them into an aesthetics' (1992: 58). In the process of this modification, Certeau reads a shift from the referential to the poetic.

As an effector of these conversions, Certeau sees that Bosch is, in essence a craftsman. Though one may not be able to tell what something means in his work, one might analyze *how* it comes to be, 'how, according to what rules, it is produced' (1992: 60). Certeau is in the process of showing that certain discourses—the painting of a visionary, the ramblings of a beggar-woman in a square (and maybe the murmurings of lovers?)—operate differently from speech, yet are able to *speak* to us all the same. The vocabulary of these ramblings metamorphoses into something altogether different: 'it carries the sign from one space to another, and it produces the new space' (1992: 58). This new space is the mystical space. It is marked by absence and difference, which refers both to the foreignness of Certeau's object of inquiry and its historical distance from him. This absence, however, is a shared absence: Certeau feels the loss of his object of inquiry and his resultant incompetence at writing about it in the same way that he believes a mystic mourns the absence of his or her object of devotion, God, and has difficulty speaking about that object (Ahearne 1995: 96-97). The space is, however, not altogether unrecognizable. Glimpses penetrate ordinary life and are enough to keep mystics (poets, artists, lovers), energized in their search for that which escapes them.

As a consequence we must treat *mystics* as a past apart from us; we must refuse to equate this 'thing', whatever it is, with an object of knowledge. To be sure, the mystic is born of a particular socio-economic context, and this is pertinent to his/her genesis: times of war, crisis, loss of class and status are important factors. Such loss represents itself in the utterances of mystics, but it does not entirely or adequately explain them. Loss is rather more all-encompassing than that: loss is intimately tied to language. For instance, Certeau calls it 'Anti-Babel'. 'It is the search for a common language, after language has been shattered' (1986: 88; 1992: 157).

There is, too, another loss that is evident here, and that is the loss of the mystical subject herself. In other words, Certeau feels that in order for the person in search of the beloved other to engage fully in the search, she must empty herself. This is where Exod. 3.14 appears in his analysis—and quite unexpectedly. The mystic, he says, is born from out of an exile, 'by wanting nothing and by being but the respondent of a pure signifier, Yahweh, whose acronym, since the burning bush, erases all the signs: "I have no other name than that which makes you leave"' (1992: 177). Mystical language, thus, has

the power to induce a departure. What kind? It is an emptying of the subject as it seeks to represent what cannot be represented. What Certeau is really suggesting is the creation of an alternative space—of speaking and by consequence being. This is a space where the subject ceases to be and where it becomes a figure. That which is unnamable (God, in the case of Exod. 3.14) is stood in for, represented as replacement of the one (the mystic) who has absented herself.

Having sketched out the process or mode of being that comprises *mystics*, Certeau is left with a puzzle, and that is how or where the search and the desired connection with the other might take place. After all, he is not suggesting that these departures and absences leave nothing in their place: that no connection between mystic and divine occurs. At this point, Certeau becomes deeply interested in Teresa of Avila's oeuvre, particularly her *Interior Castle*, which is a systematization of the journey of the soul as it encounters the divine. Of especial concern is what Certeau names the *morada* or dwelling place of the mystical subject; it is from there that the absented subject finds a place—a platform—from which to speak—and realize the missing other. The architectural figures of the *Interior Castle* are ideal for Certeau as he seeks to understand how the mystic positions herself in relation to that which cannot be spoken. Their multiple layerings and hidden rooms mirror the soul's intricate and complex dimensions. As with Bosch's masterpiece, it is the highly complex, figurative nature of the work that allows it to be so effective in Teresa's case.

It seems that the emptying of the subject in order to locate the object of her desire, so typical in the mystical experience, is really at its base an experience of Eros. As such, it is one in which all lovers share, not just those, such as mystics, who seek to find union with the divine. Certeau's observations work just as well, then, for those 'archetypal' lovers (so Landy, with qualifications, 1983: 64) of the Song. One way to think about the continuous searches and the play between presence and absence of the desired other is to understand it in Certeau's terms. More importantly, the odd language about the body is able to be understood as a *morada* for the lovers: one creates a roadmap of sorts out of the cryptic language about the other's body. Moreover, that language is intentionally layered and complex, as befitting the object of desire, as well as the contours of desire, with its challenges, doubts, ecstasies, and so on (Black 2009: 183-84, 88-92).

Moses Meets the Bush for the First Time (Exod. 3.1-17)

I think of it as hot. It is morning, but already baking as Moses, the princeling-turned-shepherd trudges along behind his sheep; he comes not upon a place to rest his weary bones, to cool his blistered feet, to wet his parched mouth. He happens—as the deity reveals his penchant for irony—upon a blazing

fire. Typical, Moses might have cynically thought, missing the refreshing coolness of the palace; and the bush, as the story famously goes, never burns up.

It is a small detail in an epic story, but it is one that has been reiterated as the narrative has been interpreted and reinterpreted, appearing popularly in children's Bibles and even in such venues as supermarket tabloids. It is a bit of fancy in a text that is otherwise given to the serious business of getting Israel ready to move out of Egypt, what will become the foundational moment for Israel's relationship with Yahweh. This fancy, however, has a serious undertone. This god of fire has a name—and a peculiar one at that—and will soon, via his fiery self, guide the people out of Israel, and crackle and burn at the most serious part of all, in the giving of the law at Horeb. Why might Yahweh not choose to speak directly to Moses, as he does elsewhere? Why do so through this bizarre episode at the base of the mountain? True, the flames are consistent with how Yahweh is imaged over the course of this journey, and they do prepare the reader for subsequent and greater demands on her imagination, namely, the plagues and the parting of the Sea. But the bush still catches the reader off guard, as one assumes it did Moses.

Moses' experience of the divine at the burning bush is one of estrangement. Truly, it is an effort on the part of the deity to make contact with Moses, only it does not appear that smooth contact is so easily accomplished between human beings and deities. Moses does not understand what he is seeing. He turns aside to look, being compelled by the strangeness of the sight. Even so, he needs to be instructed by Yahweh as to proper etiquette when meeting the divine (this is his first meeting after all): Yahweh instructs him to remove his sandals. There is no foreknowledge of the importance of Horeb as a place for Moses (though the narrator expects it of readers), no understanding as to who would be calling his name, 'Moses'. Is he eerily, spectrally addressed, as Cecil B. DeMille's famous pictorial rendition, *The Ten Commandments* (1956) depicts? Does Moses know what he is getting himself into, by turning aside?¹⁸

From the first moment, Yahweh seems a neophyte. He enflames a bush (or, more properly, an angel of the Lord appears in a bush) so as to attract attention, but is he certain that he will get it? He waits, crackling and spluttering, for Moses to notice him: what if he had turned another way? What if he had rubbed his eyes and decided the mirage was a result of a sleepless night or the monotony of his task? There is a certain capriciousness here; the encounter is dependent on Moses' right response to the sight of the bush

18. The after-effects of Moses' crime are rarely commented on, but I wonder about them. Moses had to flee for his safety, but did his crime plague him? One easily imagines that Moses might have first thought that his past was catching up with him, with an unknown voice and an (as yet) unknown purpose behind it.

(not to mention the right response to his commissioning, later on), even if the deity supposes that the miraculous sight is a sure bet. In other words, the speaking is contingent on Moses' turning aside: as the text reads, 'when the Lord saw that Moses had turned aside to see ...' (v. 4).¹⁹ Fortunately for Yahweh, the overture at the bush is successful and so he summons him. But then comes the matter of the conversation ...

Yahweh calls to Moses (whose family connections—his identity—have been made known to us), and Moses answers. Then, Yahweh identifies himself: 'I am the God of your father; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' (v. 6). He then explains the plan. On hearing this, Moses asks, first, 'Who am I?' (v. 11), to which Yahweh does not provide an answer. Instead, he responds, 'I will be with you ...' (v. 12), clearly understanding the sentiment behind the question (Moses doubts his suitability). He then offers proof, but that proof is odd, out of sync with the story, clearly retrospective, since it is to occur well after the hardship has been endured. Second, Moses asks, indirectly, 'Who are you?'²⁰ Then comes the cryptic answer, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*; and the instruction that Moses tell the people that *ehyeh* sent him. And finally, after the phrase, a curiosity: 'Thus you shall say to them, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob sent me to you". This is my name forever, and my remembrance (title) for all generations'. Many think this is the real answer to the 'What is your name?' question of v. 13, that the troublesome text of v. 14 was a gloss (Childs 1974: 60-64).

There has been an enormous amount of discussion on the text of Exod. 3.14, which offers phrasing that is confusing and unanticipated. In brief, at issue are the questions of whether the identity of this god is already known to the people (to Moses' ancestors), whether the phrase '*ehyeh 'ašer 'ehyeh*' is a name or a description of the character of this god, and, depending on how that question is answered, how the phrase should be translated; 'I am that I am', or 'I will be what I will be' are the two common choices.²¹ The presence

19. To be sure, one might read this purely as a temporal clause, fairly typical of Hebrew narrative, designed to keep the story going. It seems that it contains a kernel of something else, however. Landy thinks it might suggest a trial or a test (personal communication).

20. More specifically, and somewhat puzzlingly: 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' See the discussion in Childs (1974: 61) regarding the peculiar nature of the question.

21. Gianotti provides a useful summary of the various views (1985), as does Childs in his commentary (1974: 60-64). Mowinkel's countering of the prevailing scholarship of Albright, Noth and Alt is thought-provoking in its claim that what transpires in this scene has to do with an introduction of the character of Yahweh, in other words, a character to match the name which would have already been known (1961). And yet,

of the verb *hyh* in the mysterious phrase is important too. The text demands that we notice the connection between speaking and being that is posited here: *vayyomer* appears twice; *tomar* once; *ehyeh* three times. And, for good measure, v. 15 continues the theme, with *tomar* and *vayyomer* 'od.

In many ways, the multiple possibilities for identification of the burning god—those offered by him, and those supplied by Moses' historical and religious context—create a crisis of identity. First and foremost, there is the ambiguity of his identification of himself. Even Yahweh seems to perceive that 'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh makes little sense to Moses, or it does not have the desired effect. It is so unclear, in fact, that the deity corrects himself: Tell them it is the god of their ancestors! Which, then, is Yahweh's name, his remembrance for all generations: the cryptic *ehyeh* or the name that provides ancestral links?²² Second, there is the matter of Moses' lack of foreknowledge or connection with this god. Mowinckel sets the scene provocatively by painting the probability of Moses' confusion about this god in relation to all the others he would have known and heard of (1961: 122-23). These competing ideas or traditions create conflict; perhaps they add to Moses' dismay. Not only is he being sent out to do work that he doubts he can (or should), but it would seem that he leaves the bush not entirely clear on who or what is sending him. How strong a contrast he, in his protestations, makes. His person is much more stable: he is clearly bounded, identified, named twice, answers to his own name, and so clear is his identity that Yahweh knows the question, 'Who am I?', is not about his identity, but about his suitability for the job.

In sum, we seem to have attempts and failures embedded in this story, rather than a smooth connection.²³ Whereas the typical reading of this scene

the text seems to say otherwise—'what shall I say is his name?' (v. 13). I am also intrigued by Pannell's more marginal view, which suggests a cohortative translation for the verb *hyh*, rendering something like 'I will be what I would be', or 'Let me be what I will be' (Pannell 2006: 353). Both Mowinckel and Pannell suggest a deity in process, rather than a fixed or stable identity; they also suggest that the act of revelation is one that requires the audience's participation or complicity to be effective.

22. Consider Carroll's remarks: 'I take the response to be somewhat short-tempered and dismissive. It says nothing and then twits Moses by inviting him to speak nonsense to the people of Israel. The identity of the god will have to be discerned in the linkage with the fathers and, for the reader of the Bible, the stories of Genesis will make the connections adequately. But as an explanation of the name YHWH, the word 'ehyeh 'I will be' is utterly opaque. This is neither etymology nor aetiology, except in the sense of all those hopelessly popular etymologies scattered throughout the Bible. It is playful rather than serious linguistics. YHWH remains as unknown, mysterious, opaque and impenetrable after the tautology as before it' (1994: 47). Carroll goes on to explore how this tautology, and the promise of presence in the future, is really a present absence.

23. In the Midrash, perhaps the rabbis noted this difficulty when they argued that the

is to emphasize the deputizing of Moses and the beginnings of the Exodus story proper, I wonder instead at the effective service of the mission *despite* the communication that initially takes place here. This 'in spite of' theology, in fact, seems more consistent with the workings of the Exodus narrative, where Yahweh lets his people go by degrees, in fits and starts—all aimed, of course, at showing the wonder workings of the deity. This surely adds to the suspenseful nature of the story, since readers hope here, as they do elsewhere, for a desirable outcome. Will Moses respond? Will he be convinced by the signs? Will he agree to the plan? Will—the story implies—Yahweh pull it off?²⁴

Traces II: Speaking, Burning, and the Mystic

As mentioned, Certeau finds the multi-layered complexities of Teresa's *Interior Castle* incredibly effective as a means to reflect and organize her search for her beloved. But what is it that the *morada* is effective at doing, exactly? Alison Weber (1990) explores how Teresa's intricate metaphors, their multiple and confounding nature, function to help her bear witness to complicated subject matter—which Teresa herself admits she does not ever fully understand. They also, however, allow her to obfuscate, to create a space to speak of matters into which she has incredible insight, but is not, by virtue of her gender and the threat of heresy, allowed to explore. As such, they are deeply subversive utterances, which circumvent normative discourse and also implode gender hierarchies.

The complicated subject that Teresa explores in the *Interior Castle*, as with much of her other writing, is a profound connection with the divine, which she experiences through visions and which she stumbles to articulate. These visions, moreover, are of varying types and gradations, in terms of

bush referred not to Yahweh or his voice, but to the people. Burning, in other words, is not an attribute of the deity, as we might suspect, given the divine habit of appearing in, or preferring, fire. It is, instead, an observation about the people, particularly in light of their experiences of persecution. The message is that, despite the ongoing 'burning', Israel will never be consumed.

24. Such a reading undermines the idea of a singular, well-defined plan undertaken by Yahweh to free his people, such as the one he describes to Moses at the burning bush. The point here is not to suggest that a bumbling, unknown deity finds a spokesperson and somehow, perhaps accidentally, manages to lead his people out of Egypt. This is not the sense of the text, and it pushes the philosophical question, if God is dependent on others, can God exist? Instead, I want to emphasize the way that the text plays with suspense, drawing out the story to keep the reader, through plagues and negotiations with Pharaoh, interested. I also want to emphasize the *relational* aspect of Yahweh's communication here, as well as the execution of his plan. Yahweh seems to need the reluctant Moses as matchmaker in ways that the tradition may not always be comfortable acknowledging.

intensity and knowledge transmitted. De Certeau is quite correct that the imagery in the *Interior Castle* investigates these matters in intriguing ways, but it is through Teresa's work with biblical texts that she is able to explore them with unique insight. For instance, and pertinently for my purposes here, in the course of her discussions in the *Interior Castle*, Teresa explicates the way that communication occurs using two biblical examples: the Jacob's ladder story and the account of the burning bush. Of the latter, she observes:

Nor did Moses know how to describe all that he saw in the bush, but only what God wished him to describe. But if God had not shown him secrets to his soul along with a certitude that made him recognize and believe that they were from God, Moses could not have entered into so many severe trials. But he must have understood such deep things among the thorns of the bush that the vision gave him courage to do what he did for the people of Israel. So, sisters, we do not have to look for reasons to understand the hidden things of God (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980: 331).

The observation seems fairly straightforward: the divine communicates in ways that do not always appear evident. In the same way that Jacob must have understood something *else* from the vision of the ladder, so must Moses have understood an 'other' kind of language/message/instruction from his sighting of the bush. But Teresa did not end the subject here. It was not a matter of creating a binary relation between some intelligible knowledge and that which she cannot understand. Rather, her analysis involves various gradations of both types. This may be why she includes Jacob's ladder and Moses' experience in the same thought. Moreover, in her work with biblical texts, she seems also to understand that even these categories that she creates—or perhaps the biblical texts themselves—are unstable, which means that the connections between human beings and the divine are less certain, less mappable than even she might have hoped.

Just so, in later writing, she turned to perhaps a more apt text, the Song of Songs, to continue her meditations. She observes that just as two lovers know something of each other with just a glance, so God and the lover (the soul) have a special/different kind of knowledge of each other by special/alternative communication (visions).

It's like the experience of two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well; even without signs, just by a glance, it seems, they understand each other. This must be similar to what happens in the vision; without our knowing how, these two lovers gaze directly at each other, as the Bridegroom says to the Bride in the Song of Songs—I think I heard that it is there (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1976: 177).

As I have explored fully elsewhere (2009: 175-80), Teresa seems to be indicating two texts from Song 4.9 and 6.5, which speak both to the complexity of the encounter between lovers (in this case, via their gaze), and to the dif-

faculty of that encounter. She is not able, however, to hold the two texts in tension in her reading long enough to let the point stand. In her language, the ideas of glancing and gazing (of staring intently so as to see from all angles) create friction, in part because the texts themselves hold competing ideas, internally and in comparison to each other. In their use, thus, I read a troubling of the possibility for lovers to know the other fully; I also therefore perceive an ability of the Song to destabilize intimacy and the mechanics of desire. This applies, of course, to the textual lovers of the Song, but also to the real-life lovers: mystics and God.

So Teresa's work, often drawn to such highly figurative biblical texts, and her own complex metaphors and symbols, explore versions of this same difficulty again and again. They also manage, through various tactics, to veil some extremely complex ideas that, if taken to their fullest extent, may well have seen her suffering imprisonment, like her teacher Juan de la Cruz, for a dangerous proximity to heresy. What Teresa's work seems to acknowledge (though does not admit directly),²⁵ is that the object of desire has as much at stake as she might have in the union that she so ardently seeks. Paradoxically, the one who searches requires the absence of the object of her desire. But conversely, the one who is the object of that desire (that is, God), would also need the desirer's (voluntary) absence in order to be fully realized: for can Teresa's God take shape in her complex figurations unless she has prepared herself (emptied herself) to speak of him?

Poignantly, the question that she is unable to answer for herself or her audience is what is that *other* knowledge, that missing part of the picture that she struggles to articulate with the help of Moses, or Jacob, or the lovers in the Song? She insists (and one might expect nothing less from Teresa, given her own life of faith and her audience) that the faithful person depends on the other as a resource, allows the other to be the keeper and supplier of what is missing. All she can do is keep looking, which means that the process of seeking and not finding is eternal. It also means that the making of the mystic, and the making of the deity, is an ongoing, complex process. Put differently, it means that desire remains alive: and so on it goes, with Teresa seeking God and God seeking (?) Teresa.

*Traces III: Yahweh's Absence and Unconsumed Fires,
or, The Bush Speaks (Again)*

I cannot help but stop awhile on the absence, on the gap between lovers, on that which Teresa cannot fully explain. To do so is to avoid the temptation

25. Although, see discussion in Kearney (2006: 329), where he points out that Teresa seems to suggest that the soul and the divine appear to reverse roles. If explored further, this may be readable as the kind of inversion I am investigating here.

to resolve absence, or to pass it over, as if it is of no consequence. When dealing with Exod. 3.14, Certeau does not ponder the other's (God's) existence. Instead, and taking that for granted, he is more interested in the other's hiddenness, mystery, and absence, though his project, of course, directs his focus on the implications of that for the mystic, and not on the nature of God itself, from what I can see.

As I quoted above, in describing the mystical subject, marked by exile, Certeau explains that Yahweh's 'acronym, since the burning bush, has been the act of burning all the signs: "I have no other name than that which makes you leave!"' (1992: 177). De Certeau's understanding of Yahweh's claim is that it is one of exclusivity—'I have no other name ...'. In this, Certeau also recognizes the annihilating nature of the fire in which the deity is clothed. This name, produced by fire, destroys all others. Moreover, Certeau acknowledges that encounter with it is so intense, so alienating, that it causes a departure in those who hear it. Again, this is not nothingness, but a way of signification that has so much gravity, and is so unique, that it expands to fill the place of everything else, even he or she who desires with a whole heart to know it. It is so intense, so confronting, that Moses' first impulse is to hide.²⁶

'I have no other name than that which makes you leave' (Certeau 1992: 177). Interestingly, the Exodus account uses *šlh* (to send) in vv. 10, 12, and 15. De Certeau's version, 'makes you leave', downplays the idea of the 'commission' and heightens the ironic nature of the scene at the burning bush. Yahweh's reaching out to the wandering Moses attempts a relationship: he hopes that Moses will respond, and will indeed facilitate a connection with Israel. What Certeau's reading challenges is that the deity frustrates his own advances by virtue of his unapproachability (Moses hides his face, takes off his shoes, etc.), and by virtue of the fact that his very name ('I am')—erases all the other signs. It makes him unspeakable (indeed Yhwh is so written so as to not be spoken). Therefore, Yahweh's own advance makes him unable to enter into dialogue.

This notion of a deity—or anyone for that matter—who desires connection but organizes absence in its stead is a puzzling one. There is a secondary removal in this scene as well, since at first the angel of Yahweh appears in the bush, and then when a connection is made, the voice of Yahweh replaces him.²⁷ But the very sign of Yahweh, the thorn bush, blazing but unconsumed, communicates not closeness but distance. Yahweh chooses to connect—at first, anyway—through spectacle. He wants to be looked at, but not

26. The tradition that prevents Israel from looking directly at God (as in Gen 32: 30; Exod. 33.20) is emblematic of this remove at which humanity must negotiate communication with the deity.

27. Meyers also wonders about the usefulness of the angel here (2005: 52).

approached; the heat of the fire is suggestive of the distance he must keep. After that, he does not want Moses in dialogue, but desires only that he listen.²⁸ As I mentioned above, the encounter is still successful in what Yahweh intended: Moses is deputized, and eventually the rescue comes off. Is this, though, all that Yahweh required, or did Yahweh want to enter into a relationship of some quality with Moses? If so, what is the shape of that relationship? Yahweh seems to want to be the object of Moses' desire—at least in spectacular form, but to translate it into human sexual terms, he does not seem to want that desire to be consummated (hence, the causing of exile).

For the human partner in this exchange, is there a difference between commissioning (sending out) and causing the subject to leave/exiling her? It would appear so, and it is considerable, in terms of the status and authority of the subject. In scholarship, the Exodus scene is taken as a commissioning of Moses: he has agency, despite the clear hierarchy. He chooses to respond to Yahweh, allows himself to be sent out (though he remains unwilling), and the text implies, via the 'sign' Yahweh promises, that he will return. De Certeau's version, which I have been exploring above, promises silence, abandonment, loneliness (these rather negative evaluations are the common complaints of mystics). It leaves the question of connection rather open-ended and it *appears* to remove agency from the one who is executing the search.

The question of agency is crucial for Certeau and for Teresa. The emptying that Certeau describes is a function of the will (*volo*). It is not a matter of wanting connection, of desiring it, but of saying 'I will'. So the act of entering into dialogue with the other is, for mystics, one of volition. That is, there is decision to enter into this paradoxical condition, whereby one wills that one might be confronted with absence, that one might be sent away (a decision to lose agency?). The sending away or exile is painful and alienating, but without it, the mystic has nothing, no glimpse at the spectacle, no contact at all, no thing. For Teresa, these momentary connections, no matter how slight and how imperfect, are the point of living, and they keep her wanting more (cf. Kearney 2006: 332). One wonders, was it the same for Moses? Did the shocking, strange, alienating moments at the burning bush fill him with as much *joie de vivre*, as much *passion* as Teresa seems to experience? Were they what made him say 'I will!'

Angels, Fires, Gardens and Thorns

It is a curiosity of Teresa's writing on Moses and the burning bush that her imagination leads her to mention specifically the thorns of the bush, to see

28. Carroll argues that YHWH is not interested in Moses' perspective, but tolerates a few interjections. From the deity's perspective, Moses is there to listen (1994: 45).

the bush's nature as difficult—perhaps, to ponder the painful, penetrating nature of the encounter, though she does not specifically explicate it. Elsewhere, however, and quite notoriously, Teresa does treat this particular theme, in the well-known encounter with the divine, famously rendered into sculpture by Bernini (1652, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome). In what can only be described as an ecstatic pose, Teresa swoons as the arrow borne by an angel of God penetrates her. She describes it thus:

...the angel was not large but small; he was very beautiful, and his face was so aflame that he seemed to be one of those very sublime angels that appear to be all afire ... I saw in his hands a large golden dart and at the end of the iron tip there appeared to be a little fire. It seemed to me this angel plunged the dart several times into my heart and that it reached deep within me. When he drew it out, I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; and he left me all afire with the great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan, and the sweetness this greatest pain caused me was so superabundant that there is no desire capable of taking it away ... (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1976: 193-94).

Her discussion comes in the context of some thoughts on pain, specifically, pain at the absence of God. It is a great wounding that is asked for, but so painful that it cannot be described; nor can it be treated, or even replaced with any other kind of bodily sickness (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1976: 191-92). The vision of the angel offers some relief, it appears, however brief. But the image, tinged as it is with loss and pain, is also inherently erotic. If we did not know what we were reading (or even if we did), we might be forgiven for thinking Teresa was distinctly speaking of something else. The crossover between sexual language and imagery and the mystical drive is not surprising, of course, but it is risky. There is the risk of heresy, to be sure, but also the personal risk of thinking of matters of the flesh when the mind is meant to be directed elsewhere.

I must confess that my interest in *šlh* in Exodus rang a bell or two. As it turns out, it makes an appearance in the Song, in two rather surprising moments. Song 4.13 begins with a hapax, *shelahayik*, 'your channel' (NRSV) or 'groove' (Pope 1977: 490). Ostensibly part of the landscaping features of the garden about which the man speaks (4.10ff.), used to invoke a pastoral mood and setting for lovemaking, but also representing the woman's body, this 'channel' is likely also a more intimate reference to her anatomy, her vagina.²⁹ Described as an orchard of pomegranates, it is replete with spices

29. The word is certainly derived from *šlh* (Murphy 1990: 157), but it is difficult. Compare Pope 1977: 490; Fox 1985: 137; Keel 1994: 174-78; Exum 2005a: 155, 176; Longman 2001: 156; Murphy 1990: 157; who discuss the possibility that such a device could refer to female genital anatomy and the merits of retaining the plural in their translation (thus rendering a reference to the vagina illogical).

and perfumed plants. She later wishes that the north wind would blow upon her garden and send out its fragrance (v. 16). Her lover's reference to the mysterious *šēlāḥayik*, then, as a feature of the garden subsequently forms part of her invitation to her lover for sex, but as is typical of the Song, one sees more of these invitations and frustrated attempts by the lovers to come together than successful connection: it is on this dynamism and protraction of desire that the Song depends.³⁰

As a consequence, the other reference to *šlh* comes shortly thereafter, in the form of another failed attempt by the lovers (5.2-6). After a quick scene change from the garden, we now see the man knocking at the woman's door, and the woman opening too late to encounter him. Again, taken by many readers as a reference to some sort of sexual encounter,³¹ the verb *šlh* is used to describe the lover sending out his 'hand' into the woman's body. What actually happens here, just as what occurs in the scene in 4.12-5.1 in the garden, is not terribly relevant. The reader gets the impression that sexual connection is both desired and frustrated, both experienced and incomplete, for the lovers on a series of occasions in their relationship. But ostensibly at the heart of both of these two encounters in Song 4 and 5 is the action of moving, of sending out, as expressed by the verb *šlh*.

Shall We Fan the Flames or Put out the Fire?

The lovers in the Song, then, also understand the effect of this mysterious present-absence on the one consumed by desire. At once missing and present, seeking and being sought, found and in the process of finding, they share the anxieties of separation that Teresa and Moses might variously have felt, and the compulsion to try to understand when words and visual encounters are not enough. In addition, they willingly enter into the exchange, when at times it seems less than certain that the beloved other is present, or reciprocating their desire. There is also, however, a shared experience of the physical aspects of their relationship. Teresa's mystico-erotic experiences are sporadic and incomplete, yet they profoundly overcome her, leaving her desiring more. She writes of being set afire by the little flame of

30. The invitation in 4.6 is apparently answered by the lover taking it up in 5.1. The notion that the woman is a 'locked' or 'sealed' garden (4.12), however, rather troubles it. See Landy 1983, Boer 2000; Exum 1999b and 2005b; and Black 1999 and 2009 for more on the dynamics of desire in the Song.

31. The question of whether she is dreaming notwithstanding, it has been deeply interesting to commentators to discern what might be going on in this passage. See, among others, Fox 1985: 144-46, Keel 1994: 192, Murphy 1990: 165, 170-71, Pope 1977: 517-19; and for discussion along with a more metacommentative reflection, Exum 2005a: 190-96. See also Exum 1999a for a discussion of *double entendre* in this passage.

God. This dynamic is mirrored in the mechanics of sex, in touch, in scent, in penetration, *jouissance*, missed encounters and frustration. Teresa *burns* with desire, with a visionary physical encounter with God; the lovers burn with the 'friction of the sexual act' (Landy 1983: 126) and with their urgent need to be in the other's presence.

This brings us back to the flames of the Song of Songs. If recent, secular, literary readings tend to prefer a translation of *šalhebet* that gives credence to its intensive, rather than divine qualities, the question is, what might an interpretation that allows for a tentative presence for Yahweh in 8.6 mean for the Song in literary terms? Typically, readers end up with a solution—theologically imbued—for the flame that goes something like this: 'Divinity is the measure of the intensity of eros' (Kearney 2006: 308), or, this is human love at its very best, and it points to the divine (Davidson 2005: 153). But what if Yahweh is not a strong presence, nor an entirely absent one? Suppose the indirectness of his addition here in the Song's midst is exactly the point? Given my reading of the scene at the burning bush, Yahweh's potential flickering in the Song might not look so unexpected, or puzzling; one might venture that it is almost characteristic. The bottom line is: what does a deity who causes departure, who organizes absence as much as he desires presence, mean for the lovers in the Song?³²

Francis Landy envisages a provocative conceptualization of the scene, where the divine fire of Song 8.6 represents sexual energy/friction, that the flame is creative or generative. A spark of new life, it fuses the lovers. He observes: 'the flame of love, its creative drive, arms it and secures it against death ... but nevertheless destroys. It is, as it were, a double-agent acting for love and death, the energy released by their struggle' (1983: 126). 'The imagination of that moment is the substance of poetry' (1983: 126). I appreciate this reading because it brings death and fire together, because it foregrounds the lightness *and* darkness of the scene, but at the same time, it troubles me. The statement that 'the erotic drive is the divine flame' (1983: 127) rather sets up the deity as the creative source, which, naturally, makes sense for the majority of the biblical record. But does he not also cause absence and failing? Does he not also send those who approach him too closely away? And what about the risk to the deity himself? Tod Linafelt takes us to the point, inspired by his reading of Bataille, where he asks the

32. Contrast Kearney's idyllic reading, where the transfiguring experience at the burning bush mutates to enliven the lovers of the Song: 'The desire of Yahweh's flame here appears to embrace all that is alive. As though the seed of the thornbush has spread from the dusty heights of Mount Horeb and disseminated its fecundity throughout the valleys and planes [sic] below. But above all, the seed has found its way into the embrace of lover and beloved. The free nuptial love ... miraculously echoes the innocence of eros prior to the Fall' (2001: 55; 2006: 308).

question: 'Yet even if lovers of God are at risk, does this mean that God is also at risk?' (2002: 341).³³ Theologically, however, this seems too fraught or controversial a problem, so he demurs, stopping before he has fully interrogated the matter and its implications.

It may be true that the presence of Yahweh—in his truncated, fiery form—inspires creativity, union and creates sexual/erotic sparks that spread to the lovers (so Landy). But this cannot be the whole picture. Surely this capstone picture of love is multi-faceted, also describing love's other natures, otherwise the rest of the Song, with its challenges and negative moments, would not ring true. This is no perfect love here in the Song; it is only the hint of what might be, if perfection were in love with perfection. Instead, the *veiled* presence of Yahweh here speaks *also* of risk. If the deity's own advances do not cause, or cannot be received, but with frustration and alienation—as much as humanity might desire them—should this aspect not also be transferred to the picture that is presented here in Song 8.6? In this way, the missed encounters, the interrogations of the physical body (via imagery), the seeking but not finding, the foreshortened contact, are part of love, not something that must be overcome by the lovers, or passed over as we read this text.

Such a reading explains the proximity of this simile in v. 6c to death (v. 6b). As Landy notes, there is the possibility that flames subsume the lovers, or at least subsume their individuality into one union (1983: 126). But death also stands in for risk. The Song shows that we live always with the risk of death upon us; love lives with the risk of its own ending. It is not so much that death and love are enemies (*pace* Landy), but that they cannot exist without each other. One can agree with Landy when he writes that these two drives, love and death, come together for a moment in the divine flame (1983: 131), but it is not, I think, so that love can integrate (and overcome?) death (1983: 132); rather, it is so that it may be assured of its presence. Risk is, if you like, the other side of the coin.

Ultimately, it may be that this dynamic extends to the deity also; risk is something that the deity understands. If in Exodus it could be argued that Yahweh took a risk to encounter Moses, might the Song speak of a similar

33. The foundational question for his article is this: 'What if, *contra* Bataille, God were not "by definition" immune to risk? What if God were *not* above the fray of passion? What if the divine were *not* understood to be perfection but, rather, bound as well to the vicissitudes of desire, with all the anguish and ecstasy that it implies?' (2002: 325). He continues: 'God is introduced into the vicissitudes of erotic existence and is no longer "by definition" unrisks. As Bernard admits, "God desires us not only on account of his infinite love (as his only son who is in the Father's bosom tells us, 'My Father loves you'), but also for himself (as the prophet says, 'I shall do this not for you but myself')" (Kristiva: 160. God desires the world, *and* God desires the world's desire' (2002: 341).

situation here? In other words, rather than seeing the verse (and Yahweh's presence in it) as descriptive of love, one might turn the tables for a moment and ask what the implications of the simile are for describing Yahweh. What is the parallel risk to the deity as the lovers become consumed with their love for each other? As they see the miracle of the burning bush, but decide to walk through the garden instead, even if, as many argue, their love has a divine source? Could it be that Yahweh *needs* humanity (and humanity in love) as a place from which he might connect? If he desires, is it required of him that he mimic human lovers as they search for the other? If we take Certeau to his logical extent, it might be that human experience of love, as it is represented in a text like the Song of Songs, is the deity's own *morada*.³⁴ It is the place from which he speaks when the divide separating humanity and the ineffable is so great. In this way, the Song embraces possibility and impossibility as the meeting point between Yahweh and the people.³⁵ One should therefore resist the temptation to pinpoint this any further; to settle the matter of Yahweh's presence in the Song in any definitive way. The flame persists: it is raging and unconsumed, after all. Exum's translation of *šalhebetyâ*—'almighty flame'—is therefore perceptive and apt. It allows the allusiveness of the phrase to remain, encompassing much, but not constraining.

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34. Funnily enough, though we begin and end in quite divergent places, Kearney suggests '[i]f Exodus 3 allowed of a God speaking through an angel and a burning thornbush, the Song of Songs amplifies the range of divine speech to include the lovers' bodies and, by analogy, entire landscapes' (2001: 54-55; 2006: 308).

35. Again, Kearney comes to a similar conclusion in his observation that '[i]n sum, what he have here is a story of transfiguring eros as the making possible of the impossible' (2006: 339; cf. Carroll's 'present absence' in his reading of Exod. 3 [1994]). I wonder, though, if the reverse could be true, as I am exploring here—that his possibility might include impossibility for God. This seems a logical option in the argument, but one that Kearney (cf. 2001) is unwilling to entertain.

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RUTH: THE ART OF MEMORIZING TERRITORY AND RELIGION

Athalya Brenner

Ruth is mentioned by name 12 times in the Scroll that anonymous editors, at some time, titled by her name.¹ Out of these 12 times, she is simply 'Ruth' 4 times (1.14, 16; 2.8, 4.13). Twice more she is 'Ruth' with a modifier, 'her [Naomi's] daughter-in-law' (2.2) and 'your [Boaz's] maidservant' [3.9]. Other occurrences of her name are bound up with the adjective 'Moabite' (1.22; 2.2, 21; 4.5, 10), and we can add to the list her definition as one of the two 'Moabite women' Elimelech's sons married (1.4), and her description as 'a young Moabite woman' (2.6, my translation). Thus, Ruth is firmly qualified in her story as a foreigner of a certain place, and a certain ethnic descent.

In addition, the 'field(s)' or 'country' (thus the JPS) of Moab, where the family goes to and from which the female survivors depart to go to Judahite territory, is mentioned six times (1.1, 2, 6, 22; 2.6; 4.3), with only four more occurrences of the same noun phrase in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 36.35 = 1 Chron. 1.46, 8.8; and Num. 21.20). In fact, in an intended or perhaps an accidental symmetry, the opposite migratory target, Bethlehem, is also mentioned six times by name (1.1, 2, 19, 22; 2.4; 4.11).

Please bear with me and let me continue awhile with the numerical tracing I'm indulging in here. Moab, as a political, territorial, and ethnic entity is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible 187 times, 'Moabite' and formations thereof another 40 times or so. The distribution across biblical books is not even. In the Torah, beyond the mythic birth story of Moab (and Ammon, see below) in Genesis 19, references abound in Numbers and Deuteronomy. Further, in the Former Prophets—Judges, Samuel, Kings; then in the Latter Prophets, within the genre of the prophecies to the nations, for

1. Ruth 1.4, 14, 16, 22; 2.2, 8, 21, 22; 3.9; 4.5, 10, 13. Just for comparison. Naomi, whose name does not feature in the title, is referred to by name 21 times: 1.2, 3, 8, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22; 2.1, 2, 6, 20 [×2], 22; 3.1; 4.3, 5, 9 [×2], 14, 16, 17. The ratio is surprising, given the surface emphasis on Ruth, as illustrated by the title. In other words, Naomi is referred to by name almost twice as much as Ruth, which should serve as a pointer for reflection about the centrality of either or both for the Scroll's plot and meaning.

instance in Jeremiah, Amos, Zephaniah. A little more in the Psalms, also in Chronicles. Interestingly, Moab in Ezra and Nehemiah appears as part of the idiom 'District of Moab' from which 'returnees', our folk, originate (my translation).² Interestingly, since this idiom designates a territory rather than ethnicity or a political entity, much as the 'field(s)' or 'country' of Moab in the Ruth Scroll. In the same Persian period books, Moabite(s) feature as well.

Now, according to the birth myth, Moab and Ammon are fraternal brothers, born to Lot the nephew of our forefather Abraham from his two daughters. A sinful birth out of female-initiated incest, no doubt, but blood is thicker than water nevertheless. So how about Ammon? Ammon and Ammonite(s) are slightly less prominent in the Hebrew Bible, 106 and over 22 occurrences respectively. The distribution is similar to that of Moab/Moabite(s). Indeed, Moab and Ammon and their derivative generic modifiers appear as a pair 42 times. The most famous of these pairs is the injunction against letting Moabites and Ammonites join the Israelite community (Deut. 23.4 = Neh. 13.1). Ammonites, unlike Moabites, also appear in 2 Chronicles. Their distribution, somehow, goes further. And unlike the Moabites, references to Ammonites in Nehemiah, a Persian Period book even if its precise time and provenance are debated, are much more specific than to Moabites. Such references name individuals who are considered ethnically foreign enemies of Nehemiah and his project, like Tobias (a good theophoric name with the -ya suffix, but hang the logic; Neh. 2.10, 19; 3.35; 4.1). Finally, both Moab and Ammon are mentioned in conjunction with Arab people, Edom and Edomites³ and/or the people of the Se'ir mountain(s).⁴

Where do all these ostensibly boring, numerical lists lead us with regard to Ruth the Moabite and the Scroll that bears her name? It leads us directly to memories of territorial competition between groups that see themselves as agnatically related, yet distinct. The eponymous ancestors Moab and Ammon, and also Edom, are set out already in Genesis as our seriously flawed relations. They are presented as morally and also sexually corrupt. They are our enemies, hostilities break every so often through myth and history, but neighborhood and relatedness cannot be denied.

So far the biblical accounts. And what about history? It is agreed that Moab stopped being a political or territorially autonomous entity with the Babylonian invasions into the Eastern Mediterranean in 605–582 BCE, and that the Arabian and Nabataean tribes concluded its demise as such over the next centuries. It is generally agreed that Jeremiah 48, an oracle against

2. Ezra 2.6 = Neh. 7.11; Ezra 8.4; 10.30; Neh. 3.11; 10.11.

3. 1 Sam. 14.47; Isa. 11.14; Jer. 9.25; 27.3; 40.11; Dan. 11.41; 1 Chron. 18.11.

4. As in 2 Chron. 20.10, 22, which looks like a variant of the earlier 'Edom' component of this triad.

Moab, signifies the earlier or later developments connected with this process.⁵ The territory remained known under this name for a while, then lost even its name as territory. Beyond the Bible and interpretations thereof, in post-biblical literature pertaining to it such as the midrash, Moab/Moabite(s) are mentioned only as belonging to the past. The Ammonites fared better, they persist in some kind of social organization down to Hasmonaean times. And the Edomites were understood as Arabian inhabitants, later—perhaps when they lost their power and influence—lending their name symbolically and allegorically and as-if-secretly to Rome, the Wicked Edom Kingdom in post-biblical Jewish literature.

So Ruth is a Moabite. Like many other widows in the Hebrew Bible, she is romanticized in the Scroll and, even more so, in its interpretation.⁶ We tend to see her as the hero of the Scroll titled by her name, to valorize her dedication to Naomi and to the target community she embodies. Some of us view her as a volunteer convert, a generous selfless soul who follows her mother-in-law for the theologically and socially and emotionally correct reasons. Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi is a Bethlehem native and, within the Scroll, almost seems like a secondary figure. Nevertheless, both the basic count of Naomi's name references, and her eventual if unexplained ownership of the child born to Ruth (4.14-17), as well as Ruth's disappearance from the scene after she gives birth to a son, should serve as a basis for reflection. When does Ruth finally cease to be a Moabite? She is still a Moabite when Boaz intends to take her as wife (4.10); she is simply Ruth when he does. But then, immediately, she disappears in favor of Naomi. If you wish to view Ruth optimistically as integrated into Judahite society after her marriage and giving birth to a son and heir, forefather of King David, then you have to admit that the price of integration for this literary figure is absorption, that is, loss of individuality and disappearance from the active stage.

Ruth may have been a historical figure, who knows? But, in the Hebrew Bible, she is first and foremost a literary figure. As such, she exemplifies issues of identity that are far from simple, and from an Israelite/Jewish angle, pretending to belong to the memory of a particular Judahite family in a certain place (Bethlehem) as well as and somehow all-Israelite angle (Ruth 4)—not from a Moabite one. Pretending, since the story is dubbed from its beginning as belonging to the 'times of the Judges' (1.10), whereas it seems clear that its real provenance, like its language, belong to the Persian period, or the late Persian period. Furthermore, it is precisely in this period that the issue of identity for the new community-in-the-making, call them 'returnees'

5. See for example the veteran but still valuable commentary by the late Robert Carroll: Carroll 1986: 780-97.

6. See especially Steinberg 2004: 327-46.

or otherwise, is tightly bound up with that of the women within it.⁷ The complex question of native and newcomer, claims to territory, competition between locals and 'returnees' who declare historical ownership of the land, becomes attached to the foreignness or endogamic status of wives, as exemplified in Ezra and Nehemiah.

It is worth noting that the 'foreign women' of Ezra and Nehemiah are not exactly 'foreign'. They are the natives of the land, the locals (Ezra 9–10; Neh. 10; 13.1). The definition 'foreign' is here stretched to the point of absurdity. To begin with, several of the ethnic designations mentioned, for instance in Ezra 9.1—Hittite, Perizzite, Jebusite, Moabite, Amorite (in addition to Egyptian and Ammonite)—are no longer politically relevant. Furthermore, it is admitted that such people are the 'people of the land', that is, natives. Regarding the first point, let us remember, first, that there are other cases in the Hebrew Bible, in literature of the Persian and later periods, where the Other is defined as a political entity long out of existence and at the time of writing legendary only—such as the Nineveh of Jonah, or the Babylon of Daniel. In such instances, it is easier to delineate the difference between Us and the Other by utilizing stereotypes of nations that are no longer extant. Regarding the second point, it has long been recognized that the conflict between the self-styled 'returnees' and the locals, in the Persian period, is primarily a matter of economics and territory, more tightly linked to the question of land and its ownership than to ethnicity and religion. In other words, when we look at the small community-in-the-making round Jerusalem and Judah in the Persian period, identity definition is not just an abstract issue; it is bound up with the most basic materialistic concerns for land ownership. And this sought-for land ownership bears two distinct features. It is connected somehow to women, even if we read repeatedly that land inheritance is regulated via males; and it depends on the absorption of such women, initially described as coming from related but foreign communities, into our own—or on their expulsion.

The Ruth Scroll, beyond romance, is all about land and land ownership and their material and other rewards. The Scroll's plot centers on harvest and harvest time, in agriculture as in human social community. Land is at its epicentre, even if the link between Naomi's land, Ruth and the 'redeeming' required (ch. 4) is not that clear beyond the need to transfer continuity and ownership to a husband or son. The claim to the land, its transference from 'them' to us, the clarification of true (divinely inspired!) ownership, is ultimately regulated. This is neither a simple claim nor a simple process. It includes a definition of the We against the Other that is hardly foreign or distinct, yet experienced as different. The difference is more difficult to pinpoint when dealing with an entity that is acknowledged as more similar

7. Eskenazi 1994: 252–71.

than different—in other words, when we deal with a member of a group experienced as Our blood relatives.

What to do? Again, in this regard it is immaterial whether the Ruth story is historical or otherwise. Memory may be authentic, manufactured or somewhere in between, as is widely conceded. Positing Ruth as a Moabite, not an Edomite or Ammonite for instance, has its advantages. Defining Ruth as belonging to a source community that, at the time of writing, has no longer another (such as ethnic, political, social) identity but a territorial identity, as supported by extra-biblical historical data as well as by the claim that certain ‘returnee’ individuals are from Moabite territories,⁸ makes it easier to ‘absorb’ her into the dominant culture, as exemplified not only by Boaz, but also and perhaps primarily by Naomi. This is one solution to the identity/territory crisis. It is certainly approved of by later sources, which limit the Torah injunction against Moabite [and Ammonite] integration to males only:⁹ more support, if we wish, both for the somewhat unclear role of women in land inheritance of the Second Temple period, and the communal wish to take advantage of that situation. Yet another one is more radical: to expel the women who either and inexplicably own the land, or embody the claim for it by other forces, local but firmly designated as ‘foreign’. Sadly, be the route chosen as it may, expulsion as in Ezra–Nehemiah or absorption as in Ruth, the ‘foreign’ women in effect disappear as a result of the process.

* * *

Dialectically, that women symbolize or embody territorial identity is supported by emphasizing their assumed foreign origin or, conversely, by hiding it. As we have seen, the biblical Ruth remains a Moabite up and until she is ‘absorbed’ into the Bethlehem community, when Naomi usurps her place as actual mother. Ruth’s foreignness is mitigated by the sages of *Genesis Rabbah*, albeit not ignored; for them, in their chronological framework, the issue is religious rather than territorial: their promised territory has been lost for a long time. Consequently, she is made into a convert and religious exemplum. Worth noting is the short and cleaned up story told by Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities* 5.318–37). For him, Moab is mentioned once, at the very beginning (5.318), as the place Elimelech took his family to because of the famine, and where his sons marry Moabite wives. Thereafter, and unlike the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is never modified with the term ‘Moabite’: she is simply and consistently Ruth, although her source community is known. We can ask ourselves why. Does Josephus shy away from fighting exogamy, for his own reasons? Or is Ruth’s territorial origin not important anymore,

8. See n. 2 above.

9. *B. Yeb.* 77–78. See Deut. 23.3–6; Neh. 13.1–3.

within his territorial reality of the Roman empire? Or is Ruth's supposedly ethnic origin not as significant as her lowly social standing, and Boaz's, since Josephus sums up his story by stating that the only reason he tells the story is to show that greatness and Davidic monarchy can come out of lowly origins (5.337)? Josephus is a social and cultural snob: this is not the only place in his oeuvre that he lets attitude slip into his retellings of Hebrew Bible narratives.

* * *

Concerns change. Most interpreters ancient and modern and postmodern, to the best of my knowledge, have neglected the strong formal-territorial elements in Ruth in favour of religious and emotional (true love, no?) explanations not only for Ruth's behaviour and actions, but also for other facets of the Scroll.¹⁰ One of the telling reflections of Hebrew Bible interpretation can be found in films. I therefore turn my attention now to three films about the Scroll, limiting myself to non-explicitly devout adult films made for or around it. Those are not too many, to the best of my knowledge, surprisingly so given the tendency to view the plot as a love story between Ruth and Boaz.

The Story of Ruth, a full feature film, was released in 1960 and re-released as a DVD several years ago.¹¹ The *Internet Movie Database* site sums up the plot:

Inspired by the scriptural tale. Moabite priestess Ruth is drawn both to a Judean man and to his talk of a forgiving God. After tragedy strikes, she begins a new life in Bethlehem.¹²

Or, as the *CD Universe* site sums it up: 'A Moabite priestess renounces her gods for the God of Israel. Since she is a foreigner, her dedication is not readily accepted by the villagers.'¹³ The plot summary goes as follows:

Inspired by the tale from Hebrew scriptures and the Christian Bible, the Moabite child Ruth is sold to the temple of Chemosh. Years pass and she serves as a priestess to the idol. While arranging a temple ritual, she encounters a Judean family of artisans: Elimelech, his wife Naomi, their sons Chilion and Mahlon, and daughter-in-law Orpah. Ruth is curious about their God, and begins to meet secretly with Mahlon. After tragedy strikes, Ruth follows Naomi and begins a new life in Bethlehem.¹⁴

10. An exception is Jack Sasson's commentary, 1989.

11. Starring Stuart Whitman, Elana Eden and others. Director Henry Koster (20th Century Fox).

12. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054343/>.

13. <http://www.cduniverse.com/productinfo.asp?pid=7009045>.

14. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054343/plotsummary>. See also buyers' responses on the *CD Universe* site.

The Story of Ruth (yes, the same name but 1994) is an animated film within the *Stories from the Bible* series.¹⁵ In it, Orpah and Ruth are of course gentiles, and Naomi warns them not to come with her, for xenophobia will make them unwelcome in Bethlehem. Orpah leaves, Ruth stays, and in what follows her gentile origin never features. What matters is her religious tendency and the fact that it is a love story. For instance, it is stated that Mahlon saved Ruth from being sacrificed to Chemosh, and what the consequences are.

A third film, once again a full-length feature, is called *The Book of Ruth* (2010). It is

A Biblical Cinderella story seen through the eyes of a young woman as she leaves her homeland to Israel in search of a better life. Upon reaching Israel she is swept off her feet by a wealthy royal which ultimately leads to her destiny.¹⁶

Clearly, the film versions are quite far removed from the biblical story. A common feature is the romance between the two main protagonists, Ruth and Boaz, including making both young, attractive and good looking—which is nowhere to be found in the Scroll. Ruth becomes a totally positive character; for that, her foreign origin has to be minimized and further disavowed by her own inclination. Ruth's religious character, so minor in the Scroll, comes to the fore. Her choice of following Naomi, therefore accepting Naomi's god (Ruth 1.16-17) as one component of her all-embracing personal loyalty, becomes independent of other considerations, be they what they may. As the religious accent comes to the fore, so the territorial aspect recedes. Does it matter? Buyers on the Internet sites acknowledge that the films' distance from the biblical account is considerable, but add comfortably that it does not matter, since the 'spirit' of the biblical story is maintained.

This reader begs to differ. The 'spirit' of the biblical Ruth Scroll is not maintained by interpretations—be they ancient Jewish texts or modern popular media. Transforming Ruth to a formal convert, as do ancient Jewish texts, is bad enough; going a giant step further and making her into a converted ex-priestess is worse. In both instances, in the background, there lurks a stronger danger. The concern for territory is exchanged for religious concern. What makes an outsider, or an insider? A foreign origin—ethnic, territorial, social, genderwise—or religious conviction? Can religious belief substitute for territory, can it symbolize claims to territory, or vice versa? It can. But should it? As an Israeli, this gives me pause for thought. A painful pause.

15. Nest Family Entertainment, USA. English.

16. Pure Flix Entertainment, original release 2009. Lana Wood, Dan Haggerty and others. <http://www.cduniverse.com/productinfo.asp?pid=8071020>.

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ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE SOTAH IN POPULAR PRINTED WORKS IN THE SEVENTEENTH–NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Claudia V. Camp

Cheryl Exum has been a pioneer both as a feminist biblical critic and as an analyst of visual representations of biblical texts. I offer here, in her honor, a variation on those two interpretive movements. My textual point of departure is a relatively obscure passage in a relatively little-read book: the description of the ritual testing of the woman whose husband suspects her of adultery in Num. 5.11-31; the text is often referred to as the Sotah, for the woman who 'turns aside'. Likewise, my primary visual sources are not on the walls of museums or the silver screen of modern films, the sources of much recent work on visual interpretation of the Bible. Rather, I turn mainly to illustrations that appear in Bibles and other popular Bible-related publications dating from the late seventeenth through the late nineteenth centuries.

With Exum (1996: 8), I am not interested in whether the artist 'got the biblical text right' or 'got it wrong' but rather in what elements of gender ideology the artist reinscribes or challenges. In the case of the Sotah illustrations, though, this question is not always a straightforward one: they appear first in works that interpret the Bible, rather than in the biblical text itself, and these interpretations are often interested in this highly gendered text for reasons having nothing directly to do with gender.

Though my historical expertise wanes dramatically after the turn of the era, I will here offer as much insight as I am able into the range of other cultural considerations with which gender is in play. My suggestion that the Sotah text is obscure is misleading, however. It is, to be sure, hardly modern Christian Sunday School fare, but the range of publications in which the illustrations appear suggest a wider familiarity with it among Christians in earlier times. The Sotah, of course, also provides the basis for an eponymous tractate in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and both Talmuds, which rehearses variations in the conditions for, and the enactment and results of, the ritual, along with side discussions into any number of other (more or less!) related issues. Because the earliest Sotah illustrations drew on these sources, as well as on the biblical text itself, some discussion is needed of both.

The Sotah in the Bible

Numbers 5.11-31 describes a ritual addressing the situation of a man who suspects his wife of adultery. Though the opening line seems to assume her guilt ('If any man's wife has gone astray...', v. 11), the possibility of her innocence finally emerges ('...or if a fit of jealousy comes over him and she has not defiled herself ...', v. 14). The ritual's purpose is to resolve this uncertainty. The husband brings his wife before the priest at the tabernacle, along with a plain meal offering (v. 15). The priest puts dirt from the sanctuary floor into a vessel of sacred water, producing 'bitter water'; he uncovers the woman's head, puts the meal offering in her hands, and recites the words of a curse that she must affirm (vv. 17-22). The curse enigmatically warns that if she is guilty her 'womb will flood¹ and her thigh will fall' and that she will become a curse among her people. If she is innocent, she will be unharmed and able to bear children (vv. 19-22, 27-28). He writes the words of the curse on parchment and washes them into the water, which she must drink while he burns part of the meal offering (vv. 23-26). The text seems to expect immediate physical results of some sort if the woman is guilty (v. 27), but her husband is not held accountable for a false accusation (v. 31).

The interpretive questions raised by this text are too numerous to rehearse in this context; I shall mention here just those relevant to the present discussion. The relationship of Numbers' highly literary, repetitious text,² with its ambiguous introduction and outcome, to a real ritual is not entirely clear, though most interpreters until recently have assumed a ritual reality and read the text in those terms. They assume, in other words, from a feminist point of view, a practice embodying a blatant sexual double standard (in that no similar test is available to assuage a jealous wife) and a willingness to put even an innocent woman through a terrifying and humiliating ordeal.³ One question we may put to the text's visual interpreters, then, is what attitude they take toward the accused woman and the husband who would do this to her.

1. The Hebrew root *צבה* is otherwise unknown. See Frymer-Kensky (1999: 468) for an etymological discussion, though I draw a different conclusion from this than she does. I suspect Frymer-Kensky has over-medicalized the evocative but minimal physical details.

2. See Milgrom (1999) for analysis of the complex literary structure and Fishbane (1999) for stylistic and formal analysis.

3. Discomfort with the gender implications has led some recent interpreters to argue that the text is not as bad as it seems, that it protects the woman from a worse fate at the hands of her husband or the crowd, or is designed to prove her innocence rather than her guilt (Milgrom 1999: 481; Sasson 1999: 484). That such arguments need to be made in the contemporary world speaks, I think, for itself.

While the sex/gender double standard is apparent, there is also a question as to *which* male triumphs. Alice Bach (1999: 512) has argued that the ritual was designed to reassert the husband's status and authority, over against his inherent vulnerability with respect to uncertainty about the paternity of his children and, indeed, his male identity as such. These social-psychological dynamics are undoubtedly at work in the text and ground its power. But there is more to it as well. Imagining the husband as the ultimate victor fails to take account of the deep shame this culture imputes to a cuckolded husband and thus misses the ultimate appropriator of sexual power, namely, the priest (Camp, forthcoming). Tikva Frymer-Kensky (1999: 470-71; cf. Haberman 2000: 33-34) argues that the priest himself is subjugated to God by the ritual; this idea, however, is by no means explicit in Numbers. The question of God's role is, then, also of interpretive interest in analyzing the power dynamics of the text.

*Rabbinic Interpretation of the Sotah*⁴

Lisa Grushcow provides a close examination of the similarities and differences in the ways the various early Jewish sources interpret the biblical text of the Sotah, concluding that two main themes are consistent throughout the literature: all interpretation stems from 'the desire to develop standardized, normative legal procedures, and the desire to condemn adultery' (Grushcow 2006: 270). Given the ambiguities in the biblical source, these desires often conflict as much as cohere, generating the differences in the interpretations. What impact, then, did rabbinic variations on these two themes have on the illustrations of later texts influenced by the rabbis?

Grushcow also analyzes recent scholarship on rabbinic treatment of women in the Sotah tractates: did the rabbis improve or worsen the treatment of the accused woman? She argues that the rabbis are inconsistent on this point because they have no interest in the woman as such: what they say about her shifts in relation to their views on the problematic relationship of their two main issues, legal procedure and condemning adultery. On the one hand, the woman's fate is ameliorated by rabbinic protections against wanton husbandly accusations and balanced by accountability for husbandly fidelity. Yet the negative aspects of the rabbis' interpretation deepen, intentionally or not, the text's latent misogyny, adding details to the biblical description of the ritual and its effects that suggest a veritably salacious interest in the procedure.

4. See Destro (1989) and Grushcow (2006) for book length studies of Jewish interpretation of the Sotah, and Haberman (2000) for an extended article. Grushcow also helpfully reviews the handful of other articles on the topic.

While Num. 5.18 indicates no more physical contact between the priest and the woman than the uncovering or disheveling of her hair, the Mishnah directs our gaze, with the priest's hands, to her whole, partly exposed body:

A priest seizes her garments. If they are rent, they are rent, and if they become unstitched they are unstitched until he uncovers her bosom. And he undoes her hair. R. Judah says: if her bosom was beautiful he does not uncover it, and if her hair was beautiful he does not undo it. If she was clothed in white he clothes her in black. If she wore golden ornaments and necklaces, earrings and fingerings, they remove them in order to make her repulsive. After that [the priest] takes a common rope and binds it over her breasts (*Sot.* 1.5-6).

There is similarly unholy glee in the description of the water's effects: 'She had scarcely finished drinking when her face turns green, her eyes protrude, and her veins swell' (*Sot.* 3.4). Unlike Numbers, the Mishnah envisions public humiliation: 'All women are permitted to look upon her, as it is said, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness' (*Sot.* 1.6). The Mishnah raises, then, some further options for visual interpreters of the text regarding the degree of salaciousness in their presentation of the woman and in their interest in her ghastly physical fate if the waters prove her guilt.

The Illustrations

Illustrating Christian Hebraism

The first four images (Figs. 1, 3, 4, 5) represent, to the best of my knowledge, the earliest ones in printed and relatively widely available sources.⁵ All these works come from the Netherlands, from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries, a context interesting in its own right, and quite relevant to what we see in the illustrations. It thus requires some attention here.

The second half of the seventeenth century marked the height of an intellectual movement known as Christian Hebraism, defined by

its development of a technical apparatus, the production of ever better means to study Hebrew and Jewish literature. Over a period of roughly two hundred years, from about 1500 to 1700, ever more books—dictionaries, grammars, translations, literary histories, to mention just a few genres—were produced which facilitated the study of Hebrew and Jewish literature (van Rooden 2005).

The impulse for this otherwise diverse cultural movement was a combination of appreciation on the part of intellectual Christians for the historical value of the Hebrew sources for their own tradition and desire to study them 'without the need to have recourse to living Jews' (van Rooden 2005).

5. Wecker (2010) mentions a miniature from a History Bible from Utrecht dated 1443, in the collection of The Hague, the only earlier image I am aware of.

Such mixed motives, among others, underlay the publication by Petrus Cunaeus, a Leiden professor of political science, of *The Hebrew Republic* in 1617. On one level a work of historical politics representative of the lettered Leiden humanists, it was also unmistakably 'meant as an admonition to the body politic...not to be trapped by the conniving of religious zealots and political machinators in the mold of Jeroboam, who neatly undid the unity of the Hebrew Commonwealth' (Eyffinger 2006: ix-xi).⁶ The intellectuals' response to the political breakdown of the preceding decade was a search for other republican models, both historical and contemporary, for the Dutch Republic. Along with similar work by Hugo Grotius, Cunaeus's contribution in *The Hebrew Republic* helped 'forestall imminent crisis' (xii-xiii, xxix, xxxvii).

Along with theology and law, Cunaeus had studied rabbinics and ancient languages, and developed an appreciation for Maimonides who, along with Josephus, deeply informs *The Hebrew Republic* (xix, xxxi).⁷ He believed that the Mosaic law was uniquely efficacious in encouraging political unity and cooperation among the Hebrew tribes, traits sorely lacking among the Dutch (xxxvii, xlv). Why then did that ancient unity end? Enter the humanist whipping boy: superstition! In contrast to the later Wellhausenian 'blame the priests' model, however, Cunaeus blamed Jeroboam for replacing the proper politics of Moses with empty superstition based on 'sacred rituals and places of worship' (xxxviii). Cunaeus aimed this message at his contemporaries and their destructive battles of doctrine, and his text stands as one of the most important witnesses to 'this fascinating period of two decades (1600–1620), in which Hebrew and Jewish studies became a matter of scholarly, social, and political urgency in the Netherlands' (xxxix).

Cunaeus's Latin publication was reprinted in different editions a number of times between 1617 and 1745, translated into English and, in 1682, into Dutch. The four-volume Dutch edition included sixty copper engravings by Jan Luyken (1649–1712), one of the most important and famous illustrators of his day. This, then, is the context for Luyken's depiction of the Sotah ritual (Fig. 1). Before turning to the image itself, though, we must consider the role of this text in Cunaeus's own argument.

Cunaeus was unashamedly selective in his choice of biblical texts and freely associative in his style of argument (xli-xlii). He could be baldly anti-Semitic while at the same time almost romantically admiring of Hebrew law and its purveyor, Moses. While he was not anti-priestly as such, the priestly leadership of his Hebrew Republic often became his targets to the degree

6. All page references in the discussion of Cunaeus are to Eyffinger's introduction of the 2006 English edition of *The Hebrew Republic*.

7. Opportunity for this study was provided by the influx of Jews into the Netherlands, beginning around 1600, as the result of the formal ban on Judaism in the Spanish Empire by Philip II in 1597 (Eyffinger 2006: xiii-xvii).

they at one time or another represent either the worm of superstition or the demon of abused power. Cunaeus's reference to the Sotah ritual appears, virtually incidentally, in the midst of a discussion about the work of the Sanhedrin, beginning with the 'seventy councilors' set up by Moses and lasting until the destruction of Judea. The Sanhedrin decided matters both secular and sacred, but, according to Cunaeus, occasionally overstepped their bounds and 'openly decided the kinds of cases whose solution is beyond the diligence of mere human beings' (Cunaeus 2006: 51). As his example, Cunaeus cites the Sotah law, which he says led to the Jewish belief 'that all these senators were learned in magic, and that this skill was so important to them that only men who possessed it were admitted into their order' (51). This view Cunaeus regards as 'entirely without merit', and the mark of a failure to recognize that the seventy elders in fact had 'a kind of sacred energy', the same spirit as that of Moses, derived from the laying on of hands at their investiture. The sages should have had the wit to recognize that the senators' power of judgment, even of secret matters like unwitnessed adultery, came from this spiritual power and not from worthless teachings about magic like this 'bit of asinine Jewish stupidity' (51).

Ironically, Cunaeus's incidental and derogatory allusion to the Sotah text provides the impetus, some 75 years later, for Luyken's visual rendition of it. Though Cunaeus's work continued to be held in high regard, changing times and religious inclinations led the artist to a representation that alters, as well as acknowledges, that of his text. Cunaeus was a political philosopher, and his *Republic* was written for political purposes, an appeal for a rational (however religiously grounded) state. Luyken, however, having had an intense religious experience as a young man, was a Mennonite mystic, a moralist and poet as well as an engraver. Just a couple of years before illustrating *The Hebrew Republic*, he had provided 104 engravings for an edition of *The Martyr's Mirror*, one often gruesome picture after another of the fates of Christian martyrs over the centuries, a few of them women.⁸ The book became a fixture in the homes of pious Mennonites. Luyken's sensibilities, then, were pious rather than political.

As a Mennonite, Luyken would likely have had little time for priestly hierarchy for its own sake, yet his depiction of priests and their accoutrements is elegant and beautiful: he focuses on the spiritual elements in Cunaeus's discussion of the theocratic leadership, not on his negative judgments. In one engraving, the high priest, wearing the ephod, receives a direct revelation from God in the form of a beam of light directed at his heart, perhaps recalling Luyken's own religious experience. In general, Luyken's engravings do not bear witness to the ambivalence about Jews typical of the Christian Hebraist movement. His high priest engraving is the norm rather than the

8. Images may be seen at <http://www.bethelks.edu/mla/holdings/scans/martyrsmirror/>

exception in eschewing the demonizing ugliness often found in Christian art. Relatedly, while we would expect Luyken to share Cunaeus's rejection of magic, Luyken the moralist was known for his artistic depictions of everyday life—the world of household work and children, for example—as emblems of higher moral and spiritual aspirations (Schama 1987: 489-91). Material realia, then, seem to be no less spiritually meaningful to him, for all they are not magical.

To turn, then, to the Sotah engraving itself, it is noteworthy that Luyken does choose to represent it, and does so in painstaking and imaginative detail. What do these details communicate?



Fig. 1. Copper engraving by Jan Luyken in Petrus Cunaeus's *The Hebrew Republic* (Amsterdam: Willem Goeree, 1684)

The ritual takes place in the courtyard of an ornate and magnificent temple. Two elderly women in conversation are strikingly foregrounded, though in shadow. A crowd, both men and women, spills out in front of the women, away from the viewer. They are packed together but not all attending to the action of the ritual, as if at a sporting event—or even a lynching. Some are standing on objects in the back for a better view, one or two gesture as if cheering or booing. The copper laver (cf. Exod. 38.8), the source of the holy water, stands in the right foreground, and two priests kneel, sweeping the dirt that will go into the bitter brew. The main event occurs in

center, in the light, but at a distance from the two women in front, and thus from the viewer. The high priest is centered in front of the Temple doorway. The accused woman, to the priest's right, drinks from a small cup. The altar, fire burning, and a writing stand with paper, pen, and inkwell are to the priest's left; he points toward them with one hand.

The artist represents, then, the moment of tension in the ritual, before it is known whether the woman will prove guilty or innocent. Choosing this moment of high drama makes artistic sense, but it also reflects the ambivalence of the text itself about the woman's moral state. While the scene focuses on the act of drinking, other objects and activities noted above draw our attention simultaneously to several different moments in the unsynchronized passage: the priest's mixing of holy water and dust from the tabernacle floor (v. 17); the writing of the curse (v. 23); and the burning of the grain offering (v. 26; cf. v. 25). None of these details appears in Cunaeus's discussion of the ritual, suggesting that Luyken returned to the biblical text itself to retrieve them. Other elements in the engraving, however, show the influence of Jewish literature, whether this knowledge came to Luyken directly or through Cunaeus. As in the Mishnah, the ritual takes place at the Jerusalem temple, contrasting with the wilderness-situated tabernacle of Numbers. Cunaeus does not mention the Mishnah's more specific locus, though, the eastern gate of the temple, and neither does Luyken.

Luyken also seems to take artistic advantage of the Mishnaic injunction that the ritual take place before 'all the people', specifically including women. The Mishnah also expects evidence of incrimination to appear immediately (yellow face, bulging eyes, etc.), leading the crowd to say, 'Take her away! Take her away! that the temple court be not made unclean!' (Sot. 3.4). In Luyken's crowd scene, some figures certainly seem prepared for such physical action. With these characters, Luyken introduces a new source of danger to the woman that does not exist in the biblical text, intimating the possibility of incipient violence. Does he to this degree invite the viewer to experience the event, with some sympathy, from the tenuous position of the accused woman? The visual evidence does not seem to me conclusive, but I am reminded of his images of those stoically virtuous women being tortured or killed in *The Martyr's Mirror*.

The overall tone of the crowd, though, is mixed. One might infer a rather casual air in the foregrounded *tête-à-tête*: the two women smile and chat, and such conversational moments are repeated throughout the crowd. Is this the gossip that swirls around shame: what does who know about whom? Who has heard what? (The Mishnah mentions the gossip of 'women who spin by moonlight' as legitimate cause for a husband to invoke the ritual [Sot. 6.1].) The men sweeping dust from the floor, necessary work before the ritual, hardly appear part of a solemn event. Perhaps we could imagine a large public courtroom, with many people waiting to be heard in other cases,

though some are present only for the show trial of the day. On the other hand, as I have suggested, the apparent joviality of such a situation could be of a dangerous sort, ready to turn to violence at the prescribed moment. Conviviality and violence—whether by the hand of men or of God—are all part of the experience. Luyken brings a remarkable sense of the quotidian, the human, to this potentially awesome and awful moment.

If the presence of the crowd creates a sense of the everyday, the distancing of the main event from the viewer likewise contributes to a certain emotional distance from what for an accused wife would be a horrifying experience. We have to get past our amusement at the gossips in front and the magnificence of the temple looming behind before we can focus on the main actors in the center. The wife's somewhat casual posture, the relaxed hand at her side, and the one-handed tipping back of the cup do not suggest a high degree of formality or its accompanying tension. But a closer look is more chilling. The contrast with the well-covered chatterers in the foreground calls attention to the *deshabille* of the wife. Not only has her veil been removed (Num. 5.18), but her shoulders and breasts have also been laid bare, as stipulated by the rabbis (Sot. 1.5).

Luyken's portrayal of the accused woman is, then, rabbinically correct. Precisely because of these details, though, it is worth noting what he has chosen *not* to portray, namely, the terrible and sexualized physical affliction that the Bible says will occur to the woman and that is elaborated upon in the Mishnah (Sot. 1.7; 3.4). He shuns, in other words, the male vengeance fantasy expressed in those texts. Luyken begins a visual tradition of representing the Sotah, now largely forgotten, but it was markedly not motivated by the Bible's and the Mishnah's bias toward the woman's guilt, with its potential for vividly visualized gore. This bias is not unquestioned in either text, and Luyken has chosen a moment that represents the ambiguity of the passage's counterpoint, those fewer verses that acknowledge the possibility of the woman's innocence (Num. 5.14b, 19, 28, 30).

Luyken's Sotah is, then, not yet convicted, and his depiction of the woman herself is quite restrained (see detail, Fig. 2). Because of the choice of the visual plane and the resulting size of the main figures, it is difficult even to tell, without close inspection, that her breasts are bare. Her seemingly casual pose could suggest insouciance, or perhaps even confidence in her own innocence, but certainly not shame. In the larger context of crowd, priests, and temple, though, she still appears rather vulnerable. For 'casual' perhaps we should read 'disempowered' or, if the comparison with *The Martyrs' Mirror* holds, stoic, resigned, or perhaps hopeful that her fate is in God's hands. She is, at any rate, no temptress, and not obviously deserving of her role in this drama. The lasciviousness one can read into both Bible and Mishnah is absent here. For all that she is at the center of the action, Luyken does not ask us to gaze upon her.



Fig 2. Jan Luyken (see Fig. 1) detail

If not at her, then where? In fact, the real center of attention is the presiding priest, whom Luyken (without either biblical or rabbinic warrant) casts as the high priest with his ephod. The great door of the temple frames his figure and shadows on the ground direct the eye towards him. The gestures of his hands, pointing to the writing desk on one side and the drinking woman on the other, confirm his role as mediator of the power that will transfer from one to the other. For the rabbis, this power lay primarily in the divine Name that was written down as part of the curse and washed into the bitter water (*Sot.* 1.4). The priest, then, stands in for God in this scene, which is possibly the reason Luyken seems less worried than Cunaeus about the problem of magical thinking involved in such an ordeal-type ritual.

Remarkably, given his synoptic approach to so much of the action, Luyken largely avoids visual reference to the jealous husband. In fact, the accuser is very hard to find in this scene. A number of official-looking sorts stand on either side of the action, like the larger crowd showing varying levels of (mostly) inattention. It takes a while to realize that one of these, almost at the right margin of the scene, must be the accusing husband, identifiable by his gaze, which is focused on the action, and his right hand pointing a finger toward it. The husband appears ineffectual and insignificant. If the biblical ritual had any intent to restore his lost dignity and authority, this depiction of it makes no such offers. However we understand the tone and dynamics of the scene as a whole, the accusing husband seems to lose. He is reduced to insignificance at best, ridicule at worst, in the midst of a public, bustling, if not outright carnivalesque, environment. In this measure, Luyken reproduces what I take to be an inherently problematic

aspect of the Sotah ritual described in the Bible, namely, the public shame to the husband in the very ritual that is supposed to redress his grievance.

Christian Hebraism was also the impetus for another major illustrated work, a six-volume Latin translation of the Mishnah (1698–1703) by Willem Surenhuys. Unlike many in this circle, Surenhuys's scholarly agenda was not one of taking the Jews out of Judaism. He was

one of the most philo-semitic scholars in early modern Europe. He ... spoke openly about his friendship with the Amsterdam Jews and the help they had offered him. The most striking aspect of his introductions and notes to the Latin translation is that they lack any critical distance from the Jewish interpretation of the Mishnah, abstaining from all historical or theological criticism (van Rooden 2005).

Part of the assistance Jews provided Surenhuys was to supply the engravings included with this work, whether items in their own collections or solicited from Jewish communities as far away as Thessalonica, Egypt, and Livorno (van Rooden 2005).⁹

The Sotah appears twice in the work, once as an independent image and again, in a similar design, as part of a composite with other images representing each of the seven tractates of *Nashim*. I shall focus here on the details of the independent image (Fig. 3).

Like Luyken's, it also depicts a crowd scene. In this case, though, the crowd parts down the middle to show the woman, head and breasts bared, being held by one priest on her right and two on her left, in a gateway (as per the Mishnah), with the temple door visible through it in the background. A jug and piece of paper or parchment lie at her feet and an inscription above the gate reads 'This is the gate of the Lord; pure women may enter through it', an adaptation of Ps 118.20's 'righteous men' (Wecker 2010). The material means to truth are thus merely suggested in comparison to Luyken's fuller development of them; there are no dust-sweepers, writing desk, or copper laver to draw attention to the larger ritual action, nor does the woman actually take the drink. Gone as well is the regal centrality of the high priest, being replaced by three less decorous woman-handlers. The focus instead is on the biblical words above the scene, emphasizing God's work rather than human mediators and implements in judging the woman's purity. The artist perhaps shares Cunaeus's aversion to magic—and perhaps as a Jew fears such accusation—in contrast to Luyken's visual embrace of the earthly means to divine insight.

9. Thus, although Surenhuys's Mishnah was published after *The Hebrew Republic*, it is possible that this image is older than Luyken's. My comparison does not presume any dependence of either on the other, though there may have been one. The Surenhuys image is reprised, in the background to a different composition, in a 1735 edition of *The Hebrew Republic*.



Fig. 3. Copper engraving, artist unknown, in Willem Surenhuys (ed.), *Mischna* (1698–1703) Amsterdam, G. 06:34 AM J. Borstius, 1698–1703). Used by courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The ritual moment that we are seeing is ambiguous. Has the woman just drunk the bitter water or is that just about to come? Either way, the scene is troubling. The woman appears to be restrained by the priests, her body twisted rather than relaxed, her bare breasts now at center stage. Are the water's gruesome effects taking place? Alternatively, perhaps this woman has refused to drink, in which case the Mishnah requires that she be forced to do so (*Sot.* 3.3). Do we see her struggle? The husband stands at the edge of the

crowd. Again, as in the Luyken, he is separated from the main scene, gesturing at the action, yet here he is also more distinguishable from the masses behind and across from him.¹⁰ The prospect of his vindication suggested by his assertive posture seems unclouded by the shameful implications of his cuckoldry. He looks back at the crowd rather than in the direction of his hand gesture, as if to accept their acknowledgement of his victory.

Without passing final judgment, then, this artist goes further than does Luyken to anticipate the woman's guilt. To this degree, the bias of the source texts toward guilt is also reinforced. Unlike *Numbers*, however, which concentrates textual power in the person of the priest, this image diffuses and undermines earthly powers in favor of knowledge of and from God derived from a biblical text (though not this one!).



Fig. 4. Copper engraving by Jan or Caspar Luyken in Josephus's *Antiquities*, early eighteenth century. This plate is from the Dutch translation by W. Sewell (Amsterdam: Marten Schagen, 1732).

The Sotah in figure 4 is found in an edition of Josephus's *Antiquities* from the early eighteenth century, illustrated by Jan Luyken together with his son, Caspar (1672–1708). This scene abandons the Mishnaic details, adhering more closely to the biblical text, though perhaps hinting at some of Josephus's

10. In the Sotah roundel in the composite image, the husband is quite distinct from the (much smaller) crowd.

elaborations (*Ant.* III.xi.6). The ritual takes place in front of the biblical outdoor tabernacle—still quite grand!—in the wilderness, rather than at the Mishnaic (and, for that matter, Josephian) Jerusalem temple gate. The huge copper laver and the dramatically smoking altar appear behind the main action, but the depth of field is greatly foreshortened; even the craggy mountain (presumably Sinai) in the background appears relatively close. The writing desk and a shallow bowl with a hand broom stand prominently beside the high priest. The tabernacle floor dust is thus alluded to, but the men sweeping are gone. For Josephus, the dust was incidental: it was used ‘if any happened to be there’. Thus, for the artist, no action distracts from the main event. The viewer is virtually in the scene; we have replaced the crowd as witnesses to the event.

And a powerful scene it is. Though a few other figures (mainly priests) appear incidentally, the focus falls on three figures: the woman in the center, drinking from the cup; the high priest to the right, in front of the tabernacle curtain; and the husband on the left, with his back mainly to us. As in both Numbers and Josephus, the woman is fully clothed, with her hair loose and unveiled. She lifts the cup with both hands, alone in the middle of the scene, the focal point of male gaze from all sides. Despite the force of the male eyes turned upon her, there is nothing prurient about the depiction of the woman. If the earlier works presented her as proud but vulnerable, on the one hand, or guiltily tormented, on the other, here she has an almost classical regality. The way she lifts the cup is almost sacramental and, even more than in Luyken’s illustration for *The Hebrew Republic*, his women in *The Martyr’s Mirror* come to mind.

The composition of this scene contrasts significantly with that in the *Republic*. There, the high priest stood in the center, framed by the temple doorway and mediating the ritual implements of divine discernment at his one hand and the woman at his other. Here, however, the woman is in the center, framed by the divine mountain behind her, and also connected to it by the chalice-like laver in between, replicating the cup from which she drinks. The men on either side of her may gaze threateningly, but the priestly implements of altar and writing desk, at the outside edges of the scene, cede authority to the protective laver and mountain. The artist’s interest is significantly in the woman in her own right, reflecting Josephus’s own account which, while still caught in the sexual double standard, attempts to redress the problem of humiliating an innocent woman by providing that, after drinking the water, she will conceive a child and bear in the tenth month. Since in his account it is only God’s name, not the curse, that is washed into the water, he at least hints at pregnancy produced by the ritual itself. The Christian artist has subsequently taken the opportunity to depict a woman more heroic than guilt-laden, perhaps even of a type with the sexually dubious but ultimately ennobled women of Jesus’ ancestry.



Fig. 5. Copper engraving, artist unknown, in Calmet's *Bible Dictionary* (Paris, 1722). This plate is from the 1727 Dutch edition (Leyden: Samuel Luchtmans).

The Sotah illustration in Calmet's Bible Dictionary (Fig. 5), first published in 1722,¹¹ combines elements from the two Luykens, yet takes a different stance than either. Calmet's entry under 'Adultery' describes the legal proceedings and Sotah ritual in explicitly mishnaic terms ('This is what we learn from the Rabbins; these particulars are not in Moses'), so it is not surprising that the artist returns to the Luyken tradition. The reference to Luyken's *Hebrew Republic* engraving is fairly direct, with its crowd, dust sweepers, writing table, and prominent laver. The main ritual action, with the woman caught in the act of drinking, is likewise several visual planes removed from the viewer, behind the huge laver and also in this case behind the smoking altar. Hewing closer to the biblical text, though, the artist replaces Luyken's homey gossips with the altar, attended by priests, in the immediate foreground. Mountains in the distance place this scene at the wilderness tabernacle, though the later Luykens's sense of a divine mountain is gone.



Fig. 6: Calmet's *Bible Dictionary* (see Fig. 5), detail

This engraving takes up a full folio page and is beautifully rendered, with striking attention to facial expressions (see detail, Fig. 6). The husband is again more or less lost in the crowd, though he can be detected facing the ritual action. His facial expression and hand gesture convey anticipation, yet

11. First published in French, it was translated into English, Dutch, and German and various versions of it were often reprinted.

also uncertainty of the outcome. The men beside him gossip, perhaps as much about him as about his wife, but no one else in the crowd seems interested, including the several women. However we read these interactions, this artist continues Luyken's disinterest in the husband as a particularly sympathetic or righteously aggrieved character while at the same time removing any reference to the Mishnaic notion that women will watch and learn from their sister's degradation. Neither framing, lighting, nor composition cues the priest for special significance either. He stands between the woman and the writing table, but his face and hands both point to her, without any sense of ritual mediation. His face, with downturned lips and raised eyebrows, also seems to anticipate the next moment, though with more feeling—perhaps an expectation of awe-ful horror?—than does the husband. In general, the priests who are paying attention evince more concern, and more trepidation, than any in the crowd of laity on the other side of the action. The woman, hair loose but breast covered, is in the center of the scene, and she appears to drink with even more eagerness and conviction than in the later Luyken. Though her pose has lost that regal quality and she is not supported with compositional connections to signs of divine presence, she is presented as courageous, calm, and modest, as well as lovely.

Aside from the inherent artistry of the engraving, this illustration is important in two respects. On the one hand it provides evidence of the continuity of this Sotah visual tradition begun, somewhat accidentally, by Jan Luyken. On the other hand, it suggests a shift in the significance of the ritual. It lacks Luyken's implicit debate with Cunaeus about 'magic' (or, put in more pious terms, the possibility of divine action mediated through earthly elements), as well as his conviction about the role of the priest as its channel. The major force of the work comes instead from the finely wrought expressions on the figures' faces. This may be no more than a show of artistic virtuosity, yet it works to the woman's advantage. Though she captures the viewer's attention, she is not the center of shameful attention in the scene, and her own courage stands against her husband's anxiety and the priests' fear. Perhaps the point is that not God but her own innocence will protect her.

Later Developments in Sotah Illustration

The Sotah image in Fig. 7 was commissioned by Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672–1733) for his major work, *Physica sacra*, published in Augsburg and printed simultaneously in Latin, German, and French between 1731 and 1735. Trained in the natural sciences and medicine as well as theology and ancient languages, Scheuchzer was professor of mathematics and later physics at Zurich.¹² He believed in the Old Testament as a factual history of the

12. For a rich treatment of Scheuchzer's life and work as a scientist and religious thinker in Calvinist Switzerland, see Bernet (2003).

world and his project attempted to relate biblical events to the natural sciences, with the aim of proving the existence of God through science. More than four hundred elaborate copper plate engravings, executed by well-known artists of the day, depict in exquisite detail biblical narratives, locations, architecture, human anatomy, and flora and fauna.

Scheuchzer's discussion of the Sotah text walks a fascinating line between scientific argument and desire to affirm God's activity in the ritual. Though he is well versed in Jewish interpretation, and uses details from the Mishnah to describe the legal and ritual process, he rejects interpretations offered by 'some Jews' that the physical effects on the woman are caused by something poisonous in the water: as a scientist, he cannot but affirm that natural causes would have the same effect on every woman who drank, whether innocent or guilty. He is also astute enough to acknowledge the possible psychosomatic effects of a ritual among people who believe in magic, yet he does not believe this is the whole story here. The key is the dust from the tabernacle floor mixed in the water. The dust itself would not naturally make the water either bitter or harmful. God's work, then, comes in making the water bitter only for a guilty woman, and it is only bitter water that produces ill effects. An innocent woman will taste only sweet, ergo harmless, perfume. All in all, however, Scheuchzer is quite glad such practices have ceased. Scheuchzer's agenda of reconciling science and biblically based faith has no time for considering the experience of the woman who would endure the ordeal. The artist, however, seems to have more compassion.

This composition represents a break from the Christian Hebraist-related tradition we have seen so far. The ritual action takes place in the bottom half of the picture. A screen-like curtain, part of the curtain surrounding the tabernacle courtyard, separates the ritual's holy space from the wilderness beyond/above it (not visible in this detail). Scheuchzer had mentioned the rabbinic tradition that the ritual took place in front of 'all the people', and the artist obliges with a small crowd. Notably, though, since Scheuchzer did *not* mention the Mishnah's insistence that women view the event, and in contrast to earlier works, this audience is mainly women, all of whom are not only attentive but emotionally involved in the proceedings, apparently in support of the wife. Several lean toward her with sympathetic faces; one kneels with her face buried in her cloak; one faces us prominently, face toward heaven, with hands clasped in distress. Two children play behind the women, as if unaware of the gravity of the situation, but another reaches for and looks up at the distressed woman, beginning to share if not understand her emotions. Lament, not shame, accompanies the accused wife. As in three of the earlier works, the accusing husband stands in the shadows, bareheaded and mostly hidden by the altar.



Fig. 7. Detail of a copper engraving by J.A. Pferffel, in J.J. Scheuchzer's *Physica sacra* (Augsburg and Ulm: C.V. Wagner, 1731–1735). This plate is from a French edition (Amsterdam: P. Schenck and P. Mortier, 1733).

Even more than previously, the wife herself is ennobled rather than shamed by what she is forced to undergo. She stands proudly erect, statuesque, virtually as tall as the slightly stooped priest, turban and all. She stares down the priest, who appears a bit discomfited. He holds a bowl, but the woman has not yet taken hold of it. She seems in no hurry to do so, but also unafraid of it. Her hair cascades down her shoulders and back, and her breasts are unmistakably bared, for the first time demanding the viewer's gaze. She has become, in one sense, an object of male desire. Yet this new provocativeness does not descend into mere prurience, for several reasons. Partly it is a matter of her size and posture, along with her serene, powerful facial expression. Also at work is the classical style of her dress, calling to mind Greco-Roman goddesses or heroines, who often appear bare-breasted, as well as the presence of the lamenting women, who could come straight out of a depiction of the crucifixion. The artist, then, while true to Scheuchzer's interest in combining biblical teachings and the natural world, takes the sacramental quality of the Luyken's engraving one significant step further. Here the accused woman is no longer the worshipper but the one to be worshipped, revered as an ancient goddess in the humanist mode or as a type of Christ in the Christian one.



Fig. 8. Detail of a copper engraving by Clément-Pierre Marillier in his *Sainte Bible* (Paris: Defer de Maisonneuve, 1789–1804)

The Sotah is also illustrated in a French Bible (Fig. 8), commissioned and designed by Clément-Pierre Marillier (1740–1808).¹³ Marillier was best known during his lifetime for ‘courtly and slightly erotic’ illustrations of popular amorous poetry, but later turned to more serious subjects. His Sotah is one of 300 illustrations in a twelve-volume Holy Bible, published in 1789–1804. Remarkably, much of the work was done during the French Revolution, with Marillier living comfortably in Boissise, about thirty miles south of Paris, on the publisher’s advance for this work. From here he helped organize the national festivals that helped support the Revolution, an interesting occupation for a man producing Bible illustrations. Despite a wave of anti-

13. The biographical information is from the Grove Dictionary of Art.

clerical legislation enacted between 1789 and 1793, however, 'the earlier festivals almost always retained elements of Catholic ritual and ceremony to create an aura of pomp and pageantry' (Herman 2002: 125). Marillier's Bible illustrations reflect the untamed emotions of Romanticism, with its rejection of the rationalism and aristocratic norms associated with the Enlightenment, while retaining a neo-Classical design.

It is a world perhaps both Catholic and Romantic that we inhabit in this depiction of the Sotah ritual. The smoking altar is the central object, with a small and shadowed laver in front of it. All the action is directed toward the altar, with every gaze save one turned upward above it (the detail omits the mostly blank wall occupying the top half of the image). Three priests stand on one side of the altar. The high priest raises a plate with the barley offering over the altar, his face registering holy terror. A second is half-crouched, also awestruck. The third priest, who holds open a book with blank pages, looks at and seems to speak to the woman; perhaps he utters the words of the curse already washed off into the water.

The accused wife, lit with the same bright light as the high priest and the altar, stands on the other side of it. Two other women are behind her, one with her arms as well as her face raised heavenward. The husband, mirroring the priest opposite him, half-crouches beside his wife, prominent but in deep shadow, head and legs bare. Distinct from our other images, neither the husband nor the other women look toward the accused wife; all await word from on high. The husband's role here seems to be that of *agent provocateur*, the biblical *satan*, the accuser who incites God to action. The wife wears no veil, but her hair is modestly caught up in a cap and her breasts are not exposed. She stands, jug lifted, similar to her depiction in several of the earlier works. Here, though, the jug has either not yet touched her lips or has just been moved away from them: her head is tilted too far back to actually sip from it, looking even more directly upward than any of the other figures. Her lips are open—to drink? to pray? to scream? to worship? to swoon?

Marillier's composition, strong lighting, body language, and facial expressions create a moment of high drama that exploits the sexual tension inherent in the biblical text by the addition of an element of religious ecstasy. Our gaze is not so much on the woman as on the invisible, or not quite yet present, deity. With the figures we look up to the large open space above the action. The sense of shame we textually expect to attach to the woman is thus once more deflected, though we are not here asked to honor her for her own qualities. In a sense, though well covered, she is more objectified than in the other images. Her plight has become a vehicle for both divine revelation and extravagant, erotically charged but spiritually coded feeling on the part of the viewer.



Fig. 9. Engraving, artist unknown, in Cassell's *Illustrated Family Bible*, 1859–63

The last engraving (Fig. 9) is from the Cassell's *Illustrated Family Bible* (1859–63), which sold a half million copies (Rose 1974: vi).¹⁴ Like the Marillier, it is a Bible illustration and responds to that text alone; any reference to the Mishnah has been left behind. Here the husband, the wife, and the priest comprise almost the whole picture, with only two other priests in the left background, paying no attention. The burning altar stands to the right, but there is no writing stand or implements.

Though a Romantic emotionalism persists in this scene, Marillier's elevated passions have disappeared. It reflects both the naturalizing impulses of new historical awareness and the (still Romantic!) orientalizing characteristic of the period. The engraving returns to the experience of shame that we expect from the biblical text, but this shame is now conveyed viscerally, as the horror of the individual's exposure to him or herself, rather than as a matter of public attribution. Both husband and wife share in it. For the first

14. One other Bible illustration needs only brief mention. Harper's *Illuminated Bible* (1846), with its 1600 engravings, was widely distributed, but the large number and very small size of most of the images allows any given one to be lost in the crowd. Just the priest, the husband, and the wife appear here, but the conventions hold: the husband's face is shadowed and the modestly garbed wife's eyes are turned piously upward as she holds the cup.

time in these illustrations, we meet the husband face to face. The sense we get from the Marillier, for example, that he has unleashed forces beyond his control or benefit, is rendered here as the pathos of a concrete, individual human; he is a tortured, pathetic creature, seemingly at the mercy of unfolding events. He steps away from the interaction between his wife and the priest but his head is turned back, his distressed eyes nightmarishly hypnotized by the inexorable unfolding of the ritual. His hand pulls his cloak over his lower face, while his bare legs, in contrast both to the priest's long gown and his own covered mouth, bespeak his shameful exposure.

The depiction of the wife and priest places us precisely at v. 18 in the Numbers text. The woman holds the grain offering that the priest has placed in her hands, while he holds the earthen vessel containing the holy water and the dirt from the tabernacle floor. Almost delicately, with thumb and forefinger, the priest begins to pull the veil from the top of her head. Though she is fully clothed, there is almost a lewd feeling to this action, as if we are about to watch her being stripped. The focus is on the undressing rather than on drinking the word. The shame, and perhaps fear, in the husband's eyes is presented fully in the woman's turned head and downcast eyes. Her twisted stance, on one reading, is similar to that of the woman in the Surenhuys Mishnah, the only other one of all these images that evokes the woman's humiliation and fear. The pose could also be seen, though, in light of the orientalizing odalisque figures popular in this era, with the diaphanous covering of her bent leg also hinting at an exposure that reaches to the top of her thigh. Her shame is thus erotically charged, even though the artist leaves her guilt or innocence in question. As viewers, we may feel her pain, although even the sympathetic viewer can become a voyeur, and the artist draws us into complicity as well (cf. Exum 1996: 19-53).

Conclusion

The search for popularly consumed artwork is never a closed one, and I cannot swear that I have found all the Sotah illustrations that have existed, and in particular that there were no more after the Cassell's Bible.¹⁵ But I have offered here what I have been able to find, and these were more than I expected when I began my research. It means that many Christian lay readers over a 200-year period were exposed to imaginative and powerful visual representations of a biblical passage that they may otherwise not have lingered over, a passage noteworthy for epitomizing a particularly de-humanizing degree of sexism, even in a generally androcentric text. Much of the verbal interpretive tradition reinscribes this aspect of the text, precisely by the

15. Feminist consciousness has, in fact, produced a new burst of larger scale Sotah images in recent years, work which will need an essay of its own to consider.

inattention paid to the woman's plight as authors discourse on other matters, whether legal procedures, moral admonition, political unity, superstition, or the relationship of natural and supernatural causation.

The illustrators have on one level tracked these interpretive issues, while also reflecting other changes in religious and cultural sensibilities, whether Christian Hebraism, pietism, classicism, romanticism, or orientaling. Unlike their texts, however, the artists are not free to ignore the woman, and their choices with respect to her are often surprising. Only the Surenhuys and the Cassell's suggest her shame, and the latter does so in an emotionally complex way that also evokes our horror. There is otherwise a pronounced tendency to present the woman as a figure whose strength in adversity we might admire and which, along with the relative disinterest in her husband, reverses the textual bias toward her guilt with depictions that suggest her own sense of innocence. The later images are, however, more emotionally charged than the earlier ones, and the intimation of sexuality also increases, a factor that again weakens the woman in the Cassell's image, even as it more deeply involves the viewer in her fate.

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READING THE SONG OF SONGS AS A CLASSIC

David J.A. Clines

As a tribute to Cheryl Exum's abiding passion for the Song of Songs, I propose to discourse under this title on what makes a classic, on what it is that makes the Song of Songs a classic, and on—even if it is not a classic and even if there is no such thing as a classic—why we are better off reading it as a classic than not. I will propose that thinking of the Song of Songs as a classic moves one on to a higher plane of appreciation of this antique text, makes one a better reader and critic and scholar, and—just possibly—could actually improve one's love life. But I will begin somewhere that may be a little unexpected.

1. *Not Reading the Song of Songs as a Classic*

I will read the text along with some readers who are *not* reading it as a classic—or at least, not consciously reading it as a classic. They are for the most part reading it for the first time, they do not have much experience with classics, they know next to nothing about the Hebrew Bible, and they are on average 20 years old. They are my first-year classes of some years ago, who were one week invited to write 300 words in response to the following assignment:

What does the book do to you if you read it? (Be intellectual about this, not confessional!) Would it be different if you were the opposite sex?

You will recognize that what I was asking for was a reader response—an initial, rather unreflected response, an untutored response prior to any reading of authors or commentators on the Song of Songs, and prior to attending my course on the Song of Songs. I did not of course desire that students would cling to their first reactions to the Song of Songs, but I did want them to compose a written benchmark against which they could measure their more mature responses at a later date in their academic career.

You might have thought that students in a Department of Biblical Studies would automatically be reading the Bible as a classic, or even that anyone reading a part of the Bible would think they were reading a classic. Not so. I suspect that the very idea of a classic cuts little ice with those who think

they are already cool enough, and I certainly did not read any student responses of reverential awe for the status of the book. In any case, I had done my best, with my assignment, to have the class focus on *their* reaction, an invitation no member of the Me Generation will lightly refuse.

I do not myself often get the opportunity of reading the Song of Songs *not* as a classic, and so I found I had lot to learn from my students. If I was at times dismayed by their reactions, I was equally given to think furiously about how I could adjust and inform their responses in the future, and if I was saddened by how shallow their appreciation of the work sometimes seemed to be I was equally convinced that these were indeed real readers' real responses and equally challenged to explain and defend myself and my own evaluation of the book, if only to myself.

I have organized these readers' reactions to the book under a series of headings:

a. *Length*

Song of Songs doesn't have a great impact when read and towards the end of the book it becomes quite tedious.

It is not forbidden to say of a classic that it is long-winded. Yet if the Song is of a tedious length at 2500 words (1142 in the Hebrew), what would the *Faerie Queene* or the *Divine Comedy* be? Nevertheless, in the age of the soundbite, when a single line in a televised debate can make or unmake a President, in an age of the visual and the impression, 2500 is a lot of words, and this is a genuine reader's response, a response of our century. Perhaps one definition of a classic will have to be that it is a work that may demand a very comfortable easy chair and hours of free time.

b. *Structure*

Personally, I would like a narrative alongside this text to explain what is actually happening. I find it to be slightly confusing and annoying that what is happening is never clear. The book does not need to be explicit but simply to carry the story better than it does.

It is not forbidden either to say of a classic that one cannot be clear about what is going on. This reader, who knows nothing of classics, has come to the text with expectations of clarity and narrativity. When the expectations are disappointed the reader becomes confused and annoyed. The reader would like the text better if it were accompanied by a midrash or a time line or a scroll bar that commented on 'what is actually happening' and kept the reader up to date on the progress of the poem. Perhaps then we should say that a classic is a work—unlike pulp fiction, textbooks and airline timetables—that may well refuse a reader's expectations, even reasonable expectations.

To tell the truth, this reader is no fool: even mature and experienced readers of the Song of Songs sometimes tear their hair in desperation at not knowing 'what is going on', and would sell their shirt for the author's annotations on what in the Song is 'reality' and what is 'fantasy', for example (as if there were anything you could call 'reality' in this fiction). But, knowing that there are no such annotations, they do not conclude their critique with a complaint about that defect, but are more inclined to make the absence of 'clarity' part of the charm and the quality of the work.

c. *Sentiment*

When I first read the Song of Songs I thought, 'Yuck, this is so sickly sweet'.

I find their language very antiquated, especially that of the young man which is very 'cheesy' and clichéd.

I have a nose like the tower of Lebanon and like the Great Wall of China, but I do not consider it worthy of romantic poetry.

The book of the Song of Songs is one which I consider to be fairly tasteless and unnecessary ... a simple pathetic attempt at flattery from one lover to another.

The language used a large number of metaphors and, in my opinion, it goes over the top. The descriptions of the lovers are a prime example of this.

An experienced reader of the Song of Songs might do well to take seriously these reactions from today's youth. What is over-sweet, sickly, sentimental, cheesy and unnecessary is a matter of taste, and everyone is entitled to their taste. I do not by any means propose capitulating to the taste of 20-year-olds, but if we more mature readers of the classics believe ourselves to be in the business of educating the taste of more immature readers, we are going to need some help in overcoming that initial, hugely expressive, Yuck! Easier, perhaps, to turn disgust into adoration than to make a passionate poet out of a prosaic woodenhead; but the Yuck! remains a challenge.

d. *Intensity*

After reading Song of Songs I wonder what it must feel like to be that passionate and committed to one particular thing, not necessarily love but just one aspect of life; it makes me want to experience feelings that strong.

This reader, I submit, has already experienced the Song of Songs as a classic *avant la lettre*. The reader has found the intensity of the Song surprisingly attractive, even though the reader does not claim to have experienced that degree of intensity in life personally: they are still just wondering what it must feel like to be so passionate. In a remarkably bold and mature move,

the reader even goes so far as to read the Song of Songs as being, not primarily about love—despite all appearances—but about this matter of intensity, and so as having a reference and significance well beyond its ostensible subject matter. I would call this a truly original reading of the Song (I don't of course mean by 'original' one that no one else has ever had, or ever published—too narrow a definition—but one that the writer did not learn from someone else but which is worthy of being promulgated). It doesn't matter, at this point, whether this perception is 'right' or 'wrong'; I just like it when someone offers me an idea I can ponder on for somewhere between five minutes and the rest of my life.

e. *Panic?*

Images spring to mind of the later Romeo and Juliet story, where two people's love is so strong but banned from them. Here we feel the same kind of intensity and almost panic.

Here is another focus on the intensity of the poem, but with a special addition: 'almost panic'. The day I read this student's work I could think of nothing else than this wonderful (even if wholly flawed) interpretative key that phrase was offering to the readership of the Song of Songs. No one, to my knowledge, has ever seen *panic* in the intensity of the Song of Songs, but what if this reader is right?

What if the excess in the poem is, in some degree, hysterical? What if the desperate searching for the beloved is more a demented, unreasonable, uncontrollable lust than a fervent absorbing desire? What if the lovers are driven by *fear*—by fear of losing one another, fear that their love is unreal, fear that it is not wholly reciprocated, fear that love of this intensity cannot possibly last? What if it is a 'banned' love, one that is above all socially unacceptable, like that of Romeo and Juliet? Is the love in the Song of Songs then doomed, will it not then end in death? Is the Song of Songs an idyll, or is it a tragedy in the making? Is intensity of this degree desirable, or is it a danger? Has the history of interpretation of the Song of Songs been following a false trail, in applauding the mutual attraction of the lovers and in finding the lovers' union a consummation devoutly to be wished? Should it instead not have taken a cue from the 'fantasy' itself, from the lack of realism, from the terrifying sentence 'Love is as strong as death' (8.6—which must also mean that death is as strong as love), that this is an other-worldly love, which is not so much impossible as fatal in the real world? What would happen to our reading of the Song of Songs if its default intertext were Romeo and Juliet?

This is a 'strong' interpretation, I would suggest, one that cannot easily be forgotten, even if we do not 'buy' it. That 'almost panic' is a phrase with the potential to destabilize the interpretation of the Song of Songs.

f. *The Abyss* (?)

Much the same thought seems to have been in the mind of another reader, though in a more negative mode:

In reading the book I felt the sense of foolishness of being tied to some thing that is the only thing you seem to live for; it shows the notion of throwing yourself into the 'abyss', the unknown.

For this reader, the intensity of the Song and the total absorption of the lovers in one another are experienced as a 'foolishness', as the absurdity of throwing away all firm standing ground and 'throwing yourself into the "abyss", the unknown'. This reader shrinks from the intensity the former reader felt as 'panic' and invoked Romeo and Juliet to explain.

g. *A Love Poem*

When I read the Song of Songs I feel that I am reading a love poem.

It took me a long time to realize that this was not the naivety I first thought it was. The author of the comment does not mean that it is a poem about love (which would not be a very stunning observation), but that it feels like a poem written by a lover to a beloved. That is what this author understands a 'love poem' to be, I now believe. No one, of course knows for sure what the original intention or purpose or setting of the Song of Songs was, though a few ideas have become enshrined in the textbooks. No one, to my knowledge, however, has suggested that it was a poem written by a male lover to a female beloved—or perhaps by a female lover to a male beloved—with the aim of seduction or arousal of love. This, to me at any rate, was a new idea.

Here then is a reading that cuts across the generally accepted view that the Song is a *depiction*, a fiction in which there are two characters created by an artist who personally stands entirely outside the poem, the unbroken first-person speech and second-person address being merely literary devices. What if, to the contrary, we were to regard the poem as the composition of one of the lovers depicted in the poem, and delivered to the beloved as a love token? Or even that the poem, while being a literary fiction, has the form of such a love poem?

h. *Magic*

Song of Songs can be compared to a dreamy 50s Hollywood production, starring for example Doris Day where everything is just perfect and the key theme is the true magic of passion.

I find Song of Songs a beautiful poem which gives me the desire to read it in its original tongue ... its great emphasis on eros love in the most romantic of settings, the Middle East.

Roland Murphy, the learned *Song of Songs* commentator, does not, I think, refer to Doris Day, and Marvin Pope, his eminent equal, almost certainly did not think of the Middle East as the most romantic of settings (not a lot of people do these days). But what these readers who are not reading the poem as a classic are finding in it that the commentators cannot see, or else cannot bring themselves to say, is something about the mood of the poem, the mood induced by the poem. Magic is the word, and with it its associates, dreamy, perfect, true, passion, beautiful, desire, eros, love, romantic. Magic means spellbinding, and these readers I have just quoted have either fallen under the spell of the poem itself or are recognizing in it the kind of magic they have come to identify elsewhere. Already they are well on the way to reading the *Song of Songs* as a classic.

2. *What is a Classic?*

I will not be trying to compose watertight definitions of a classic, since perhaps being a classic is not a property of a text but rather of the shifting patterns of appreciation and esteem texts are held in by their manifold readers. I am not even sure that I think the idea of a classic is politically correct, which is, if anything, even more serious.

All the same, there are certain family resemblances among things that are spoken of as classics, and uncovering those will now become, for a moment, my task.

The Classic Car Club of America defines a classic car as

a 'fine' or 'distinctive' automobile, either American or foreign built, produced between 1925 and 1948. Generally, a classic was high-priced when new and was built in limited quantities.¹

Antiquity, rarity, value.

What of classic video games?

The following is a list of video games we consider 'classics' (most were made from 1979 to 1983) ... Classic games will generally sell for more money than other games of similar age.

Antiquity alone does not make a classic.²

On the other hand, being a classic is a status that may be attained in the course of time, at least for Tektronix instruments for measuring:

First, we need to realize that 'classics' were all once brand new and, therefore, not classics. But just getting old does not make a piece of equipment a 'classic' in my view. It also had to be something special during its prime. In

1. www.classiccarclub.org/definition.htm.

2. www.peterboro.net/~recroom/whatisclassicvid.htm.

my view, virtually all early Tektronix instruments were special ... Currently, I draw the line at those products introduced by Tektronix after 1969 ... they are not classics ... yet! Many of them will be, however. Some will never make 'classic' status, in my view.³

There is something else: beauty. A classic car must be 'fine', even oscilloscopes are called 'classic' when 'care and effort ... went into their design and manufacture'. And as for a yacht:

Most of us in the yachting scene know a genuine classic when we see one. She was built years ago when all yachts were things of beauty and grace with fine lines and acres of canvas. The survivors of that golden era are unmistakably classic.⁴

Beauty and grace, with fine lines, from a golden era.

More to the point is the essay by the novelist Italo Calvino, 'Why Read the Classics?', offering no fewer than 14 definitions, in a discursive and tantalizing style.⁵ I will boil down his points into five.

1. The classics, says Calvino, are books about which people say, 'I'm rereading ...', never 'I'm reading'. The more often you reread a classic, the more details, levels and meanings you appreciate in it. You don't tend to reread an airport thriller—the immediate effect is all.

2. A classic is a text that is always new, no matter how often you read it. Our youthful readings are often of little value because we are impatient, cannot concentrate, lack experience in how to read or experience of life itself. As we mature and return to our classics, each rereading offers as much a sense of discovery as the first reading.

3. A classic 'come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations', having generated a 'pulviscular cloud' of critical discourse around it, which readers do well to shake off. Introduction, commentary, critical apparatus and bibliography are a smokescreen concealing the work itself. 'Classics are books which, the more we think we know them through hearsay, the more original, unexpected, and innovative we find them when we actually read them.'⁶

4. A classic is a book to which you cannot remain indifferent, one which helps you define yourself in relation or even in opposition to it. It would not be desirable, even if it were possible, to shut oneself up to the reading of classics alone. In order to read the classics, you have to establish where you

3. www.reprise.com/ash/clients2/classic.asp.

4. www.antiguaclassics.com/00docs/00whatis.htm (for the Antigua Yacht Regatta 2000).

5. In *Why Read the Classics?* (trans. Martin McLaughlin; London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), pp. 3-9. The essay was first published in the newspaper *L'Espresso*, 28 June, 1981.

6. Calvino, 'Why Read the Classics?', p. 6.

are reading them 'from', 'otherwise both the reader and the text tend to drift in a timeless haze'.⁷ 'The person who derives maximum benefit from a reading of the classics is the one who skilfully alternates classic readings with calibrated doses of contemporary material.'⁸

5. A classic is a perpetual challenge to the values of the present. It is 'a work which persists as background noise even when a present that is wholly incompatible with it holds sway'. That does not mean that we read, or should read, the classics *for the purpose of* finding challenges in them; it is just that 'reading them is always better than not reading them'.⁹ 'While the hemlock was being prepared, Socrates was learning a melody on the flute. "What use will that be to you?", he was asked. "At least I will learn this melody before I die".'¹⁰

I have two more characteristics of a classic of my own I would like to throw into the ring. First, I suggest, a classic is a text you are willing to forgive. A classic may well not conform with contemporary standards of good taste, political correctness, clarity, structure, and the like, but that will not stop us reading it. An airport novel as rambling and chaotic as *Tristram Shandy* would be likely to get the heave-ho from our holiday deckchair, but with the classic we will persevere, and even make heavy weather of the holiday. A black and white Hollywood classic might offend every canon of feminist sensitivity but remain among the staple viewing of a refined thinker. We forgive a classic its flaws and even its outrages. And even if we cannot actually forgive our classic, we may suspend our judgment against it.

Second, a classic is a work that lends itself to being treated with irreverence. Especially if the classic status of a work is assured, there is no harm in being cheeky about it, and perhaps there is even something of a necessity so as to sustain our own sense of autonomy and resist to a degree capitulation to a universal consensus that threatens to make our decisions for us. Jokes about the Bible, for example, or reusing its language for comic purpose, as in the Wodehouse line, 'I was one of the idle rich. I *toiled not, neither did I*—except for a bump supper at Cambridge—*spin*',¹¹ do nothing to harm the classic status of the Bible, but rather confirm it.¹²

7. Calvino, 'Why Read the Classics?', p. 8.

8. Calvino, 'Why Read the Classics?', p. 8.

9. This is not to say that reading the classics makes you a better person; Cheryl Exum has reminded me of the remarks of George Steiner on this point: 'We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning' (*Language and Silence: Essay on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* [New York: Atheneum, 1958], p. ix).

10. Calvino, 'Why Read the Classics?', p. 9.

11. P.G. Wodehouse, *Leave It to Psmith* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1924), pp. 123-25 (124).

12. It is an old tradition to make fun with the classics: I think of the Hellenistic novel

3. Reading the *Song of Songs* as a Classic

So, with these pointers to some family characteristics of a classic, let us imagine what it would be like to read the *Song of Songs* as a classic. This is quite a hard task for a biblical scholar, since it is not in our training to esteem the works we comment on—at least in print.

As an example, I take the *Song of Songs* commentary of Roland Murphy, which is as fine a commentary as any you could hope to find on a biblical book. But I search high and low for any appreciation of the book approaching Calvino's characteristics of a classic. True, there is word of 'the marvellous theological insight that the *Song* opens up',¹³ of the *Song* as 'a crafted work of poetic imagination',¹⁴ but there is nothing in Murphy that is remotely as appreciative of the book itself as he is of Origen's third-century commentary on it, a work that he admires as 'an intellectual achievement of monumental proportions, a grand synthesis of exegetical reasoning, philosophical reflection, as theological vision'.¹⁵ Murphy, like most of us, has not been able to develop a vocabulary or a rhetoric that can appreciate the *Song of Songs* as a classic without sentimentality, exaggeration or embarrassing autobiography.

A second example is the Foreword to Robert Gordis's commentary.¹⁶ While the esteem and affection in which books are held are often a matter of fashion, he begins by saying, in this respect the *Song of Songs* is 'a shining exception. For over twenty centuries it has retained its appeal to men's [sic] hearts'¹⁷—which I would take to be an estimation of the book as a classic. But this remark is sadly undeveloped, and proves to be no more than an entrée into a discussion of the varying interpretations of the book that have been advanced over the centuries and the rightness of a literal reading of it. On the next page too we find the beginnings of an evaluation of the book: 'When the *Song of Songs* is studied without preconceived notions, it emerges as a superb lyrical anthology, containing songs of love and nature, of courtship and marriage, all of which revel in the physical aspects of love and reveal its spiritual character'.¹⁸ Yet this paragraph topic sentence does not

of Chariton, *Callirhoe* (2nd century BCE), where lines quoted from Homer amusingly give a heroic cast to the feelings of the all too unheroic protagonists of the novel.

13. Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Canticles or The Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), p. 103.

14. Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 91.

15. Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 21.

16. Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (revised edition, New York: Ktav, 1974).

17. Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, p. ix.

18. Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, p. x.

lead into an exposition of the lyrical qualities of the Song, but rather into the question of its acceptance into the canon of Scripture.

What then of the first four characteristics of a classic that I suggested above: antiquity, rarity, value, beauty? On all these grounds the Song of Songs is a precious classic. It is not the most ancient love poetry, but it is older than most classics; it passes the antiquity criterion with flying colours. It is a rarity, in Hebrew literature at least, since there is nothing like it, and if it did not exist no one would have imagined such a work for ancient Israel. It is a rarity to the extreme of being unique, and that inevitably makes it valuable—for our understanding of Hebrew life and culture, for our appreciation of the possibilities for literature and sensibility in ancient Israel. But its chief value lies in its beauty, which cannot easily be exhausted. Were one to compose a *waṣf* to the Song of Songs, such an itemized list of the beloved's parts as we find more than once in the Song, one would have to fasten in turn upon the extraordinary match between the subject and the language, upon the modernist and impressionistic swirl of its profligacy of images, upon the reticence and, at the same time, the suggestiveness of its erotic depictions, on the delicacy of its sketch of female subjectivity, on its leisure together with its intensity, on its imagination that could construct a best of all possible worlds, a world in which time stands still, in which nothing *happens* but everything *is*—and yet more.

Perhaps it was too much to ask of a *commentary* on the book that it should read the book *as a classic*. And yet Francis Landy, though not exactly writing a commentary, manages to do just that. Critics, he remarks, 'have been quick to note the beauty of the Song, but few have made any attempt either to analyse it, or to consider it an integral part of its composition. They ignore it as purely decorative, and turn to more serious matters.'¹⁹ On the contrary, he writes, 'Beauty in the Song is an all-pervasive quality, that one cannot separate from the love of the lovers, the world they inhabit, or the language in which the poem is written. The three levels signify each other ... [T]heir beauty is contagious, passes from one level to another. Lyricism persuades us to accept the possibility of this beauty, because we imagine it emanates from a supreme inspiration.'²⁰ The whole book is an exposition of the beauty of the Song, and one word in what I have just quoted shows he is reading it as a classic: 'us'. 'Lyricism persuades us to accept the possibility of this beauty.' If we do not say, 'We' (or 'I' at least), it is hard to see how we can be talking about *reading*. Reading as a classic implies inserting the reader into the frame, abandoning talk of the Song as an objective external reality and talking

19. Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Bible and Literature Series, 7; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), p. 137 (2nd edn, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011, p. 131).

20. Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, p. 138 (2nd edn, p. 131).

instead about readers—not indeed about readers in general, or pushing the Song into the shadows cast by readers, but talking about readers engaged in this one project, reading the Song of Songs, and reading it as readers read classics.

Now the role of the reader becomes even more explicit when we turn to the characteristics of a classic in the eyes of Calvino. In the first four characteristics I outlined above, there was no place given to the viewer (there were no *readers*, of course, for yachts and cars). Being a classic was an intrinsic quality of the object, even if the object acquired the status of a classic only after the passage of time. But for Calvino, a classic is a book *we* are rereading, a book that is always new, no matter how often *we* read it, a book *we* find original and unexpected, a book to which *we* cannot remain indifferent, a book that challenges the values that surround *us*. We might summarize him: ‘No classic without a reader’. He is in no danger of subsuming the book beneath the reader, but he cannot imagine a classic that is not being read.

But what can we say of readers reading without descending into embarrassing or exhibitionist autobiography (like ‘what the book means to me in a very real way’)? It is not very difficult. We could do a survey of readers, which would be informative but time-consuming; or we could look at what readers of the Song of Songs write about the book, or (just as good) at what they fail to write, and that will tell us how they are reading.

1. Are readers rereading the Song of Songs—for pleasure, for themselves, and not just for advancement in their career or to fill a slot in a lecture series? Is there any evidence that people are reading, and rereading, the Song of Songs not just because it is in the Bible but because they like it? Yes. It would be hard to gainsay the evidence of the enormous bibliography in Pope’s Anchor Bible commentary, for example. Whether it was the most popular Old Testament book in the Middle Ages would be hard to calculate, but it would certainly be a candidate for that honour.

2. Is the Song of Songs a text that is always new to its readers? I cannot speak for all readers, but need I look further than my esteemed colleague, who published her first paper on the Song in 1973²¹ and is self-evidently finding new things to say about it today?

3. Calvino would have us shake off the ‘pulviscular cloud’ of critical discourse about our classic, and read the book for ourselves and for itself. Who can deny the force of that demand? And yet who has not found that the critical discourse is not necessarily a ‘smokescreen concealing the work itself’ but precisely our route into appreciating the originality, the unexpectedness, the innovation of the book? Alongside smokescreen commentaries,

21. J. Cheryl Exum, ‘A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs’, ZAW 83 (1973), pp. 47-79.

there are revelatory commentaries, which turn us back to the work itself, and ensure that we truly savour its originality.

4. Calvino's fourth characteristic of reading a classic is one that I cannot with such confidence assert is commonly true of contemporary readers of the Song of Songs. To read a classic, he says, you have to establish where you are reading it 'from', you have to alternate classic readings with 'calibrated doses of contemporary material'. The traditional reading position for biblical scholars has been an allegedly neutral one, in which the reader's 'position' is neither here nor there. That is a view that is changing rapidly, as the social location of the interpreter becomes more and more a subject for scholarly interest. *Reading from This Place* is the title of a couple of recent volumes in biblical criticism,²² and the slogan for an even wider recognition of the indispensability of situating ourselves and our readings. I am seeing too some evidences of 'calibrated doses' of contemporary material as the role of the Bible in contemporary culture becomes a recognized topic within biblical criticism; but we have yet a long way to go to meet Calvino's criterion with much success.

5. Calvino wants to stress that a classic is 'a perpetual challenge to the values of the present'. That has always be true about biblical texts as classics, since those who have preserved them have usually regarded them as enshrining truths that call the values of the present into question. Those today who foreground the mutuality of the couple in the Song as a contribution to contemporary discussion of relations between the sexes are reading it in just that way, as are those who speak, like Gordis, of its 'healthy-minded attitude toward life and love'.²³

I would like to add, however, the converse of Calvino's point: that also the present is a perpetual challenge to the values of the classic. If we alternate our contemporary reading with our classical reading, as Calvino himself recommends, we will not always find ourselves in sympathy with our classic texts, but will sometimes at least want to challenge them from the perspectives that we ourselves adopt and that we share with our contemporaries.

This is why I would like to add to Calvino's characteristics of a classic my definition of a classic as a text we are willing to forgive. Do we need to forgive the Song of Songs, I need to ask, and, if so, *can* we? I mention just three points at which I think the Song needs to be forgiven—and at which I myself am more than happy to do so, though others may feel differently.

22. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from This Place*. I. *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*; II. *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

23. Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, p. x.

a. The way that even while it is representing mutuality in love and giving more prominence to female subjectivity than any other text in the Bible, it is sustaining the patriarchal social order and (on the whole) the image of female passivity, from the first verse, where she wants *him* to kiss *her* (1.2), not the other way around, to the last, where she (apparently) is waiting for *him* to come to *her* (8.14), not the other way around.²⁴

b. Its creation of a world that does not mesh with the realities of its society. It is no crime that it is not social realism, that it is a fantasy; but it might as well be a depiction of life on Mars for all its connection with Israelite life. For example, the lovers are surely not married, for otherwise she would not be living in her mother's house and they would not be having to make excursions to the countryside for *al fresco* sex; on the other hand, if they are not having sex, what for goodness' sake *are* they having? Now, no matter how common premarital sex was in ancient Israel, it is hard to believe that it was extolled to the degree it is in the Song of Songs. So there is something fishy about the Song.

c. And finally, as I have argued before, its implication that eros can compensate for social oppression is a grave fault by the standards of today. Even if the lovers are wholly and absolutely on an equal footing at this moment, for how long in the life of an Israelite woman may such a happy state of affairs be presumed? It will be downhill all the way for the female lover of the Song once chap. 8 is over. She will remain forever the social inferior of her lover, she will be admired throughout her life for her fertility rather than for any bodily perfections, which will probably never again be mentioned, she will be for the most part excluded from male society and spend her life producing children and bringing them up—if she does not die prematurely in childbirth.

And finally, does the Song of Songs lend itself to irreverence? Let us see.

The male lover's logic is very odd, do you not think? In chap. 2 we see him arriving at her house with a hop, skip and jump over mountains and hills. There he is, peering in at the windows (what is wrong with the front door?), till she comes within speaking distance. What would we like him to say? How wonderful she is, how happy he is to see her? Perhaps how much he would like a nice cup of tea after all that strenuous bounding over the hills? No, this Romeo waxes all meteorological and *National Geographic*:

24. Admittedly, she imagines herself actively looking for him in the streets (3.1-4; 5.6-7), but I take both these narratives as dreaming wishes (as is clear in 5.2) rather than as depicted action (as against Exum). She imagines herself kissing him in the street (8.1), but only on fulfilment of an impossible condition (that he were her brother). Her most autonomous action is to invite him to go and spend the night in the countryside (7.11-12).

for now the winter is past,
 the rain is over and gone.
 The flowers appear on the earth;
 the time of singing has come,
 and the voice of the turtledove
 is heard in our land.
 The fig tree puts forth its figs,
 and the vines are in blossom;
 they give forth fragrance (2.11-13).

Has he spent all that effort just to give her the lowdown on the seasonal news? To be sure, he calls her 'my love, my fair one', but he seems to be paying a lot more attention to the weather than to her.

What then do you think of his line of reasoning when he is knocking at her door in the night time (this woman seems to have unique domestic arrangements for ancient Israel, since her bedroom door opens straight onto the street). Think of a line you might use under such circumstances. A line to follow 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one'. What would be a good 'motivation' for this nocturnal request? What seductive language will get her out of her bed in the middle of the night? Something romantic, do you think, like

for my head is wet with dew,
 my locks with the drops of the night (5.2)?

This man needs a towel, not a woman. Also, he is fibbing. Dew, I am reliably informed, forms when moist air is in contact with a colder object, such as the ground that has lost its heat by radiation. Now since the heat of his head is 98.6° F (unless he is suffering from a fever, which seems not unlikely, in which case it is higher still), it must be a very warm night for spring if dew is forming on his head.²⁵ If his head feels wet, it will be unevaporated sweat, not so romantic as dew.

Now the question is: Does the Song of Songs survive such mockery? Without question. The Song survives all wrong-headed and wooden commentary, it survives all the readings that over the centuries have maintained that it is certainly not about the very thing it is so evidently about. It is all the stronger for its survival of attempts on its life and its virtue. Whatever is said about 2.11-13 it remains the most beautiful song to nature in the Hebrew Bible.²⁶ A mere handful of images of spring are enough to create,

25. Murphy reminds us that the night dew 'is assuredly very heavy in Palestine' (*Song of Songs*, p. 170), and Pope that 'the heavy Palestinian dew is bone-chilling before the sun comes up' (Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Anchor Bible, 7C; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977], p. 512).

26. As Wilhelm Rudolph called it (*Das Buch Ruth. Das Hohelied. Die Klagelieder* [KAT 17/1-3; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus (Gerd Mohn), 1962], p. 134).

with great evocative power,²⁷ an unforgettable sense of the joy and beauty of the new season.

And as for 5.2, perhaps the irreverent reading may not be so far from the mark anyway. Murphy for one thinks there is 'a deliberate exaggeration here; it is clear that this is not the real reason for seeking entrance'.²⁸ The young man fears, or pretends he fears, that he might be refused entrance if he says too candidly why he really wants to come in. Perhaps he deserves the teasing response he gets from his lover, who pretends that she can't come to the door because she has no clothes on and she doesn't want to get her feet dirty. Then, for their teasing, they both deserve what happens when she does get to the door: he is not there! Or rather, nothing happens, for it was all a dream anyway: she was asleep but her 'heart' was awake (5.2). The irreverence of the reading may have put us in touch with the teasing, playful, misdirection of the lovers.

4. *But Is There Such a Thing as a Classic?*

At the beginning I hinted that, despite the title of this paper, maybe there is no such thing as a classic. Even worse, that there *should* be no such thing as a classic.

I certainly want to claim that being a classic is not an intrinsic quality of a text. Classics are made classics by their readers, and it is possible to imagine one generation overturning the decisions of a former generation about which works should be regarded as classics. No book will necessarily be a classic in perpetuity.

But there is a more serious question. It is whether the very idea of a classic has outlived its usefulness, whether the concept of a classic should now perhaps be declared politically incorrect. Even if it is readers that assign the title of classic to literary works, the title adheres to those works as if they owned it. New generations are told by their elders that such and such works are the received classics, that they should be spending their time with these books and not some others, that they should be allowing their present values to be challenged by a certain selection of works that have already been chosen. And chosen in the interests of a hegemonic class, who have had the authority to declare certain works classics and others not.

The situation is very clear when it comes to the Greek and Latin classics, which in many circles are still what is understood when the term 'classics' is used. Their worldview, their ideology, their philosophy, and their notions of gender relations, were for many decades the horizon of a privileged English

27. Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 140.

28. Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 170. Michel Fox points out parallels.

education, for example, and their influence is still quite visible (I am speaking of the United Kingdom, where I live as a somewhat bemused alien) in public life, in state religion, in the education system, in the letters columns of *The Times*. Their values are not values freely adopted by the English people or the leaders of public opinion; they are values imbued in the elite by their schooling, and not open to sustained or systematic critique.

Whatever the works referred to as classics may be in one culture or another, at one time or another, collectively they constitute a canon, a prescribed and recommended list of books. It does not matter very much if there is a multiplicity of canons or if canonical lists are fuzzy at the edges. It is enough that the concept of an authorized canon flourishes (even if no one can say definitively which particular books are in and which are out). The notion of a canon implies an authorizing body, such as a democratic and multicultural society can only find anathema.

I conclude that the day of the classics is approaching its end, and that we would be better off without the concept or the term. And yet I would hate the day to dawn when no one was treating books in many of the ways I have outlined above as characteristics of classics. Will we not always treasure certain books from the past, find them beautiful and rewarding, be refreshed by them and challenged, find ourselves returning to them with delight and surprise? We will recommend them and suggest them to others, not asserting a universal acknowledgment of them, not prejudging their superiority over other works that are treasured by other people, not despising those who find no pleasure in our books. If we do that, I shall not be surprised if the *Song of Songs* long remains one of those former classics that no longer bear the name, classics, shall we say, *après la lettre*.

TEARS IN JERUSALEM:
DAVID'S RESPONSE TO THE DEATH OF ABSALOM IN
2 SAMUEL AND TOMKINS'S 'WHEN DAVID HEARD'

Andrew Davies

My interest in the Bible began long before I could have dreamt it might become my profession. Growing up attending a church that had no service book, I often found myself short of reading matter in what always seemed like eternal sermons, and as a result, the Holy Bible (Authorized Version) became something of a solace to me. Like the preaching, at the time, most of the Bible went over my head. I missed its subtleties and much of its significance. But reading it kept me entertained, particularly when I realized that I could find for myself in this book some of those great stories that I had learned at home and in Sunday School—epic tales of heroes, of teachers, of prophets and kings, which enticed me, enthralled me and kept drawing me back for more. The Bible became to me, one might say, a Godsend.

As childhood became my early teenage years, I started to understand rather more of what I was reading (now in the newly released NIV translation!), and I also started to dig a little deeper. As well as those fantastic stories that I had loved in infancy, I realized that the Bible had some more unusual passages too. I learned some mildly amusing biblical jokes and puns, fell upon one or two passages and stories that didn't seem very 'religious' to me at all, was shocked that I found the odd swear word here and there, and discovered a few rather 'quirky' and strange verses (the Old Testament, in particular, seemed to be replete with them). I wondered why 'go down, baldhead' was such a terrible insult to throw at Elisha, and why it would fittingly result in the mauling to death of 42 small boys by a she-bear.¹ And I smiled more than once at the Authorized Version's translation of 2 Kgs 19.35, which describes the state of the Assyrian army at the end of the siege of Jerusalem in the vivid but somewhat peculiar phrase: 'When they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses', and often thought how waking up only to find you were dead would be a somewhat unfortunate experience.

1. 2 Kgs 2.23-24.

There was, however, a particular verse I remember being bemused, rather than amused, by. 2 Samuel 18.33 (19.1 in the Masoretic text) describes David's reaction to the news of the death of Absalom in this way:

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate,
and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son
Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!²

I remember thinking—as I still do today to a certain extent—what a curious sort of phrase that is to report. Of course, I could understand, or at least imagine, David's sorrow and anguish at the loss of a dearly loved son and heir. But repeating 'My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom ... Absalom, my son, my son!' in that way just seemed to me to be inane, undignified babbling, and plain unnecessary. Now perhaps the king in his grief, desolate and inconsolable, might have stumbled over his words in such a way—words, after all, are difficult to manage at the best of times and not of much comfort in tragic situations. But why record what David said in this way? Could the biblical author not just have written 'my son Absalom' once and been done with it? The repeated use of these phrases seemed at one level to be inept, simply poor writing; and, in other ways, it appeared to intrude into what should have been a private moment anyway, even for a mere character in a narrative.

I think I now understand something of the reason for this duplication of words and phrases, though. In a sense the repetition is intended to be heard as 'inane babbling'—it is simply, as Alter describes it, a 'horrendous stutter of grief' which provides the bitter climax of this whole 'tale of anguished conflict between father and king in the same man'.³ I wonder if the biblical writer is just struggling to find a way to communicate to us something of the depth of emotion felt and expressed by David in one of the most miserable moments of the great king's life. Arguably, the author uses some of the more vivid lexical resources available in this attempt as well as the syntactic device of repetition. The verb רגז, for instance, which the KJV translates in this verse as 'much moved', is used elsewhere to describe earth tremors as often as for individuals shaking with emotion (and that emotion is fear, in most other places—this episode appears to be the only instance in the Hebrew Bible where the motivating passion for such trembling is sorrow). Perhaps the passage illustrates for us that it is just not all that easy to express verbally how truly heartbroken David is here, shaken to the core and indeed torn apart by the sheer anguish of the news he has just received.⁴

2. Cf. also the similarly agonized wail of 2 Sam. 19.4.

3. Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. xxiii.

4. Pamela Tamarkin Reis, 'Killing the Messenger: David's Policy or Politics?', JSOT

Of course, this is not the first time David has lost a son, and his reaction here now is described in terms that are quite different from his response to the death of Bathsheba's baby son in 2 Sam. 12.20. In that instance, he 'got up from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped; he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate.' In comparison to this comparatively measured response to an even of such great sadness, Absalom's death certainly seems to elicit a more impassioned and emotional reaction from David, despite its context in the narrative.

Furthermore, when David heard that Amnon had been killed, according to 2 Sam. 13.31, his initial reactions were to rise from his seat, tear his garments, and prostrate himself on the ground; only later, with the return to court of his sons from their brutally interrupted little day trip, does the ceremonial mourning begin, although we are told that the entire family then 'wept with an exceedingly great weeping' (בכו בכי גדול מאד, v. 36). After he discovered that Absalom had been killed, however, David did not attempt to contain or defer his grief to a more appropriate space or time. The biblical author describes him as weeping and mourning Absalom's death 'as he was going' (בלכתו)—in other words, the king's sorrow is expressed in full public view. This time he did not wait to return to the palace to mourn but hurried instead up to the roof chamber above the gate (עלית השער) (he had been 'sitting between the two gates' at the time these events had been recounted to him, according to 2 Sam. 18.24). Presumably David seeks to hide in this way in the hope of preserving what remained of his dignity and saving himself from further embarrassment in public, but it has the unfortunate side effect, for which Joab later rebukes him, of making the returning Israelite army feel like cowards and traitors as they returned home through those very gates to the sound of the king's mourning from the chamber above them. David could hardly have chosen a less public private place to mourn and wail. Here too our author's precise choice of words is undoubtedly significant; Pamela Tamarkin Reis has highlighted the 'linguistically odd tripling of *al* in the phrase *vaya'al al aliyat* ("And he went up upon an upper place")',⁵ and certainly this triple repetition, particularly in conjunction with the three uses of Absalom's name and David's fivefold acclamation of him as 'my son', has to be understood as wilful and significant, and certainly not as a result of the dubious competence I had formerly ascribed to the author. Together, the choice of words and their order (such

31 (2006), pp. 167-91 (184). Her overall argument in this article, that 'David's reaction...is an exaggerated charade of grief calculated to move and win over Absalom's followers', is perhaps unduly cynical, but nevertheless pretty convincing; however, none of the musical reinterpretations of this passage appear to take this line.

5. Tamarkin-Reis, 'Messenger', p. 184.

as it is) and repetition, phonically as well as syntactically, seek to express disorientation and confusion. In such a state of disarray, perhaps all David's mind can focus on is Absalom, his son who is no more, and of the need to get away from that place of sorrow as quickly as possible. As David plummets down, down, down emotionally, he ascends physically, up from the messengers, up from his entourage and up from the cruel world which has deprived him of his beloved, if treacherous, son. It is unfortunate that such ascent only serves within the narrative to make the depth of his descent more widely evident.

I suggest, then, that the somewhat jumbled repetition here attempts to portray for us a depth of agony such that we all hope few will ever have to endure. Personally, I am far from convinced that it succeeds in that task; I fear the outcome serves to baffle and bemuse the reader as much as it bears witness to David's sorrow. Yet even a cursory consideration of the cultural reception of this short passage down the centuries is enough to demonstrate that the text has clearly been perceived as having significant emotional resonance and relevance beyond its immediate context for many. 2 Samuel 18.33 has never appeared in the lectionary cycles, yet it provides the text for some of the most admired and frequently performed anthems of the Anglican liturgical tradition. There are at least six well-known choral settings of this comparatively obscure and slightly strange text, all titled 'When David Heard'—at least four from seventeenth-century England, by Thomas Tomkins (to which we shall be turning our attention shortly), Thomas Weelkes (1576–1623), Robert Ramsey (c. 1590–1644) and Richard Dering (c. 1580–1630); and then in modern times we have pieces by Anglo-Australian Jennifer Fowler (1982) and a stunningly beautiful and musically innovative treatment from Eric Whitacre (1999, in 18-part harmony in places).⁶ And those are just the more prominent compositions in a rather crowded field. Why such interest in a comparatively obscure couple of sentences? Surely this text does not attract attention for its vivid imagery and articulate word play.⁷ While the death of heir apparent Prince Henry in 1612 would have provided some context and motivation for British composers of the day to write about the passing of a sovereign's son, that event does not in itself and on its own explain the fascination with this particular text at that specific time or since.⁸

6. An interesting cataloguing and musicological discussion of these and a range of other settings can be found in J.D. Spilker, 'The Context and Tradition of King David's Lamentations' (MMus Thesis, Florida State University, 2006).

7. 'Absalom', for what it is worth, is an incredibly difficult name to set in a more sombre piece of music because of its natural syllabic rhythm.

8. See on this point I. Godt, 'Prince Henry as Absalom in David's Lamentations', *Music and Letters* 62 (1981), pp. 318–30.

Perhaps, then, our passage has invited the attention of composers so frequently because it is a text that longs for more than it has the capacity to offer, which therefore desires and invites completion—and, perhaps at that, a measure and means of completion that mere words are unable to provide. For all that authors can use the tools at their disposal with consummate skill and to good effect, to persuade us, their readers, to ‘particular perceptions of reality’ (in Kathryn Pfisterer Darr’s lovely phrase),⁹ texts can only refer to those experiences. Words on the page are only able to take us so far. They can describe emotion, offer us the opportunity of relating to and identifying with the sufferer...but they cannot actually deliver that emotion to us. I think music can. Our text certainly invites empathy; but it cannot, by itself, engender it. Again, I think music can. Outside of the musical context that this text seems to invite, it never delivers, in my estimation, and, actually, I wonder if ultimately it is impossible for it to deliver its true emotional potential. I wonder if the passage has been set musically so frequently simply because anyone truly worthy of the call of the composer who should happen to encounter this verse and be able to relate to it, perhaps because of their own personal experience, is bound to find within the text a lack that they cannot resist attempting to fill. Maybe music is the best tool available to us for the interpretation of this passage, then; let me reflect for a moment on why that might be the case.

Music and Biblical Interpretation

It is clearly no radical assertion to observe that music has immense emotional power. When Augustine memorably labelled it *ars bene movendi*, ‘the art of fine movement’, I am sure that the motion he had in mind was emotional and spiritual rather than physical.¹⁰ Martin Luther accorded music the same kind of power when he famously suggested that music ‘alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely a calm and joyful disposition’.¹¹ Surely many of us would readily admit it holds such power over us. It does so partially because it functions at such an immediate level. Language, spoken or written, needs decoding (and many have highlighted so well for us the challenges that poses). Sound, however, is a directly sensory experience. It might not communicate the same thing to each person, and in that sense still might need a measure of interpretation, but it can be experienced and

9. K. Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision and the Family of God* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), p. 11 and throughout.

10. Augustine, *De musica*, I, 3, 4.

11. G.G. Krodel and H.T. Lehman (eds.), *Letters II* (Luther’s Works, 49; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 428.

engaged simply by being heard. Sound has an essentially anthropological function; it is, as Iegor Reznikoff has claimed, 'much more primitive in our consciousness than the level of speech' and 'is related to our deepest, that is to say, to the very first levels of consciousness'.¹² It is therefore vital that in seeking to interpret and comprehend musical sounds and 'exegete' compositions, we acknowledge the foundational, elemental nature of sound, and recognize that sound—in particular the precise ordering of sound for a rhetorical and creative purpose in what we call 'music'—affords us the opportunity of encountering elements that are both beyond and deep within ourselves. While texts too may invite us to that sort of encounter and create the opportunity of its origination, they cannot actually create it in quite the same way that music can. At the same time, the emotion generated by musical sound can lack context, significance and depth without a supporting narrative of some sort to anchor and quantify it. Therefore, I would suggest the emotional power that is contained within the text can sometimes only be expressed adequately by such a primordial means as through music, and a fuller appreciation of the pathos and power of any musical setting requires an awareness of its supporting narrative context.

If this claim were true, then it would suggest that any study of the cultural reception of biblical narratives in music should give attention to both text and sound if it is to deal with the data comprehensively. Of course, the study of biblical themes and imagery in music is by no means a new concept, either for biblical scholars or for musicologists.¹³ Generally, however, such studies have neglected to take into account what is for me the fundamental element of any musical setting of a biblical text, and that is the actual sound world created by the music itself. Consult any study of the Bible in film, for instance, and you will find detailed discussion of elements such as framing, panning, low shots, high shots, and point of view; but most studies of musical settings of the Bible tend to deal with texts more than they discuss technicalities. I would like to see what the notes and sounds themselves can tell us.

In order to do that effectively, perhaps I need to take a moment to discuss methodology, therefore, and the various tools that I think are open to us in

12. Iegor Reznikoff, 'On Primitive Elements of Musical Meaning', *JMM: The Journal of Music and Meaning* 3 (2004–2005) [www.musicandmeaning.net/issues/showArticle.php?artID=3.2], sec. 2.2.

13. To offer just a few quick examples: see H. Leneman, *The Performed Bible: The Story of Ruth in Opera and Oratorio* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007); J.W. Rogerson, 'Music', in J.F.A. Sawyer (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 286–98; A. Davies, 'Oratorio as Exegesis: The Use of the Book of Isaiah in Handel's Messiah', *BiblInt* 15 (2007), pp. 464–84; D.W. Rooke, 'On the "Handel-ing" of 1 Maccabees: Thomas Morell's Use of Biblical Sources in the Libretto of Judas Maccabaeus', *SJT* 57 (2004), pp. 125–38.

any kind of 'musical exegesis'. It seems to me that a reader-response approach—particularly an Iserian, phenomenological approach which still permits a measure of determinative power to the text or piece of music under consideration and acknowledges the role of the author or composer in its generation, but focuses forthrightly upon the significance of the artefact as perceived by its recipients—is ideally suited to any sort of cultural criticism, and that is the technique that I plan to adopt.¹⁴ Contemporary biblical scholars are accustomed to asking ourselves both *what* texts mean and *how* they mean, and treating a piece of music as a work of biblical interpretation entails addressing those same questions to the musical sounds themselves. That is not quite as straightforward as might at first appear. As Reznikoff has noted, 'It is indeed interesting to ask why we feel so strongly the need to speak of meaning in music and at the same time, in trying to express it cannot give except in a few obvious cases any clear meaning at all, nor even express this need in words'.¹⁵ Music does not communicate, does not 'mean', in the same way that language does. There is no chord that means 'I love you', no melody that can tell you from which gate your aeroplane leaves ... though I could easily show you a rhythm that communicates fear (the *Jaws* theme music, for one) or 'whistle a happy tune' for you. There are certain types or arrangements of sounds that communicate certain ideas or feelings or can be used to elicit certain images or concepts. Some of these responses are culturally conditioned but others are more inherent to the very nature of the sounds, and skilful composers and performers will know both the difference, and the way to use sounds to elicit the response they desire. They have a number of tools to help them communicate their message. Each individual sound has the qualities of volume, duration, pitch and timbre, and when the sounds are used together, then we need to take into account the factors of melody (the diachronic arrangement of notes to produce a tune), harmony (their synchronic arrangement to produce a chord), rhythm, tempo, tonality and texture. All those elements can be combined to create a world of sound that interprets and elucidates the world of text. Let us examine how one composer did exactly that in his setting of our text.

Thomas Tomkins (1572–1656): When David Heard

The great Welsh renaissance composer Thomas Tomkins was born in St David's, Pembrokeshire in 1572, the son of the cathedral organist there;

14. I have argued this case more thoroughly in *Resoundings: Reading the Musical Afterlives of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, forthcoming).

15. Reznikoff, 'On Primitive Elements of Musical Meaning', sec. 2.2.

young Thomas was a chorister, and then learned his father's trade, serving as the Organist of Worcester Cathedral for a full 50 years, from 1596 to 1646, before the cathedral organ was destroyed by the Roundhead army after they conquered the city during the English Civil War. From 1620 onwards he combined that responsibility with his duties as a member of the Chapel Royal, the elite troupe which provided choristers and instrumentalists for worship services at the various royal chapels (such as St George's, Windsor), and he was appointed to the prestigious office of organist to the chapel in 1621. He wrote the music for Charles I's coronation, but was narrowly beaten in the race for the most important of all English musical postings, Composer of the King's Music, in 1628. Today, Tomkins is best known for his church music, which includes five full service settings for the Anglican liturgy and over a hundred anthems (many of which were published posthumously in 1668 in the collection *Musica Deo sacra* by his son Nathaniel), and many of them are used in cathedral services to this day particularly in the Church of England.¹⁶

I describe Tomkins as a renaissance composer advisedly, for, although he was composing well into the seventeenth century, he was stylistically conservative to the point of being dated even in his own lifetime. Perhaps proud of his heritage as a pupil of the great William Byrd, his music, for all its beauty, looked back to the work of his master rather than forward, and failed to reflect the new Baroque musical language that was rapidly becoming the *lingua franca* of his times. Certainly, the anthem I want to consider here has rather more in common stylistically with Palestrina than with Bach, though chronologically he stands midway between them. *When David Heard* was probably first published in 1622 as part of Tomkins's major collection of madrigals, entitled simply 'Songs'. Peter Phillips describes it as 'one of the supreme examples of late renaissance composition, a highly expressive blend of polyphony and more harmonic writing, of dissonance leading to consonance as David seems at last to come to accept the reality of his position'.¹⁷

A quick comparison of the text of the anthem with the AV translation of the passage is instructive.

16. For an interesting, if somewhat dated, short summary of Tomkins's life and contribution which offers analysis of his general style and of some key works, see B. Rose, 'Thomas Tomkins 1575!–1656', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 82 (1955–56), pp. 89–105, which was presented to celebrate the tercentenary of the composer's death.

17. Peter Phillips, *English Sacred Music 1549–1649* (Oxford: Gimell, 1991), pp. 186–87.

<i>KJV</i>	<i>Anthem</i>
And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, 'O my son Absalom My son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!'	When David heard that Absalom was slain, he went up to his chamber over the gate, and wept. nd thus he said. 'O my son, Absalom, would God I had died for thee Absalom my son'.

It is therefore obvious and noteworthy that, while in other respects the two texts are pretty much identical, Tomkins's setting (along with many other similar settings of the verse) begins with a phrase that is not part of the biblical text: 'When David heard that Absalom was slain'. Interestingly, this introductory phrase 'when David heard' appears just three times in Samuel, and on each of those occasions it is associated with a death; directly with those of Nabal (1 Sam. 25.39) and Abner (2 Sam. 3.28) and more obliquely with the demise of the king of Ammon in 2 Sam. 10.7. As the first line of the anthem, however, this clause serves a number of useful rhetorical purposes. First, it establishes some sort of context for the forthcoming lament. If the anthem had begun with 'The King was deeply moved' or some such sentence more closely reflecting the biblical text, then there would be no explanation within the anthem itself of the cause of David's grief. The altered phrase offers something of a potted summary of previous events. This contextualization is an artificial one, of course; it fails to explain that the reason for Absalom's death is quite simply his treachery—treason, even—and overlooks the fact that, according to the biblical text, David never did actually hear that Absalom was slain, but drew the inference himself (see 2 Sam. 18.31-32). Even the very word 'slain' carries semantic and emotional value far beyond phrases such as 'has died' and 'was killed', implying perhaps a more unfortunate and possibly unlawful manner of death. There are two further smaller changes in the anthem text: it is now *his* chamber over the gate that David ascends to, making it a more private place than suggested in my earlier analysis; and then Tomkins removes 'as he went', which might be seen as meaning that David waited until he was out of public view before he began to mourn. Furthermore, though the way I have presented the text above makes it seem that the anthem makes less use of repetition, in reality entirely the opposite is true, because Tomkins repeats each of David's phrases a number of times and passes back and forward between the voices, dramatically and musically emphasizing the striking reiterations of the biblical text.

But what of the musical notes themselves? *When David Heard* is set in C minor, which later came to be commonly associated with funeral music in the classical era and beyond.¹⁸ The anthem is written for five-part unaccompanied choir (SAATB); the lack of accompaniment should give the piece (if well performed, at least) a very pure (almost angelic?) tone and allow for more flexible tuning which can both increase the bite of Tomkins's many suspensions and dissonances and emphasize the consonance of their ultimate resolution. The anthem is mostly in 4-4 time, though there is a brief, temporary change of time signature to 3-2 toward the end of the piece, and it runs for 69 bars, which equates to approximately 4m 30s to 5m in performance.¹⁹ For my purposes, the piece divides neatly into seven sections in terms of both musical and lyrical content.

1. When David heard (bb. 1-8)
2. He went up to his chamber (bb. 8-16)
3. And thus he said (bb. 16-22)
4. Oh, my son (bb. 23-31)
5. Absalom my son (bb. 31-48)
6. Would that I had died (bb. 48-58)
7. Absalom my son (bb. 57-69)

The phrases, clearly, do not divide up into the neat four- or eight-bar units beloved of the classical era, and for that matter the section breaks do not even occur neatly at the end of a bar. The only clear pauses occur at the transitions from sections 1 to 2 and 3 to 4, where they are suggested by the text as much as required musically. Progression between the other sections happens somewhat more fluidly, and, particularly in the case of the juncture of sections 6 and 7, the new lyrical and musical idea is sometimes put forward by one or more voices while the others are still finalizing their previous theme, which helps to retain the musical and emotional momentum of the piece. A full musicological analysis of the work is neither possible nor desirable in this context, but there are a number of interesting and important features of the anthem which serve, in their own way, to interpret the biblical account and give us some insight into Tomkins's understanding and appreciation of the text.

18. C minor is the key, for instance, of Mozart's *Maurerische Trauermusik* (K. 477), the second movement (*Marcia funebre*) of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony (No. 3; Op. 55) and Chopin's funeral march, Op. 72 no. 2.

19. I have worked in the preparation of this paper with two recordings of the anthem: those by the Tallis Scholars directed by Peter Phillips (*Thomas Tomkins: The Great Service* on Gimell Records [1991]) and by The Sixteen directed by Harry Christophers (*Renaissance: Music for Inner Peace* on Decca [2005]).

It is worth observing in the first instance how effective the opening section of the anthem is. Somewhat unusually for a scene-setting passage, since they usually serve to establish boundaries, key concepts and ideas and orient listeners to the topic under consideration, the first phrase of *When David Heard* is all about disorientation. It envisages a shocked and horror-struck David who has just heard the tragic news, and it tries to recreate his emotions for us in at least four different ways.

In terms of harmony, Tomkins quickly establishes the piece in C minor, only to 'take it for a walk' immediately into other related keys. In just eight bars and sixteen melodic notes he ventures from C minor through C major, F major, Bb major, G minor and ultimately rests on G major. It is as if he is determined not to allow us to settle, but wants to disturb our sense of tonality, direction and 'home'. Melodically, most of the movement in all parts is by step, backwards and forwards, and the soprano line in particular gives the impression of 'wobbling' somewhat back and forth between two or three notes, as if it does not know where to turn. That insecurity is made both worse and more obvious because there is no bass line in this section, which, correspondingly, means there is no depth or weight to these few bars and that they are left with little sense of certainty and security underpinning the melodic vicissitudes of the other parts. The most disorienting feature of these bars, though, is the first alto line, which comes in two beats ahead of the others, and stays ahead, dragging the other lines onward and taunting them to catch up. The accent is continually thrown forward and this disturbs the synchronic flow of the music.

Even the straightforward narrative description of sections 2 and 3 is not without its musical interest; there is some interesting mirroring and 'painting' of the words there as 'he went up' is set to an ascending phrase and 'over' soars, in the soprano line, to a high F, and the disorienting effect of one musical part running fractionally ahead of the choir as a whole is continued with the words 'and wept' (and exaggerated; the repetition moves from being two beats out to just one as both alto voices separate from the other lines).

Section 4 starts to recount David's words for us: 'O my son'. The major musical interest here of the work is both melodic and harmonic. The tenor, second alto and first alto, entering one at a time in quick succession, all start on the same note (G above middle C) with very similar melodic patterns but while the tenor and second alto step down, the first alto part rises, giving the effect of the one 'G' note splitting apart into three and portraying the breaking of David's heart. The same theme is then taken up in almost a fugal manner by the soprano line, and then just a beat later by the bass two octaves below—the tenor leaps in another beat after that, and all five parts pass the theme up and down, backwards and forwards between themselves (the word 'son' appears some 30 times in just nine bars) building up the

tension and torment before a suspended resolution ends the section. If disorientation is the theme and message of the first part of the work, then here the anguish is palpable.

That distress is both prolonged and exacerbated by the introduction of the name 'Absalom' into section 5, and by the rhythmic and melodic interest which grows more complex and vivid as the section develops, stabbing the name 'Absalom' deeper in with each poignant repetition. Note timings tend to be shorter in this section—quavers and semiquavers predominate instead of the longer sustained notes of the first half of the anthem—though they lengthen again to permit the harmonic progressions to become even more complex as Tomkins makes a brief foray into the cognate keys of F minor and then G minor. Somewhat more distant keys are hinted at too as the composer passes a short ascending phrase to the name 'Absalom' between all five voices, which he uses sequentially to powerful effect, culminating with a soprano high G which falls emphatically on the first beat of bar 45 on 'son' (a key word, clearly, and one which is emphasized still further by the rapidity with which it falls away, as the soprano line, having built to this climax in movement by step, immediately drops down a fifth before descending further.

With the onset of section 6, the texture of the piece changes somewhat as initially the first alto part alone takes up a new line, 'Would God I had died for thee'. This is treated in an informal fugue as the other parts take it up, with musical emphasis clearly thrown on the word 'God' in that it is both the highest note of the phrase and the only note not reached by step—the leap to this note in the second appearance of the sequence in the soprano line is striking, particularly since it reflects an octave leap to the equivalent note in the tenor line just two beats before. The deity, certainly in Tomkins's thinking, is the intended audience of David's expression of regret here as he seeks a measure of closure.

Indeed that resolution is to be found, musically at least. Section 7 fittingly draws the piece to a close, picking up the threads of earlier motifs; softening the harmonies and gradually moving them from predominantly minor to major chords; slowing the pace of the piece with long sustained notes in the bass; and establishing a firm and distinct C major as the key for the final bars of the piece by slow repetition of the high tonic or 'doh' note in the soprano over continuing motion in the altos and tenor. Though the composer gives us no performance directions, many performers have pulled back substantially both on volume and tempo at this stage to allow David's sorrow to fade gently away into the distance.

In this sense, therefore, Tomkins moves beyond the place where 2 Samuel 18 leaves us, with David still in trauma, and offers us a glimpse of the David of later in 2 Samuel 19, with an ultimate resolution on the homeliest of all chords, a rich and resonant C major. Tomkins has moved us successfully

from disorientation, through anguish and deep, agonized distress, to tranquility and finality—though even this is briefly disturbed again by a slight interruption in the first alto line. The final chord progression is from F major to C major, forming what is known as a ‘plagal cadence’, the traditional harmonization of ‘amen’ at the end of hymns and prayers in the Christian tradition, and this musical allusion adds to what was already a deeply spiritual moment.

There is, of course, so much more that could be said about this anthem, let alone the other musical settings of 2 Sam. 18.33, but I hope these few observations have demonstrated that it is may just be possible to succeed musically where texts have...well, perhaps not failed, but certainly under-achieved. In my estimation, the biblical author has struggled to emphasize the depth of emotion demanded by the events described, but has clearly offered enough to arouse the interest and fascination of composers since, and many of them, including Tomkins, have risen admirably to the challenge of drawing out the true pathos of the events the Bible describes. More generally, I would suggest that this example suggests there is something both very elementary and very elemental about the power of music. It speaks to, and beyond, our deepest emotions—it is therefore, for most of us at least, the natural port of call for us in times of trouble, national, corporate or personal. There are times when a narrative simply will not do, and in those circumstances, music has so much more to add to the text than ambience. This is why we never have been, and never will be, short of musical settings of the Bible. On top of everything else they seek to communicate, biblical texts are vehicles for emotion too, and music can help convey this at a more fundamental level, as a powerfully elucidating commentator.

READING THE TALE OF JOB*

Michael V. Fox

How seriously are we to take the Tale of Job, by which I mean the Prologue together with the Epilogue? The current consensus is: not very. The Tale is said to be a folk tale with naïve, orthodox, simplistic assumptions that must be overridden in favor of the more sophisticated poetic body of the book. There we find the book's true meaning. This meaning, as scholars have almost universally agreed since Matitiahu Tsevat's 1966 article, is that the world lacks a divine moral economy in which deeds are met by appropriate and commensurate rewards and punishments. The God who created this world is amoral, or worse.

I disagree with this interpretation, but my present purpose is to focus on the Tale itself. I will argue that the narrative frame of Job is meant to be read with full seriousness and is determinative for the meaning of the book.¹

The Tale is not as simplistic as has usually been supposed. The author of the book, it is claimed, is using the Tale as a mask of naïve piety even as he ironically winks to the sophisticated reader. According to Kember Fullerton, an early adherent of this reading, 'The *pious reader* would see in the Prologue the suggestion that suffering came from God and would be content with that, i.e. with a purely religious or, better, theological explanation. The *thinker* would see that this is no real explanation' (Fullerton 1924: 132). David Clines, more subtly, argues that there are two voices in the Prologue, a sophisticated one and a naïve one. There is, however, a certain circularity in deciding which components to allocate to each voice. In any case, the result is still to discount least the surface claims of the Tale (1985: 127-36; 1989: 9 and *passim*).

The prevalent means of neutralizing the Tale is to read it as irony. The basic move in detecting irony is the recognition that the author could not

* This essay is offered in honor of Cheryl Exum. Her keen and original insights, deep scholarship, and vivid writing make all of her books and articles a pleasure to read and ponder.

1. It is true that, as Edward Greenstein says, '... the insights into God and God's ways that we discover in the prose tale are never really contradicted by anything one reads further on and may, in fact, be reinforced by what we read' (2009: 339). We differ on what these insights are.

really have meant *this*; he must have meant *that*. We must flip the meaning on its back. In the case of Job, the relevant irony must be what Wayne Booth terms 'stable' (1974: 1-31, esp. 3), because once the ostensive meaning is flipped, it must remain there for the rest of the book. So what is supposed to signal the ironic intention of the Tale?

The following arguments for ironic reversal are derived largely from the writings of Edwin Good (1973, 1992), James G. Williams (1971: 231-55), David Robertson (1973), Katharine Dell (1991), Athalya Brenner (Brenner 1989), Yair Hoffman (1981, 1983), and David Clines (1985; 1989: 9-30 and *passim*).

1. The manifestly legendary, if not ludicrous, quality of the story. Brenner emphasizes legendary exaggerations in Job's wealth, his great old age, the beauty of his daughters, and, above all, the extremity of Job's piety, as marking legendary fiction (1989: 40).

2. The character of Job. The Job of the Prologue is said to be too pious and patient to be believable and too unlike the Job in the rest of the book to be credible, and nothing prepares for the change in his character in chap. 3. Athalya Brenner calls Job's religiosity 'almost a parody of faith rather than a climactic manifestation of it' (1989: 44); Curtis calls it 'almost a caricature of undeviating piety' (1979: 510).

3. The character of God. In the Tale, God is anthropomorphic, popular, and earthy. In the poetic parts he is transcendental, glorious, and abstract (Hoffman 1981: 164).

4. Theology. The Tale affirms retribution, which other parts of the book supposedly repudiate. The restoration of Job in the 'happy ending' (as the Epilogue is often called) especially violates all that has gone before.

First of all, the far-fetched, 'legendary', character of the Prologue does not invalidate its deeper truth claims. Micaiah ben Imlah's description of a heavenly court scene (1 Kgs 22.19-22) is not meant as reportage, but he is entirely serious in using it to show the inevitable outcome of Ahab's war plans. Kafka does not intend the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa into a cockroach to be viewed as a silly tale meant to divert the naïve from the keen satire that follows. James Clerk Maxwell did not intend to distract the naïve when he imagined a demon guarding a trap-door in a partition to allow only fast molecules through.

Maxwell's demon interests me not only because he is a beady eyed zealot like our Satan, but because he is also an example of a *thought experiment*, in this case serving to modify the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Kafka's tale too is a thought experiment. Thought experiments allow us to analyze strange and difficult realities by stripping them down to essentials, catching them at the extremes, and describing them schematically. Their role is to remove distractions and make us focus uncompromisingly on the core issue. So too the Prologue of Job lays down a thought experiment that explores

what happens when a man exemplary in piety, blessed copiously in family and worldly goods, has his good fortune ripped from him unjustly by a just God. All these premises, including the last—paradoxical—one, are essential to the ensuing story. I will treat the other supposed markers of irony in a sequential review of the Prologue.

Prologue

The Prologue speaks in the voice of the omniscient narrator, and this voice will introduce the others. The narrator, speaking as the author, has an authority that even God cannot override, because God too exists in the world constructed by the narrator. With what Newsom rightly describes as ‘simple language, conceptual clarity, and redundant structures of narrative and moral authority’ (2003: 83)—which, by the way, also describes most of biblical narrative—the narrator lays down the book’s premises.² Interpreters tend to cherry-pick the ones they want to maintain, but they are all valid and in force throughout the whole book.

At the beginning of the book we are taken to an obviously fictional realm, a time outside of history—the ‘once upon a time’ realm—and outside of space—in the heavenly court. We are introduced to Job, who was pious in the highest degree, an Edomite Yahwist no less!—almost an oxymoron.³ The extremity of his piety must be authentic. If it were not, the friends would be right in their assumption that he must have done *something* wrong. This assumption, though wrong, is in fact more reasonable than Job’s superlative and unflagging piety.

Still, even if we accept the premise of Job’s piety, it does not feel natural. Job is too aloof from normal experience. We can feel sympathy for him at this stage but not empathy. Empathy will begin when the rage that he *should* feel starts to pour forth. Then he becomes one of us. This, I believe, is the author’s tactic. We first see Job as a puzzlingly perfect character too distant from human normality to be anything other than a spectacle, certainly not a

2. Wayne C. Booth, who has famously explored the scope and workings of irony, uses the opening of Job as a key example of authoritative presence: ‘With one stroke [Job 1.1], the unknown author has given us a kind of information never obtained about real people, even about our most intimate friends. Yet it is information that we must accept without question if we are to grasp the story that is to follow ... We could never trust even the most reliable of witnesses as completely as we trust the author of the opening statement about Job’ (1983: 3-4).

3. John Day (1994) marshals the arguments for a putative Edomite location. Day finds four mitigating factors intended to make the identification of the hero with the detested Edomites acceptable. It seems to me, however, that the discomfort of the identification is intended. Job is a thought experiment and thus taken to the extreme. His being an Edomite is a paradox and a challenge to expectations.

representative of humanity. Then we suddenly hear him giving vent to words of rage and protest, expressing what we would feel in words more powerful than we could ever utter. Then, and only then, Job starts to stand for *us*, by which I mean the reader constructed by the author.

Job's piety is not the total of his psychology. We are shown a man who is incessantly calculating, holding strongly to a retributionary theology and seeking to employ it to control his fate. Thus his prophylactic sacrifices for potential flaws of his family. This does not prove that he held to a strict retributionist theology, but it does show him at least playing the odds, expecting a reward for virtue, worrying about punishment for faults. Still, Proverbs' promise of *טַהוֹרָה* for the righteous is not fulfilled in Job.⁴ He is not at ease, as he testifies retrospectively about himself in 3.26: 'I was not at ease or quiet; I did not rest, yet agitation came'. Even now he is not unaware of the fragility of human destiny. His fear of Yahweh is fear *sensu stricto*. Given what will ensue, it must be said that he is not naïve. Nor is he exactly mistaken.

Job is prosperous, rich in property and persons. He has a lot to lose. At the very start we see God rewarding the faithful. The causal connection between Job's righteousness and his prosperity has been disputed (Cooper 1990: 67), but it is in fact assumed by the conjunction of the statements in vv. 1-5, which is most naturally construed as consequential. The connection is also presumed by God's implicit concession that Job's piety may be motivated by divine protection. We can hardly suppose that this protection had nothing to do with Job's virtue, of which God is well aware. And when God complains that the Satan incited him to devastate Job *הַנֶּחֱמָה* (2.3), he shows that Job's suffering is unwarranted and, further, that most suffering is presumably *with* cause. God rewards his servants, as any reasonable ruler does, if he wants obedience.

Good behavior is reinforced by punishment as well as reward. The Satan has been going about observing human behavior. As Tur-Sinai (1967) notes, the Satan is an agent modeled on what the Persians called 'the king's eye[s]', an imperial secret agent or inspector.⁵ The purpose of the Satan's activity is to report disloyalty, what we usually call sin, for punishment.

Yahweh seems to expect that the Satan will have found little good to report, for he takes the initiative and boasts of one sure example of human virtue. 'Have you taken note of my servant Job, for there is none like him on earth?' (1.8). Yahweh radiates pride in his faithful. Indeed his own honor is at stake, for what kind of a king would he be without loyalists?

4. See Prov. 1.33; 15.16, 17; 17.1.

5. Herodotus 1.114.2, in the singular. See N.H. Tur-Sinai (1967: 38-45 [40]). This identification does not depend on Tur-Sinai's unlikely derivation of *שָׂטָן* from *שׁוֹט* 'wander'.

The Satan goes right for Yahweh's weak spot, namely his hopes for human loyalty. The Satan does not accuse Job of anything. Actually, he accuses *God*, for it is God who has created the conditions that produce the results that please him: 'Are not you the one who hedged him about?' (1.9). The Satan says—or, rather, implies—that Job is susceptible to a *potential* flaw: the failure of his loyalty if it ceases to be rewarded. If this is true of Job it is true of everyone. The Satan goads Yahweh into an experiment—not a wager—that will cause vast harm, one that is without warrant, at least not in Job's behavior. In other words, it is unjust, and God admits it.

Why does Yahweh give in? He could give the Satan a well-deserved rebuke, as he does in Zechariah. The reason is that the Satan is probing God's vulnerable spot. The Satan knows how to play to vulnerabilities. Some persons have an unbridled lust for sex, some for wealth, some for power, and the Great Tempter of later mythology can offer them these. Yahweh not only wants but seems to need human righteousness, defined as loyalty to him and him alone, in thought and in deed. The entire Hebrew Bible testifies to this need. Yahweh demands human loyalty and enforces the demand, often ferociously, often to his own pain. It is a matter of honor. He is not certain that he is getting it because he is not entirely omniscient. So the terrible test must go forward, obliterating property, lives, health, and status in the process.

'The God of the story', Clines says, 'is more "human" than many would care to admit' (Clines 1989: 22). But all interesting gods are human, in mind if not in body. And Yahweh's humanness does not cease after chap. 2, contrary to the notion that the anthropopathic God of the Prologue is replaced by the incompatibly transcendent deity of later chapters. Perhaps in the friends' minds God is a distant, mechanistic abstraction. But for Job—sometimes—God is an erratic, implacable and even unhinged foe, an Inspector Javert with limitless power. When Yahweh does appear, he comes down to earth in a storm and converses with Job, if not literally face-to-face at least person-to-person, and he exhibits a craftsman's pride and affection toward his handiwork, notably in his description of Behemoth, Leviathan, and the war horse. This is also the God of the Tale.

So Yahweh turns Job over to the Satan, who progressively strips him of all he has. Note how the Tale narrates the events from Job's perspective, via the reports he receives. The issue, for now at least, is not the wrong done to Job but how it will affect him. Though Job and his friends will soon be obsessed with the issue of God's justice, God and the Satan are focused on human reactions. This is a book about humans.

Job endures the loss of his possessions, human and otherwise, by declaring, 'Naked I came forth from my mother's womb; naked will I return there. Yahweh has given, Yahweh has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh' (1.21). Job does not interpret his fate as retribution. God gives and takes

away, sometimes inexplicably. This grants God a legalistic, though not really convincing, exculpation for what happens between the two termini. Job does not deny retribution, but he recognizes that good and bad fortune cannot be reduced to that principle.⁶

When Job holds to his innocence, the Satan demands a more stringent protocol: Job's own person must be attacked. Beyond that God cannot go, because if he kills the lab rat the experiment is off. Smitten by skin disease, Job sits in the ash heap scraping himself. This is not mourning, just misery.⁷ Then, at his wife's provocation, Job asks, rhetorically (and rather coldly) 'Should we accept the good from Yahweh and not accept evil?' (2.10b). There is no suggestion that this disaster is punishment, even wrongful. Retribution there may be, but sometimes good and bad fortune just come and go and need not be rationalized.

Job's friends come from afar to comfort him. It must have taken weeks if not months for them to receive the news, to coordinate their trips and to make the journey. They do not recognize Job at first, but when they do, they weep in dismay. They sit by him in silence. They are true friends, offering the most genuine comfort, their silent fellowship—Job himself will say that

6. Rick Moore (1983: 20) observes that the Prologue does not assume strict retribution. When Job says, 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not receive evil?', he assumes a theology without strict retribution: 'We see, therefore, that the poetic dialogue, in its stand against a theology of retribution, is *not* pitted against the prose narrative, as many have maintained' (20). But I disagree with Moore's claim that this is an 'admission of capricious rule' (20). God has his reasons.

7. External expressions of misery resemble mourning practices (which include sitting on the ground, as Job is doing), but Job is not in ritual mourning, at least not for the dead. For (1) he did not begin this behavior when his children died (though perhaps the reader would assume that he and his wife undertook ritual mourning at that time), but only after his physical affliction began. (2) He is still in the dust and ashes when his friends arrive, which must have taken months. A normative mourning period is not specified in the Bible, but narratives speak of periods ranging from less than a day to thirty days, with seven days the most widely attested (Olyan 2004: 35). (3) Job never bewails his children. Though we may assume that he is grieving their loss, the loss he expressly and extensively laments is of his status vis-à-vis God and society. Job is humbling himself in an expression of shame but not repentance.

Non-penitential petitionary mourning practices are associated with self-affliction (e.g. Dan. 10.12; cf. v. 2) or debasement (Ps. 35.14; 44.26; 2 Sam. 13.13, 19 [with the use of ashes]; 19.3-4; Jer. 9.18; Ezek. 7.18). See Olyan 2004: 34.

Job's skin disease complicates interpretation of his behavior. A leper takes on mourning practices but differs from mourners by obligatory social isolation, and he has no comforters (Olyan 2004: 107-109). (According to Lev. 13.18-23, שחין may or may not develop into צרעת, commonly translated 'leprosy'. Fohrer [1963: 101] argues that the poet of the dialogue understands Job's disease as leprosy.) Job's friends sit near him to comfort him. He is socially isolated not because of ritual impurity but because people find him disgusting (19.13-20).

silence would be his comfort (13.15)—and they do not deserve to be called ‘friends’ in scare-quotes, as they often are. But seven days after they arrive, Job cracks.

Chapter 3

The change in Job’s attitude occurs within a silence, in the space between the prose tale and the poetic dialogue. Some think that the change is so abrupt as to make the two sections incompatible and thereby to force a further ironic discrediting of the Prologue. In fact, no more need be said to explain Job’s outburst than to consider what he has been through. Still, the change is not without preparation. We need not imagine Job sitting in pious meditation all this time. Perhaps we are to picture his friends’ silent presence as allowing him at last to open up and pour out his pent up grief and anger. I note this headline from the *New York Times* of 15 February, 2010: ‘Haiti Emerges from its Shock, and Tears Roll’.

The change in Job is deep but does not sever him from his earlier self in a way that renders the Prologue retroactively naïve or unbelievable. Hoffman says that ‘The poetic speeches present him as a rebel, daring to criticize the ways of God bitterly, while in the Prologue he appears as an obedient, submissive person accepting his suffering willingly’ (1981: 163). Yes, but we aren’t supposed to stop reading with chap. 2. Job changes, and he’ll change again. Newsom says that ‘Though it [chap. 3] would certainly not count as “cursing”, the prose tale could not easily accommodate Job’s uttering something like the lament in Psalm 13’ (2003: 63). Perhaps; but the author *does* place something of the sort immediately after the Prologue, something much more vehement, in fact. Where else could he put it?⁸

Genre shift has been added to the arguments for ironic discounting of the Prologue. According to Athalya Brenner, ‘the prose/poem contrast is deliberate; and that can only mean that the contrast itself is the message’ (1989: 38). Newsom believes that though certain genres are mutually compatible, ‘the didactic prose tale and the wisdom dialogue are too sharply at odds about the relation of speech to truth for this to be the case’ (2003: 24). But genre shift proves little. There is certainly no shock or irony in the move from Exodus 14 to the Song of the Sea or Judges 4 to the Song of Deborah. Moreover, in Wisdom Literature a narrative frame often brackets very different genres, as in Anchsheshonqy and Ahiqar, both of whom, perhaps not incidentally, are the victims of an injustice. And as for the move from resignation to rage, compare the way that Jeremiah’s expression of joy in

8. We need not assume that the middle of the original folk tale was a continuation of Job’s pious resignation. After all, 42.7 is evidence that God can at least tolerate complaints and accusations.

God's word in 15.16-17 is abruptly followed by a protest to God for having been a deceptive stream (v. 18).

The friends view Job's complaint as theologically intolerable and demanding rebuttal, but we need not share this view. Job's complaint is extraordinarily intense, but it is of the same sort as the grievances of Jeremiah⁹ and hardly more bitter than those in Lamentations or Psalms 89 and 44.¹⁰ God will later seem less upset by Job's complaints than the friends do now. The complaint itself is, in traditional terms, legitimate, and similar complaints in Jeremiah and the Complaint Psalms are never renounced or repented of.

I am not saying that the Prologue flows gently into the Complaint without shock. But is a book like this supposed to avoid shock? Job's complaint is an abrupt but credible sequel to the Prologue. Without the Prologue and the premises it lays down, the book could not proceed.

Theophany

But it does proceed, with Job's angry demand for justice and the friends' dogmatic insistence that he must be receiving it even now. Then God appears.

The Tale of Job is my topic, and I will not attempt to interpret what is bracketed by its parts. I have addressed this in an article (Fox 2005) and will develop my arguments on another occasion.

In brief: contrary to the now-traditional interpretation of the Theophany, I do not believe that God is intimidating Job. He makes no threats and does not 'trample' Job in a storm, as Job had expected (9.17; cf. 9.4), but only chides him for speaking in ignorance and challenges him to debate. God shows Job respect by trying to convince him of something. In the Theophany, God says nothing that denies a moral order. In a few places he even affirms it, as when he asks, *האף תפר משפטי תרשיעני למען תצדק*, 'Would you even repudiate my justice, condemn me so that you might be justified?' (40.8). God possesses *משפט*, which cannot mean moral indifference. But he is not making a case for justification.

9. E. Greenstein (2004) has shown that the author of Job drew directly on Jeremiah here and elsewhere, while making the borrowed theme more extreme or surreal.

10. Psalm 44 protests God's abandonment of Israel in battle in spite of Israel's loyalty. 'We are reminded of Job's protestations of his innocence and his refusal to accept his friends' explanation that his suffering was due to his sins... We have also an example of how the author in the biblical text is trying to cope with suffering, not explain it' (Martin 2001: 20, 21). 'Suffering', Martin observes, 'can be the consequence of faithfulness to God, something one bears "for the sake of" God and God's service' (Martin 2001: 31). This is expressed in Ps. 44.23a, 'Because *for you* (עליך) we have been killed every day'.

Yahweh's rhetorical questions are humbling but not humiliating. They do chastise Job, but they are also a didactic elicitation of knowledge that Job already has, namely knowledge of God's power and providence. They are not unlike the very similar rhetorical questions in Proverbs (30.4) and Deutero-Isaiah (40.12-14; 41.2, 4, 26). Almost none of the questions in the Theophany is difficult to answer, and few of the facts are unknown. Many of God's questions and statements echo things said earlier by Job and his friends.¹¹

What Yahweh mostly displays is delight in his powers as craftsman and provider. The fact that God brings rain to the desert does not show indifference to humans; rain in the wilderness is a standard topos of divine blessing. The poet delights in the freedom of the wild ass and the silliness of the ostrich, which propagates her kind in spite of her negligent ways. The animals described are mostly outside human control, but so what? Humans have no wish to control most of them. Anyway, inability to control other creatures cannot be the issue with the war horse, whose fierce power is very much at the disposal of human designs. As for Behemoth and Leviathan, too much has been made of the chaos and evil they are supposed to represent. In any case, they are under God's control and can be no more dangerous than he lets them be; and they do not seem to do much besides being undefeatable. Leviathan is usually thought to be the crocodile, but the beast in the Theophany is a denizen of the sea and its depths. It is based on a whale, a creature of the Great Sea, as in Ps. 104.26.¹² They are objects not of terror but of admiration for being the most excellent of their kinds.

As is often observed, God does not tell Job why he is suffering. If he did, the book would not be relevant to those who do not receive a personal theophany. Job no more gets an explanation as to why he is suffering than the psalmist gets an answer to his aggrieved question, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' (Ps 22.1).¹³ Still, Job can deduce from the lack of accusation, and indeed from the scolding for speaking in ignorance rather for a prior sin, that his suffering is not punishment.

11. The few questions that are difficult, for example, 'What is the way to the place light dwells, and darkness—where is its place?' (38.19)—are meant to underscore God's ability. This is shown by the purpose clause: 'so that you could take it to its territory, show it the path to its house' (38.20).

12. The whale memorably 'sneezes', shooting a spout that can be said to glow when the sun shines through it (41.10a). The spout can be imagined as smoke or steam coming from his nostrils (41.12). Of course the picture is enhanced beyond the natural when the poet tells of flames shooting from Leviathan's nose and mouth (41.11, 13). But the whale alone can stir up the depths or whip up the abyss into a boiling froth (41.23)—as cetaceans memorably do by leaping and crashing back into the water—or leave a white wake (נתיב) behind him (41.24).

13. The psalmist's question is misguided. He has not been abandoned, except temporarily. He is making false assumptions like Job, who asks, 'Why do you hide your face and reckon me as an enemy to you?' (13.24).

Job's Repentance

Then Job repents, and our teeth stand on edge. He acknowledges God's omnipotence and his own ignorance. Then he declares, in 42.6, **עַל כֵּן אֲמָאֵס** וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל עֹפֶר וְאֶפֶר. His meaning at least *seems* clear: 'Therefore I am disgusted and repent on dust and ashes'. Still, the current consensus holds that Job's declaration is defiant, in a cagy, ambiguous way, not really penitent. After all, what has Job done that calls for repentance? In an influential article in 1979, J.B. Curtis proposed that this verse means: 'Therefore, I feel loathing contempt and revulsion [toward you, O God], and I am sorry for frail man' (505). Many have followed this approach, with variations, and there is now a consensus that Job is not really contrite. Some say that Job is speaking ironically (Williams 1971: 246-47) or 'tongue-in-cheek' (Robertson 1973: 466) or that his words are 'not insincere' but are still 'a crafty and subtle speech that means more than it says' (Clines 2009: 177). Beneath the surface expression of remorse, it is agreed, lies defiance, or at least resignation.¹⁴

I think that 42.6 expresses contrition, genuine and simple. **מָאֵס** is one of a number of verbs that is both transitive and intransitive.¹⁵ **נָחַם** certainly can mean 'repent', 'change one's mind'.¹⁶ A human can be *like* dust and ashes (thus in Job 30.19), but 'dust and ashes' does not in itself mean humanity. 'On dust and ashes' is where Job sits. At the same time, the metaphor is an objective correlative of Job's wretched condition.

If a psalmist had spoken Job 42.6, no one would doubt that it expresses repentance. But, of course, it is Job who is speaking it, so we must ask how it fits this context and his character. Read as an ambiguous statement of defiance, the verse does not fit. It would be peculiar and demeaning to the proud, outspoken Job, who was convinced that God demanded honesty (13.7-8, 16), if suddenly, with no threat to his person, he became cunning and sneaky. If Job is double-talking, he is lying, and if he is lying, he is cursing God in his heart.

If Job's real intention were the accusatory one and God understood it, it was surprisingly tolerant of him to declare Job right and to restore his fortunes in the very next verse. If God had missed Job's true, 'insolent' intention, as Curtis (499) calls it, then God merely failed to catch a bad pun and when he

14. A rare exception is B. Lynn Newell, who argues that Job is contrite for his verbal overreaching. She paraphrases: Therefore I will have nothing more to do with (i.e., despise and reject) the sins of which you charged me which I committed by my speaking without understanding, and I repent upon dust and ashes (1984: 315).

15. **מָאֵס** is intransitive in Job 7.16; 34.33; 36.5.

16. E.g. Exod. 13.17; 1 Sam. 15.29; Jer. 4.28; 15.6. **נָחַם** is used of humans changing their minds in Exod. 13.17; Jer. 31.19. When God is the subject, the meaning is the same, for God can regret things he has done or is about to do, even if they are not sins.

says that Job spoke correctly, there is no 'terrible self-incrimination', as Robertson (1973: 468) calls it.

Job is repenting not of any prior sin but of having spoken in ignorance, which is, after all, what God scolds him for (38.2; 40.1) and what he himself confesses (42.3). His ignorance was not sinful, but his speaking in ignorance was less than laudable. Whatever else the theophany means, it certainly intends to induce humility, and it is no surprise that it has this effect on Job. I suspect that few academic readers are affected that way, but that does not mean that Job is not. He is what his author made him, and the author favors humility.

Epilogue

The Epilogue begins in 42.7, but not abruptly, because God's approval of Job in that verse presumes Job's repentance in 42.1-6 and his silencing in 40.4-5.

In 42.7, Yahweh says to Eliphaz, 'I am angry at you and your two friends, because you did not speak about me correctly, as did my servant Job'. This is most often read as validating everything Job has said, including every accusation that he threw at God, and even including, ironically, the condemnation supposedly hiding in 42.6. Verse 7 is also thought to create an intolerable contradiction to Yahweh's earlier anger at Job, perhaps in the process deconstructing the Epilogue, or the whole book, or creating some delicious and subversive paradox. But the contradiction has been grossly over-dramatized.

God's approval in 42.7 cannot be a blanket affirmation of Job's assertions. God well knows that Job was wrong in thinking that his suffering was punishment, wrong in assuming that his fate was the result of retribution gone awry, wrong in thinking that God was hostile. God certainly thinks Job wrong in condemning him and declaring his justice worthless (40.8). Now I understand that many modern readers would not agree that Job was wrong in these regards, but God himself—the god portrayed in Job—could be expected to do so. Nor can God's validation of Job's words be confined to the principle that God 'does not govern the world according to the dictates of retributive justice' as Clines puts it (2009: 196). That's too bland and philosophical a formulation of Job's invective. Job has accused God of actively violating justice. Is Yahweh so liberal that he *wants* Job to say that he is unjust but not so liberal that he will not tolerate the friends' belief in his strict justice? Nor can 42.7 globally reject the friends' words. They often proclaimed God's wisdom and power, sometimes in terms foreshadowing Yahweh's self-description.

To identify what God is calling correct and incorrect, consider first that 42.7 is not primarily about Job; it is about the friends. It is addressed to Eliphaz, with Job mentioned incidentally, by way of comparison. The verse

serves to motivate the command to the friends in the next verse, which begins ועתה—a locution that typically marks consecution: ‘therefore’. Because the friends spoke incorrectly about God, they must ask Job to intercede on their behalf. The fact that Job is placed in the middle shows that God is angry at them for wronging *Job*. They were guilty not of an abstract theological error but of insisting that God was punishing Job for some sin. And if what they said incorrectly was that Job must have sinned, then what Job said correctly was that he was innocent.

The limited scope of 42.7 means that God neither affirms nor repudiates all that is said in the dialogue. Much remains open and is left to the reader’s judgment. God turns away from the issue of undeserved suffering, to which, after all, there may be no solution.

Job receives the vindication he demanded. As for the friends, once they show Job honor by asking him to intercede and have healed the human breach, they become worthy of forgiveness. They have been true friends, both by coming to comfort Job and by sitting at length in the dump next to this scabrous and exasperating outcast. Yes, they have had a nasty argument, but friends do that sometimes.

Job’s fortunes are now restored. It turns out, rather irritatingly, that the friends were close to right about Job’s end, but for the wrong reasons. (This is truly ironic, a staple of tragic irony.) The friends insisted that if Job repents of a presumed earlier sin he will be forgiven and again prosper (8.5-7). But sin and forgiveness have nothing to do with Job’s fate. It is they who require forgiveness. And Job’s restoration is not a reward; it is reparation. God took away, and now he has to give back, and if he cannot truly replace what Job has lost, Job can, as legal language has it, ‘be made whole’, with some additional indemnity for pain and suffering.

Now that Job is again prosperous, all his brothers and his sisters and former acquaintances, who earlier kept their distance from the suppurating sufferer (6.15; 19.13; 30.10), come to eat with him in his house (no ash heap for them!) and to comfort him for all the evil that Yahweh brought upon him (now that it is over) and to give him money (now that he is again rich). In this one can hear the irony of social critique. Job’s daughters are beautiful—no irony here, because beauty is highly prized in folk tales, and can also enhance the bride-price. And Job, who once longed for death, lives a long life.

Is it true, as Newsom says, that ‘the entire world of the prose tale’s discourse, aesthetic and moral, seems indigestible after the divine speeches?’ (2003: 20). Yes, but I’m not sure that anything in the book is good for the digestion. The world of the Epilogue, with pettiness alongside some real satisfactions and some partial compensations, is the one in which we spend most of our lives. And, I think, the author realizes this too.

A Folk Tale

When I told a friend of mine that I was writing on Job, he sort of scolded me. He said, 'And how do you explain the fairy tale ending?' That got me to thinking about it. I accept the widely held hypothesis that the author of Job adopted an earlier story of Job, and that this was indeed a fairy tale, or, better, a folk tale. It is that scary.

If you read the Grimm tales in their first edition, from 1809, or even their gentler predecessor Perrault, or just Google 'folk tales', you see stories by no means suitable for children, as the Grimms' early critics pointed out. Most of the stories are not really *Kindermärchen* but rather *Märchen*, tales told by adults for adults. As the folklorist W.G. Kudsus observes of folk tales, 'Underneath the plots and the interpretations, stories of anger wait to be heard along with those of wonder' (2005: 3). The world of folk tales is a harrowing one. Agreements are made over the heads of the helpless, promises are given that lock others into a brutal fate, pacts are sealed that *must* be kept. Sometimes misfortunes are punishments; often they just happen, with no explanation given. Folk tales reveal a world in which clouds of cruelty, danger, constraint, and uncertainty always hover over human heads.

Is the Tale of Job naïve? It is, insofar as it is composed in simple language, in a linear time-sequence, with flat characters, in the sense that their emotions and thoughts get little description. The Tale of Job may be called naïve in another way, namely the kind of reality it inhabits. The following statement about naïve art comes from the *Grove Dictionary of Art*:

[N]aïve artists may be concerned not with making images that are intensely real, or conversely intensely unreal, but with producing mythic transpositions of the world, invocations of the 'superreal', an idealized, timeless and yet still accessible reality. Elemental or essential qualities blend in a vision of utopian harmony; and if there are sometimes aggressive or disruptive images, '...there is also almost always both a superficial charm that flatters the casual gaze and a cool, distinctive luminosity, an aura or "poetic halo", in Maleković's phrase, of genuine aesthetic value' (Cardinal 2009).

Job is often said to have a happy ending. Folk tales commonly, but not always, provide happy endings.¹⁷ A beast may regain human form, discarded children may outwit their abusers, and exploited orphans may rise to royalty. But such events are always a surprise, at least within the world of the story, and readers, especially children, allow themselves to be surprised too. More-

17. William Whedbee has rightly brought our attention to certain comic elements in the book of Job (even though it is a stretch of the term to call the book 'comic'). As Whedbee observes, 'the happy ending demonstrates the ultimate irony and comedy of Job, where the problems are not fully and satisfactorily resolved, where the contradictions and incongruities remain' (1977: 245). This is indeed comic, but it is also tragic.

over, the happy endings do not entirely eliminate the discomfort of the tales. They presume a world where other unsightly men will stay ugly, where displaced children will be exploited, where most Cinderellas will never escape their grimy toil, where some discarded children, like the thousands in modern cities, but, unlike Hansel and Gretel, will not escape their predators.

Are folk tales naïve, or is it rather that they give expression to a sophistication shaped by the hard experience of generations of disabused souls? Or perhaps naivety and sophistication are not the relevant categories. As for Job's happy ending, this is not a guaranteed conclusion to all unwarranted suffering. The Tale states only that good fortune was restored in this case. The Tale of Job is certainly not naïve in the sense of portraying a comforting and unblemished world, overseen by a God who always abides by rules we all understand.

Are we really meant to read the Tale of Job without disquiet? Certainly the original readers knew the peril of marauding bands descending on a village, of horrific disease and natural disaster striking capriciously with no recourse. Sometimes restoration and healing come, sometimes not. The people who lived such lives or told such tales could hardly believe in a formulaic *Tat-Ergehen Zusammenhang* nor imagine that the victims of war, disease, and disaster always deserve their fate or that the rich and secure always earn theirs? Such a notion was never, to cite a grossly anachronistic characterization, the 'orthodox Jewish view',¹⁸ nor was it Wisdom dogma¹⁹ or 'Old Testament' tradition. Even Deuteronomy does not blame the poor, the orphans, and the widows for their straitened condition.

The reality of the Tale of Job is far from what Newsom strangely calls 'a world where everything is certain, clear, a unity of coherent meaning' (2003: 54). That world lasts at most for nine verses. Then everything crumbles. In

18. Dell (1991: 193) uses this term to characterize the Prologue. Many scholars simply call the beliefs of the Tale and the friends 'orthodox' without asking which orthodoxy.

19. Psalm 37 (see v. 25) shares this mentality. So do many sayings in Proverbs, if taken in isolation. But they should not be. Didactic wisdom makes no such assumption. It warns that sloth will bring poverty, but never blames the poor for their privation. It recognizes the existence of social oppression but never deems it a warranted punishment and it recognizes that wealth does not necessarily come from virtue. Proverbs 28.6, for example, says 'Better a poor man who goes in his integrity than a man of perverted ways who is rich'. Proverbs' idea of justice is no more inconsistent than saying that smoking causes lung cancer but some lung cancer is not caused by smoking. Given its didactic purpose, the book of Proverbs speaks of causality in the first way, while the book of Job, given its philosophical thrust, the book of Job thinks in term of the second. In the end, the book of Job offers, as Clines says, 'implicit instruction on how to live rightly when one is suffering' (1989: lxii). And teaching how to live rightly, not the promulgation or exploration of doctrines, is what Wisdom Literature is all about.

this world, people can do what God wants and still see their lives ravaged in moments. It is a reality in which God himself has blind spots, and where the rectitude of his own order is always in question.²⁰ It is most certainly not the world that Hoffman calls 'free from deep existential problems' (1981: 168). The world of the Tale continues into chap. 3 and beyond, except in the friends' perception. The author of the book did not himself originate the folk tale of Job, but he is not repudiating it. He is unfolding its potentials.

The Tale of Job provides stability—not existential but literary—in the form of a definitive, omniscient, authorial voice. Like a picture frame, it defines a setting that controls the way we view the picture.²¹ Without this control, the middle chapters would be a heated jumble of anger, contradiction, and ignorance. The book would be truly and irresolvably polyphonic, or rather, cacophonous. The stability of the frame is necessary also for the theology, because the book promotes, and wants us to accept, a paradox: God is just but his justice is not absolute. God concedes this in 2.9 and in the Theophany by refusing to justify Job's suffering. Is this justice? The narrator thinks so. But who says that justice must be absolute? Only Job's friends.

Justice is not the highest value. Elsewhere in the Bible, God may override justice for the sake of mercy—as he does in forgiving the friends.²² In the Book of Job, he overrides justice for another reason: to allow for a human loyalty that is pure, unbought and unstinting. God is not amoral or anarchic, but he is constrained by the logic of his own demands, and these require allowing the world to be imperfect. Beautiful but imperfect. Humans must respond with faith in God's goodness in spite of the world's—and God's—imperfection.

It is true that God's answer to Job is not quite satisfactory. It does not address Job's complaints or explain his suffering. But the book of Job is not for Job; it is for the readers. Readers, who approach Job's world not from within but from above, and who, unlike Job, have read the Prologue, are allowed a privileged, superior perspective and are even given insight into the mind of God. The readers learn that God *wants* not only human obedience

20. Newsom says that whereas in the hypothesized original prose tale, the 'happy ending' expressed 'confidence in the possibility of a moral and material wholeness in life', with the interruption of the dialogue and divine speeches it has a new meaning as 'a posttragic Epilogue to the whole book, one in which the goodness of life in all its fragility is embraced' (2003: 257). This is true, but it was true already in the Prologue and was only reinforced by the words of the Theophany.

21. Gillmayr-Bucher (2009) develops this analogy with some precision. She says that the narrative as well as the dialogue do not offer a clear and univocal frame but unfold possible perspectives.

22. God's mercy toward the friends shows him superior to the law of retribution (Ngwa 2005: 110). But such divine behavior is normal, and sacrifices serve as the mechanism of securing it.

but also fidelity in the depths of their heart, their unconditional faith in his goodness. So much so that he is willing to override the principle of just retribution to make pure faith possible.

While many contemporary readers, including myself, would not affirm this faith or find it intellectually satisfactory, it is a faith held by a great many people, and it is a lesson that many, perhaps most, readers have drawn from Job since ancient times. The antiquity of this interpretation is a consideration in support of its interpretive validity. If the book's true message were rebellion against a tyrant God and the repudiation of a moral economy, then the book, for all its poetic power, would have failed to convey its true message for some 2500 years, only to have it emerge and flourish in the very decades that esteemed verbal rebels, that sought, in a slogan of the times that has also been applied to Job, to 'speak truth to power'.

The message of the book of Job can be encapsulated thus: When you are suffering, even when you cannot make sense of your suffering, observe God's skill and goodness in the world about you and believe that somehow this applies to you too. A summary like this is inevitably reductionist. The book does much more. It portrays and explores one process by which God can make puzzling decisions and human attempts to make sense of them and come to terms with them. It is a book about humans, not theology.

Eliphaz asked, 'Can a man benefit God?' (22.2a). He would be surprised to learn that the answer is, Yes. Job and his friends agreed on human wretchedness, but they were, ironically, wrong. Humans have in their power to give God something he deeply desires, even needs: unbought human loyalty, a stance of unconditional faith, even when they are suffering a divine injustice. Humans actually occupy a lustrous position in God's sight. It may be that, as Eliphaz says, God does not place trust in his angels, but he has no choice but to trust humanity.

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THE COMIC PLOTS OF THE BIBLES

Edwin M. Good

Having spent most of a long professional life closely reading specific texts, especially in the Hebrew Bible, I turn here to consider entire works in terms of their structures. It may seem a grandiose undertaking for a short article, but celebrating the contributions of Professor Cheryl Exum to biblical studies invites something at least ambitious, even if making sense of the entirety of the Bibles may seem excessively ambitious.

Bibles? Surely there is but one Bible: The Bible. Well, no, there isn't, and I suspect that most readers know that.

The Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) is a one-volume work, the Christian Bible a two-volume work, of which the Old Testament is the first volume. By definition the Hebrew Bible is complete; and by definition the Old Testament is incomplete. Though the Protestant list is closer to that of the Tanakh, the books are in different orders and different categories. The history of biblical canons is very complex, and I will stay out of it.

Modern historical scholarship made us keenly aware of variety and change in the Bible. It showed how the Bible depicts the cultures in which it lived and the historical events and epochs that it experienced. We learned to think about books as coming into being over centuries of story-telling and poetic performance and more centuries of editing in writing. Historical scholarship took the Bible apart and put the problem of historical change at the center of its interest.

Denying none of that, the literary study of the Bible has been interested in how books hang together as works of literature. *The Theme of the Pentateuch* by David Clines looked at the literary structure of Genesis to Deuteronomy as a single work. Scholars of an earlier day, who spent their energies tracing disunities, would raise their eyebrows at the thought that so complex a work as the Pentateuch can be thought of as a literary unity. I want to go even further in smaller space than Clines did. I want to discuss the unified plots of the whole Bibles, thinking of each as a single literary work.

A disclaimer: to think of the Bibles as literary unities neither requires nor denies that the deity is the author. That is a theological question, not a literary one, and I am not interested in it. One can discuss books without discussing authors.

Plot is a work's narrative structure reduced to essentials. Take the quintessential love-story plot: girl meets boy, girl loses boy, girl gets boy. Turn it around, 'boy meets girl', etc., and it is the same essential plot. Run it through 3000 different sets of characters, settings, and circumstances, and it is still the same plot though never the same story. To lay out the plot implies that you have peeked at the end. Plot is not what you discover in a story as you go along; it is what you see on looking back over the whole.

Coleridge said that all philosophers are either Platonists or Aristotelians. The sergeant in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* sings that little girls and little boys are either little liberals or little conservatives. It can be argued that all plots are either comic or tragic. That does not mean that comedy is always funny or tragedy always sad. Dante's great work, which we have come to call *The Divine Comedy*—he called it *La commedia*—cannot be called humorous, but in terms of plot and philosophy it is certainly what he called it. The comic plot begins high ('boy meets girl'), descends into threat ('boy loses girl'), and recovers in an up-beat ending ('boy and girl come together'). A group faces a disturbance to its well-being, which is overcome, and the society is restored at the end. The first part of comedy may for a time seem to be tragedy. The first part of Dante's *Commedia* carries us to the bottom of Hell, a magnificently grim journey, but the other parts move magnificently upward. Graph it, if you like, as a U. This is the reason that so many comedies end in marriage—apart from comedy's probable beginning among the Greeks in fertility rituals. Marriage stands for the reconstitution of threatened togetherness.

The plot of tragedy goes the other way, like a parabola or a downward-slanting line. It starts high, and either goes higher and then descends to its tragic close or begins immediately to slide downward to the conclusion. It does not matter who or what brings about the downfall. There is a downfall; some evil is rooted out of the scene, and some tragedies almost become comedies by entering into a new and better social circumstance.

I will argue that the Hebrew Bible has a comic plot, and that the Old Testament is that part of a comedy that looks like tragedy, to which the New Testament adds the upward right arm.

The Hebrew Bible

Perception of plot depends on perception of the whole work. The mystery writer tries to prevent our seeing how the mystery is resolved until all is revealed at the end. Readers more intelligent than I often divine the ending even before reaching it. I am content to let plot reveal itself. With a very large work like a Bible, investigating the whole work must reveal the plot that emerges. I doubt very much that those whose centuries of labor issued in

the Hebrew Bible's canon ever thought that they were helping to devise a book with a single plot.

We begin with Torah. *Torah* is not merely law. It comes closer to meaning 'instruction', maybe even closer to 'tradition'. And the books of Torah contain a great deal more than regulations and laws. Torah begins with the creation in Genesis and its sequel tales, proceeds to the Patriarchs, then to Moses, the Exodus from Egypt, and Mt Sinai and the giving and rehearsal of the law in detail. It proceeds through the wilderness between Mt Sinai and the Promised Land.

Torah presents three stages in the story of Israel. I will tag them for memory's sake as Creation, Clan, and Covenant. In the stage of Creation, the human race is placed at the head of the whole creation, and the human family is made the basis of social life. Genesis presents two different stories of creation, both involving the centrality of the family, the first by positioning humans, male and female, at the head of the created order, the second by showing the creation of woman as the solution to a flaw in the creation. 'It is not good that the man is alone. I will make a helper for him as one facing him' (Gen. 2.18, my translation). With the presence of woman, a new kind of human life comes about: 'a man abandons his father and his mother and clings to his woman, and they become one flesh' (2.24). The human race is presented from the outset as a family, and the ensuing chapters describe problems in it, some arising from humans trying to be divine instead of human (chap. 3), from humans acting as if they were not family members but enemies (Cain and Abel), but others seeming to arise from failures on the creator's part to see the implications of some of his arrangements, such as the unexplained refusal to accept Cain's sacrifice, or some apparent divine misdeeds by the 'sons of the Elohim' marrying the daughters of humans (Gen. 6.1-4). Finally the deity throws up his hands and 'regrets' that he made the humans and others and decides to start over.

Noah takes his family to sea at the Flood and restarts the races, human and animal. His sons people the whole world, but somehow that line of descendance threatens by its single language to wall itself away from any divine influence by its tower, built up to the Sky. So human language is multiplied, and the race is scattered. The genealogy of Shem narrows down to Terah, one of whose sons is Abram. This family story is made perfectly clear by the meaning of his name in Hebrew: 'High, or Exalted, Father'. So we go in Genesis 1-11 from Adam, 'human beings', to Abram, the father of a family that broadens out in the next stage, the stage of the Clan.

The fortunes of that Clan proceed through the rest of Genesis with the tales of Israel's forebears, Abram/Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons. This is a chosen family to whom God makes a promise always deferred. As Abram's family journeys from one home to another, God commands him to journey still farther: 'Get yourself out from your land and from your clan and

from your father's family to a land that I will show you. And I will make you into a large nation, and I will bless you and will magnify your name, and it will be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and him who belittles you I will curse. And all the tribes of the soil will be blessed with you' (Gen. 12.1-3). No connection is yet made between being a 'large nation' and owning the land. There is only the promise of blessing.

When Abram gets to Canaan God gives another deferred promise: 'To your descendants I give this land' (12.7). Not to the man himself. The problem is that Sarai, Abram's wife, is barren (11.30). The land, where Abram is to become a large nation and a blessing, is to be given to descendants whom, it seems, Abram cannot possibly have.

The story, then, revolves around the twin issues of a land promised but not possessed and of an heir necessary but seemingly impossible. From Canaan Abram goes to Egypt, where he promptly hands Sarai over to the Egyptian king—not likely to get him descendants. He has a son, Ishmael, by the maid Hagar, but they are expelled from camp. God promises that Sarah will have a son, but no sooner are Sodom and Gomorrah reduced to rubble than Abraham hands Sarah over again to a foreign king. Isaac is born at last, all other possible heirs are out of the way—and God says to Abraham, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and get yourself to the land of Moriah, and offer him up as a sacrifice there on one of the mountains, which I will tell you' (22.2). Will this deity ever permit anything promised to happen? Or does he, as in the Flood, intend to write 'Finish' to the whole promise? Whatever test that was, Abraham apparently passed it. He now has a descendant who may own the land.

But Isaac continues to live as a nomad. His twin sons complicate the issue of inheritance when Esau, who was born first, trades away his right of inheritance to Jacob for a bowl of soup. We are very quickly out of Isaac's story and into Jacob's, and Jacob spends most of his time outside the land he is supposedly to inherit. He gets wives in Haran, but, returning to Canaan years later, he gets into hot water at Shechem and must move on. In Genesis, people move on, neither stay nor possess the promised land.

Joseph is the pesky little brother who irritates the older ones so much they sell him into slavery into Egypt. But Joseph comes out of every situation on top and rises to be Egyptian prime minister. Finally under the impact of famine Jacob and the rest of the Clan move to Egypt under Joseph's protection.

In Exodus, the Clan, reduced to slavery, is liberated to a new situation, taken out into the desert, presented with a law at Mt Sinai, and sent off to Canaan. The geography of all these journeys exhibits an interesting process of circling around the center. Abram went from Mesopotamia to Haran, then to Canaan, the promised land. He went immediately to Egypt, came back, and he and Isaac wandered in Canaan. Jacob returned to Haran, came

back to Canaan, moving from place to place, and, with Joseph's rise to power, went to Egypt. With the Exodus, the making of the covenant at Mt Sinai, and the trip on from there, we are headed once again for Canaan. Haran—Canaan—Egypt—Canaan—Haran—Canaan—Egypt—Canaan. The promised land is at the center of this story, but the Clan always leaves to go somewhere else.

After the Mt Sinai experience, Israel heads for Canaan for the last time, and this time it arrives there not as a Clan, wandering here and there, but as possessors. Israel is becoming a nation, as God says: 'Now then, if you will obey me faithfully and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is mine, but you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod. 19.5-6).

This is the third stage, the Covenant. Israel will become a holy nation by obeying God faithfully and keeping the covenant. That involves the law, which now becomes the way of shifting the society from Clan to nation. What began in Creation and continued in Clan now becomes Covenant, first in the ceremonies of law-giving at Mt Sinai, then on the way to the promised land. Through all the difficulties of wandering in the wilderness runs the thread of the new order, the process of learning to live as a nation.

The Torah, then, shows how Israel came to be at the center of God's attention. In Creation, the world and humans are established. With Clan, one family is picked out for special concern and privilege. With Covenant, that family becomes a nation, the divine protection is affirmed, and the nation can live in social and religious responsibility.

Now we come to the Prophets. What Christians call history, the Hebrew Bible calls 'Former Prophets', and puts them into the same category as the 'Latter Prophets', which the Christians call 'Prophets'. The plot of this book depends decisively on which arrangement of it you are reading.

In Joshua the promise of the land is no longer deferred. Israel invades, conquers the territory, and divides it among the tribes. In Judges, the nation goes through cycles of difficulty and resolution, groping toward itself, still a conglomeration of tribes, not a national unity. Several times toward the end of Judges occurs a refrain suggesting anarchy: 'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased'.

The nation becomes a kingdom in 1 Samuel. But the kingship, beginning with Saul, seems not to solve the problem of anarchy. Samuel, protesting the people's desire for a king, shows them vividly that the king will do as he pleases. Yahweh responded sourly to the demand for a king, saying to Samuel, 'It is not you they have rejected; it is me they have rejected as their king' (8.7). Kingship, designed to alleviate the problems of anarchy, seemingly undercuts divine sovereignty over the nation.

The first three kings all start well and then slide down. Saul is aggressive and successful, but fails to do what he is told, and David is appointed. David

is fabulously successful, going from one power to another. But he falls afoul of Bathsheba, experiences a series of troubles within his family, and dies senile and tragic. Solomon begins as the epitome of wisdom and wealth, constructs a splendid Temple and builds up Jerusalem. But he is overcome by the temptations of power, and dilutes the nation's allegiance to God. At Solomon's death, the nation splits into two, a split from which it never recovered.

A series of prophets has already appeared, bringing the king's God's messages about what is happening or about what will happen. Samuel speaks with Saul, Nathan with David. Solomon has no prophet, but his adversary, Jeroboam, has one—a sign that the matter is nearly out of hand. The succession of prophets continues after Solomon. I suspect that they may be a reason this section is called the 'Former Prophets'.

The prophets and the story point increasingly to the fact that the nation is headed for drastic trouble. The split after Solomon results in two nations, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Israel continually fails to heed its prophets, and it is brought to an end a couple of centuries later by the Assyrians. Judah, left alone, fails to heed its rootage in the covenantal law and royal responsibilities to God, even with the reform of Josiah, and is dissolved 150 years or so later by the Chaldeans, and the exile in Babylon begins. At the end of 2 Kings is a hint that things might be looking up: the last king is treated magnanimously in captivity. So the Former Prophets show the downward motion from the nation's beginning to the catastrophe, which it interprets as God's punishment for Israel's failure to meet the demands of the Covenant. At the end of 2 Kings, we are at the bottom.

With the Latter Prophets, which we are accustomed to calling the 'Prophets', we seem more than once to circle back over what we have already seen. Isaiah sees the destruction of Israel, and explains it as God's, not merely Assyria's, doing. In parts of Isaiah are descriptions of the destruction of Judah, and in chap. 45 Cyrus the Persian at the end of the Babylonian Exile is named as God's 'anointed one—whose right hand he has grasped'. Later still we see the society reconstituted after the Exile: 'Hark! Your watchmen raise their voices, As one they shout for joy; For every eye shall behold the LORD's return to Zion. Raise a shout together, O ruins of Jerusalem' (52.8-9). Isaiah has the plot line in miniature: dissolution of Israel, dissolution of Judah, restoration of Judah, perhaps even a reunion with long-destroyed Israel. So where the Former Prophets take the story to the catastrophic end with a hint of the up-turned happy ending, the Latter Prophets begin back with the catastrophes and proceed to the reconstitution.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel participate in the beginning of the Babylonian Exile, but Jeremiah vividly portrays the exiles' return to the land, and Ezekiel ends with a stunning vision of a transformed country centered on the rebuilt temple, the barren desert turned fertile, and the Dead Sea brought alive. The

Book of the Twelve goes back to the dissolution of Israel with Hosea and Amos, comes down through the dissolution of Judah in Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, and ends with the reconstruction of the Temple and the new society after the Exile in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. In all of these books is the pattern Catastrophe–Reconstruction. With the Prophets, we have come to the up-turning leg of the U-shaped plot, concluding in a viable society, reestablished in Jerusalem and with a Temple. Zechariah culminates in a vision of Jerusalem at the center of the world, a city in which the bells on the horses are inscribed ‘holy to the LORD’. And Malachi closes with the promise of final victory when the prophet Elijah returns. Malachi exhorts, ‘Be mindful of the teaching (Heb. *torah*) of my servant Moses, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel’. The reconstituted nation looks back to its national origin in the Covenant.

One could argue that the plot of the Hebrew Bible is complete with the Prophets. It is a comic plot, moving from the Creation–Clan–Covenant pole of the Torah through kingship and exile to restoration in the Prophets. The story is comic, because it closes with a society that has weathered dangers and has come out renewed and recognizably continuous with the past.

We have a whole third section of the Hebrew Bible to deal with, and, as I have said, the plot is complete. The Writings present the restored community and its life in several ways. The Psalms are the community at worship and prayer. Job and the Proverbs place Wisdom in the reconstituted community’s life, show the light cast on ordinary life by the pithy lore of the ancestors and examine the problems of suffering. The Five Megillot, the Five Scrolls, were read in public at the yearly festivals: Song of Songs at Passover; Ruth at Shavuot or Weeks; Lamentations on the ninth of Ab, commemorating the Babylonians’ destruction of the temple; Qoheleth at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, in the Fall; and Esther at Purim, a festival based in Persian, postexilic times, in February. They take us around the community’s festival year, as wisdom takes us around its secular life, and the Psalms around its daily religious life.

The Writings end with three books or sets of them that go back over the whole story of the community, but in reverse order. Daniel shows the expectation of a future definitively under divine control. Ezra and Nehemiah, a single book in Hebrew, narrate the reconstruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the society to which the Prophets referred, thus the happy ending in renewal of the community, making possible the future that Daniel expects. Chronicles goes back over the entire story—the first chapters are a chronological list of names beginning with Adam and coming down through the Exile. It ends with the proclamation by Cyrus the Persian that sends the Jews back to Jerusalem to accomplish the society’s reconstruction.

The Writings, then, recapitulate the plot, reminding us of the whole by narrating its beginning and closing with the definitive reconstruction. The

Hebrew Bible is Israel's own account of who it is, how it got that way, and how it remains who it is.

The Christian Bibles

We keep in mind that the Old Testament is part of a larger whole. There is no Old Testament without a New Testament.

Christians had a Bible before there was a New Testament, and only in the second century of the Common Era did anyone think that it needed additions. It centered on the Septuagint, along with other Greek books, some stemming from Hebrew originals. The earliest extant copies of that document are from the fourth century of the Common Era. There are fragments of manuscripts and occasional quotations, seldom more than a sentence or two, in various Christian writings—some in books that became part of the New Testament. And there are translations into other Mediterranean languages. Different locations probably had different versions: Ephesus's different from Alexandria's different from Rome's. What we know about this Bible is very, very little.

Not knowing the order (or orders) of the books, we can't reconstruct the plot of the earliest Christian Bibles. In fact, there was apparently no single order of books in the Western Church until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. The Middle Ages were a canonical stew. The Reformation controversies in the sixteenth century led to the two separate forms of canon.

The Protestant Old Testament contains only books that are in the Hebrew Bible, but it orders them as in the Septuagint. Both Protestant and Catholic Bibles have, not surprisingly, a Christian plot. I will not differentiate them. I do not think that the additional books in the Catholic list make any difference to that, though the Maccabees in the Catholic list brings the narration of the Old Testament period closer to the beginning of the New Testament.

Remember that plot is a structure we perceive from looking back at the whole book. Because the Christian Bible joins a New Testament to the Old, to talk about the plot of the Old Testament requires that we have read the New.

The New Testament looks back over a story of salvation, its extension into the wider world, and the expectation that the world will come to its final end soon, with the ultimate distinction of saved from lost. In the light of that conclusion, the Old Testament deals with human failure to meet God's expectations and with God's efforts to solve that failure and to provide salvation.

On this reading, the problem turns up first thing, right in the creation story itself. God has scarcely given Adam and Eve his command to stay away

from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, when they disobey him and eat the fruit, and they must be expelled from the Garden of Eden. The story has already begun its downward movement, and we have hardly been introduced to the characters.

The New Testament understands that in Eden sin entered into a good creation, and into a humanity that was dominated right from that moment by sin and disobedience. In the next chapters of Genesis, the sin is extended out to the whole world, through Cain's and Adam's other descendants to the Flood. Starting over after the Flood, Noah's family brings the problem immediately to light (Gen. 9.19-27), and through his descendants to the entire world. The Tower of Babel (11.1-9) portrays the corrupted race's unity as so threatening God's control that he breaks it up by confusing the languages. The New Testament will experience a solution to that difficulty.

The reverse movement begins with Abraham, chosen to receive the promise of offspring and of territory. Accepting the promise, Abraham, we are told, is counted as righteous. His belief can break the dominance of sin. To be sure, even Abraham falls prey to unbelief, telling the crazy story that Sarah is his sister and giving her first to the Pharaoh and later to Abimelech just when she is supposed to become pregnant. And the terrible test when he raises the knife over Isaac at Mt Moriah validates his belief that God may demand the sacrifice of a son. But the promise does not solve the problem of sin.

Things keep going wrong. Isaac acts in bad faith to Rebekah by giving her away to Abimelech, Jacob acts in bad faith to Esau by tricking him out of his inheritance and deceives Isaac with his mother's connivance to get the blessing intended for Esau. Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery. Only when threatened by a famine that will kill them all does the family have some of its unity restored in Egypt.

The family finds itself in slavery (we have reached Exodus), and the end looks to be its dissipation among the Egyptian masses. But Moses is born, and a new kind of chosen people can emerge. Moses is a new kind of leader, not an ancestor but a Levite, who mediates between God and the people. As mediator Moses leads the people in the release from slavery in Egypt, and he mediates the establishment of the covenant at Mt Sinai.

Here Israel is given the duty of obeying the Law. 'If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. Moses' mediatorial function devolves upon the nation, which therefore becomes holy by means of the society's adherence to the law. That is the new factor in the history of sin. Israel enters a covenant matching the divine promise of care, love, and protection with the human promise of obedience. Israel may overcome the tendency to do badly and to deny God.

It fails, of course. No sooner has Israel agreed to the covenant than Moses, coming down the mountain with the tablets of the law, discovers Israel in a

monumental orgy around the golden statue of a calf: 'Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt'. One such episode follows after another as the tale goes on. Can legislating righteousness not turn the trick?

Taking possession of the promised land, Israel does not improve. The Book of Judges presents a repetitive cycle of Israel's denying God, a punishing enemy, cries for help, and God's providing a judge who rescues Israel. 'In those days', runs the refrain toward the end of the book, 'there was no king in Israel, and everyone did as he pleased'.

When the Philistines threaten Israel, demands for a king begin, to which God responds without enthusiasm. Samuel's predictions about kings are negative (1 Samuel 8). Saul's tragic career shows that he is unfit to continue, but with David, the second major leader after Moses, the kingship takes shape. With Moses God ruled by the law; with David God rules by the divinely chosen king, controlling the nation as God's plenipotentiary.

Like everything else, the kingship fails to work. The history of the nation is a history of failure to meet the demands. David is brought down by his immorality and family problems, and Solomon cannot improve the moral tone of anything. A revolt splits the nation into two, but the Books of Kings keep reminding us that Israel, the northern revolutionists, departed from David's dynasty, and knowing the end of the story, we know that the future lies with David. The kings fail to act like David's proper descendants. The whole story, with constant predictions of failure from prophets, points to the fact that Israel and Judah are building up reserves of guilt. Israel's departure from David's dynasty has its end at the hand of Assyria. Judah's Davidic kingship ends at the Babylonian exile, but the hinted upturn at the end of 2 Kings, when Jehoiachin is elevated within his exile, points to continuation.

The Chronicles circles back over the whole story from Adam through the kingship in terms of Judah alone. 'The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, till there was no remedy' (2 Chron. 36.15-16). 2 Chronicles goes beyond the exile to Cyrus's decree of restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem. Ezra and Nehemiah recount rebuilding the Temple and the centrality of the law in the new situation, rebuilding society and the city, and putting Judah firmly in command of its ethnic identity. But the story in some ways peters out. Esther's rise to power in the Persian empire issues in a fantastic exchange of massacres between Jews and Persians. Finally, last of what some canonical lists call 'The Stories', comes Job, which almost seems to recapitulate Israel's suffering in Job's experience, except that Job receives his goods, health, and family back at the end.

In the Catholic canon, Tobit, Judith, and 1 and 2 Maccabees take us down to the Maccabean revolt against Greek rule in the 2nd century BCE.

Here the Old Testament changes its approach. Instead of telling the story, it comments on it, first in poetry. This series of books takes us back to the central kingship. The Psalms refer implicitly to David, and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs to Solomon. These books turn the subject toward the individual. The frequent 'I' in the Psalms points toward individual salvation; wisdom guides the individual's life in Proverbs, and wisdom in one powerful person's experience (Ecclesiastes) shows that life cannot be completely satisfactory by wisdom alone. Love in the Song of Songs points by images to the love that will later unite God and the soul by the agency of Christ (remember that we are reading a Christian plot). As elements in a plot, then, these books point back to the kingship of David and Solomon and point forward to the coming king and the motifs of salvation, wisdom, and love that he will bring out.

At last we come to the prophets. On this reading, I can see the prophets in two ways. First, the New Testament perceives the prophets as a constant stream of predictions of the Messiah. From that standpoint, the prophets are the principal turning point in the plot's movement toward the New Covenant.

Now perhaps you see why the order of the books makes a difference. The prophets are at the end of the Old Testament, closest to the New. By itself, that placement emphasizes their predictive function. The New Testament constantly quotes prophetic predictions as specifically fulfilled.

The other way I see the prophets is in terms of the constant refrain, 'Hear the word of the LORD'. The idea of God's Word goes back to the first story of Creation where the universe came about because God spoke words. In the covenant law, the Ten Commandments are introduced by saying, 'Moses spoke these words to Israel'. The New Testament is very much interested in the 'Word of God', especially as the Gospel of John echoes Genesis 1, 'In the beginning was the Word', and that Word became flesh. John identifies the word that made the universe, that brought about the covenant, and that the prophets proclaimed with Jesus himself. The prophetic 'Word of the LORD' is a necessary episode in the plot of God's Word from Creation to Jesus.

Thinking of the prophets either as the proclaimers of the Word or as predictors of the Messiah works in this Christian plot; we go from Isaiah's virgin who conceives a child to the child born to be Messiah. We go from Jeremiah's prediction of a new covenant written not on tablets of law but on the heart to the Last Supper where Jesus says, 'This cup is the New Covenant in my blood'. We go from Daniel and the dream of 'one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven' to Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man who predicts his own return 'with the clouds of heaven'. And we go from Hosea's passage about God's son called out of Egypt to the flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt and their return, and from Malachi's expect-

tation that Elijah will return to John the Baptist, whom Jesus identifies as the returned Elijah.

In discussing the prophets as predictors of Jesus, I do not commit myself to the view that they knew or thought that they were doing that. I distinguish what I think the prophetic books meant as documents of their own times and what they have come to mean as integral to the Christian biblical whole. That may be a partial explanation of my switch during my career at Stanford from thinking I was teaching the Old Testament to preferring to teach the Hebrew Bible.

Besides these predictions, the prophets showed what had gone wrong in their days. The prophetic criticism plays the searchlight over a society constantly failing to live up to its own tradition and assumptions. Isaiah was sure that Israel deserved God's Assyrian punishment. Jeremiah analyzed the moral shortcomings of his own times to the point of danger, being dumped (chap. 38) into a well to shut him up, and being rescued only by the heroic courage of a black slave. Ezekiel was constantly misunderstood. 'To them', God tells him, 'you are just a singer of bawdy songs, who has a sweet voice and plays skillfully; they hear your words, but will not obey them.'

That the prophets talk about both present and future underscores their place as this plot's turning point. They interpret their times as God's activity in, with, and against the people, interpret the troubles and the burden of guilt under which the nation staggers. It is the false prophets who proclaim peace when there is no peace, or, as Micah describes them, say nice things about those who line their pockets and put food in their mouths.

But they also look ahead, predict happiness for the future, see the coming comic ending. There's Zechariah: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets' (Zech. 8.4-5). Or Ezekiel: 'Fishermen will stand beside the sea from En-gedi to En-eghlaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets ... And on the banks, on both sides of the river, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing' (Ezek. 47.10, 12). Such visions of future peace gain depth from the grim past and the sometimes grimmer present.

The Old Testament portrays failed hopes and dashed expectations. It portrays a creation gone awry, a nation corrupted, a promise not completed, a salvation that keeps getting mixed up with the impossible demands of Law, with guilt and the doom attendant on it. It is the tragic side of the comedy in the Christian Bible. From the depth of disasters and punishments, it looks across to the comic side, awaits the upturning conclusion.

The story comes to its end, then, with the awaited Messiah, descended from David's dynasty. Defying the Roman pretensions to rule the world, he is

executed for being the king he is, and his death redefines kingship. He stands on a mountain as a new Moses and gives a new moral law that revises the old one. And in John's Gospel he redefines the Word. The New Testament draws together into Jesus the motifs of Moses and the law, David and the ruling kingship, and the prophetic word.

The word also points back to Creation, and John's Gospel, like St Paul, emphasizes the solution to the problem in the Creation, that the corruption of the race debilitated humans, making them incapable of meeting God's requirements. The crucifixion and resurrection complete the sacrificial system in the Old Testament law, God's sacrifice of his son completes Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son. Jesus' death proves that death is no longer punishment for sin, and his life presents its receivers a life with God as God intended it.

Israel itself is reconstituted, not as a nation but as a Church, purified at least in theory of political corruptions, an Israel freed to be focused entirely on God. That community is the core of the coming Kingdom of God, which will displace the world's nations—by force and cataclysm as some of the New Testament sees it. The kingship of God, which Israel rejected in favor of a human king in 1 Samuel, will come to be accepted by all the world. The New Testament entertains both the idea that the Kingdom of God will take place on a renewed earth and that it will be in an entirely new world, human life reconstituted in heaven.

So the entire story bears the marks of the comic plot. It starts with human beings in the image of God, who degenerate to the bottom of despair, from which God brings them back up to the heights of heaven itself. It is the classic U-shaped plot, and, like classic comedies, it ends with a marriage: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ...' (Rev. 21.1-4).

The comedy of the Bibles is more widely connected to religion. I know of no religion focused on tragedy. All propose a positive outcome to the sorrow and suffering that the human race endures. We owe tragedy to the religion of ancient Athens, but the theatrical productions of tragic drama were followed in Athens by comedies. Think of any religion you wish, the great world religions or tribal and ethnic religious systems, and you will see, I think, that they all propose—in very different ways, to be sure—that religion is more than anything else like an outburst of joyous laughter.

ON THE ALLEGED WISDOM OF KINGS
AN APPLICATION OF ADORNO'S
IMMANENT CRITICISM TO QOHELET

Norman Gottwald

As a long-time friend, Cheryl Exum persuaded me many years ago to contribute to a volume of *Semeia* she was editing on Tragedy and Comedy in the Hebrew Bible (Exum 1985). At the time I had no idea about what I might have to say on the topic. It was in fact my first foray into a genuinely literary critical study of a biblical text. As a historical critic who had expanded into sociological criticism, I had little understanding of the value of allegedly non-referential textual exegesis. So it was that I began cautiously, even skeptically, to apply notions of tragedy and comedy developed in literary studies to the Latter Prophets as a completed whole (Gottwald 1985: 83-96). While the import of literary critical methods for historical critical inquiry is not at once apparent in many instances, I soon discovered that a serious literary critical study often produces insights and generates questions of historical worth that never arise during exclusively historical critical analysis. For this Festschrift to honor the one who first pushed me into serious literary biblical studies, I offer this instance of a fecund connection between literary criticism and historical criticism, represented by the immanent criticism of Theodor Adorno in the service of critical theory.

In reading Qohelet through the lens of Adorno's so-called 'immanent criticism', I necessarily must hold in check my strong inclination as a socio-historical critic to focus on date of composition, authorship, provenance, sources, redaction, social setting, and canonization. Not that historical critics are unaware of contradictions in the book, which they typically explain—even explain away—by redaction criticism or theological exegesis. For instance, it is common to assign Qohelet's commendation of religious belief and practice to a glossator who sought 'to take the edge off' the severe pessimism of the original text. This maneuver dissipates the contradiction, effectively eliminating it by assigning the antithetic opinions to two writers each of whom is more or less self-consistent. Theological exegesis tries to harmonize the poles of contradiction by softening their radical disjunction or

by appealing to the larger biblical canon as a balance or corrective to Qohelet's excessively negative outlook on life.

At first glance immanent criticism looks as though it might be interchangeable with the close reading of some forms of literary criticism. The two approaches do concur in taking the book as a self-contained whole which must be examined on its own terms, at least initially, without regard for historical critical hypotheses. For strictly practiced literary criticism, however, the text constitutes a boundary that cannot be transgressed. Some excellent recent literary studies of Qohelet, such as those by Gary Salyer and Eric Christianson, illustrate how by contrast immanent criticism is a very particular kind of literary criticism. After examining the ambiguous rhetoric and narrative strategies of Qohelet, both authors move to contemporary existentialist appropriation of the book's thought by leaping over the wider social and cultural dynamics that formed the matrix of Qohelet and also by failing to attend analytically to the present social and cultural matrix in which they appropriate the biblical text existentially. They exhibit the very hallmarks of the existentialism that Adorno critiques as a historically disconnected appeal to experiential subjectivity, well illustrated in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard.

The readings of literary criticism adhere scrupulously to the self-referential character of the text, whereas immanent criticism insists that the completed literary whole, taken precisely on its own terms, overflows or transcends its boundaries. The text exhibits contradictions of form and content that cannot be understood apart from the contradictions of the text's social surround. As Terry Eagleton has succinctly put it, 'what else in the end could be the source and object of any [literary] signifying practice but the real social formation which provides its material matrix?' (1976: 72).

The contradictions typically identified both by historical criticism and literary criticism, if not attributed to a glossator or redactor, are treated as conceptual inconsistencies or enigmas that are either resolvable by an even more careful reading of the text, or remain unresolved because the writer/editor has not been clear or has omitted information or argumentation that could resolve the inconsistency. It is assumed that writers and editors are themselves more or less aware of these clashing concepts, to the extent that they may even comprise the backbone of a text's argument. These textual polarities are viewed less as outright contradictions and more as paradoxes that, while seemingly blatantly contradictory, may nevertheless be construed as ultimately compatible. By way of example, Michael Fox has identified three central contradictions in Qohelet which he attempts to construe as conceptually compatible: (1) between the futility of work and the wealth that work produces; (2) between the benefits wisdom confers and its ultimate incomprehension of life; and (3) between the posited justice of God and the injustice God permits and even decrees in life (Fox, Chapters 2-4).

Immanent criticism, on the other hand, is minimally interested in the 'contradictions' of which writers are aware. Whereas Fox's type of contradiction is indeed an imaginable result of the puzzlements generated in everyday life, the contradictions that immanent criticism seeks are largely invisible to the author simply because they cannot be resolved as long as the clashing social conditions they indirectly articulate have not been resolved. The harmonization of the antagonistic social conditions is of course precisely what the text is unable to achieve by any sort of intellectual or religious legerdemain. The contradictions require a social resolution.

In terms of social content, Qohelet is very much about the conduct and values of kings and the officers who attend them. Royal regimes are claimed to depend upon wisdom as the source of their success. The deep unacknowledged contradictions in this celebration of royal wisdom are two-fold: (1) the clash between the alleged wisdom of kings and their gross failure to uphold justice in their realms; and (2) the collision between the praise of wisdom as an abstract, apparently universal, good and the failure of royal regimes to provide stable and trustworthy working environments for state officials to carry out the king's supposedly 'wise' policies.

Both of these deep contradictions in Qohelet are entangled in the literary conceit by which the author of the book adopts the persona of a wise king, doubtless modeled on Solomon, who teaches others how to view life and how to behave, especially in public service. Let us call this persona the Teacher-King whose words are framed by the author's introduction in 1.1 and conclusion in 12.9-14. When I refer to Qohelet I refer primarily to the persona and reported observations of the Teacher-King and not to the author of the book as such who speaks without disguise only in the introduction and epilogue. As far as the thought of the actual author, we know it only through the posited speech of the Teacher-King.

On the Alleged Wisdom and Actual Injustice of Kings

In the so-called Royal Experiment of 1.12-2.26, a Teacher-King in Jerusalem recounts the lavish projects and marshaling of human and natural resources by which he had hoped to find lasting satisfaction in life but without success. Only as he surrenders himself to wisdom's ways does he secure a measure of precarious happiness which may be reversed by a change of fortune at any moment. This speech of the king is noticeably ego-centered and concerned with self-fulfillment, and it makes no reference at all to how he administered the state for the benefit of his subjects, ostensibly the first duty of any wise king. Astonishingly, when the king broaches the matter of rampant social injustice in the realm, he deplores it, but does nothing whatsoever to combat it (3.16-17; 4.1-3).

Although the Teacher–King purportedly continues to speak throughout the book, there are considerable sections where he is no longer certainly identified as the speaking subject because the ‘I’ voice drops out, reappears, and drops out anew. Thus, when the text severely criticizes kings, is the Teacher–King included among the monarchs criticized? We are, I think, entitled to read it either way, even both ways. To put it otherwise, it is as if the book forgets that it has announced itself to be the words of a Teacher–King regarded as the paragon of a wisdom that only persistent seekers are able to acquire. Without warning, the text wanders into overt and implicit criticism of kings as grievously deficient in wisdom, and in some cases actual fools. This wobbling of the text between a self-proclaimed ‘ideal ruler’ and an exposé of incompetent or oppressive kings produces an equivocation in the book’s assessment of royal rule, leaving the reader in doubt as to exactly who it is who pronounces on the virtues and vices of kings. Suspicion that the categorical criticisms of kings also applies to the Teacher–King is awakened by the frequent absence of the first-person voice passing negative judgment on rulers. In short, the text fudges the identity of the voice speaking so negatively of kings as a cohort, and, in puncturing the aura surrounding royal wisdom, this equivocation reflects unfavorably on the Teacher–King in spite of his eloquent self-congratulations when he reports on his own rule.

Virtually nothing is said about the details of royal administration under the Teacher–King. He distances himself from any involvement in or responsibility for injustice and oppression in his kingdom, even as he bitterly deplores the corruption of judges (3.16-17) and the heartless crushing of the weak by the strong (4.1-3). The king is appalled that there is no one to comfort those who are wronged without cause. This apparent royal surrender to lawless forces in his kingdom is surpassing strange. The Teacher–King who, according to his initial claim, has power to do anything he desires for his own pleasure (2.9-10), fails to lift a finger against injustice and oppression in his realm. This can only be described as dereliction of duty so blatant that one wonders if the author naively fails to notice the dissonance or is perhaps insinuating to the observant reader that the Teacher–King, who liberally exercises his vast powers for his own wisdom quest, hypocritically ‘passes by on the other side’ when he is confronted with social crimes against the weak by those who have the power ‘to get away with it’.

This contradiction between the assumed virtue of the Teacher–King and the perhaps inadvertent disclosure that he has not intervened to prevent injustice and oppression within his own kingdom, sets the stage for the many critical references to kings and their officials whose ‘leadership’ is pictured as gravely lacking in wisdom.

At least one of the mechanisms for the injustice that the Teacher–King is said to deplore but does nothing to stop is explained in 5.8-9 (Heb. 5.7-8) as

follows: 'When you see in a province the poor oppressed and justice and right violently taken away, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher one, and there are yet higher officials over them' (v. 7). This evidently refers to a ranked bureaucracy in which three levels of officialdom, in league with big landowners and prosperous merchants, are implicated in violent repression of justice for the poor, precisely the systemic sociopolitical evils denounced by many Israelite prophecies and also attested in other wisdom literature such as Job and Proverbs (Gottwald 2006).

Regrettably, the clinching verse that follows (v. 9) is textually corrupt, or at least syntactically opaque, and capable of a number of translations. Customarily interpreters regard the *yitron* of v. 9 as 'profit, advantage or gain' from the land that is productively cultivated by the king, thereby assuming without warrant that this verse intends to contrast a just king with his unjust officials. However, the *yitron* may just as easily refer to the 'surplus' or 'advantage' that the king extracts for himself from the cultivated land, thereby putting him at the apex of an unjust system practiced by his officials. I would tentatively translate the verse, 'the surplus of the land is his, the king is profited by the cultivated fields'. One modern translation proposes a paraphrase that makes the socioeconomic thrust even clearer, 'And since the king is the highest official, he benefits from taxes paid on the land' (*The Learning Bible*: 1203). On the other hand, if the difficult verse means to commend the king as chief promoter of equitable agrarian practices, it is peculiar that he allows the gross injustice practiced by his officials as described in v. 8. If this 'benign' rendering of the verse is preferred, it would present us with the same inaction of royalty against socioeconomic injustice we noted in 4.1-3.

On the Alleged Wisdom and Actual Maladministration of Kings

In addition to its allegations of royal negligence, if not outright complicity, in allowing or facilitating state injustice, the speaking voice in Qohelet takes a dim view of the dysfunctional relations between kings and the officials who serve them.

There are aging rulers who foolishly refuse to take advice (4.13).

There are forceful rulers who insist on doing as they please; therefore, it is best for their counselors to wait for the propitious moment to offer them contrary advice (8.2-6).

There are rulers who become enraged at their underlings whose only defense is to placate the angry potentate by a show of extreme deference (10.4).

There are rulers who commit serious errors of judgment in appointing inexperienced upstart officials in place of aristocratic leaders of proven ability, disrupting governmental efficiency and disconcertingly reversing the status positions of officials at the whim of the monarch (10.5-7).

There are rulers who shout in the company of fools, ignoring the words of their wise counselors (9.17).

There are lax rulers who cannot control princes who engage in drunken revelry (10.16-17).

There are rulers and their minions who maintain a tight control on their positions of power by encouraging court sycophants to inform on anyone who curses or insults the king (10.20).

There are rulers who undertake military campaigns and are defeated by the wisdom of the poor (9.14).

In sum, heads of state are seen to be either weak and incompetent, failing to perform their rightful duties, or strong and willful, doing as they please irrespective of prudent advice otherwise. Whether strong or weak, kings are prone to erratic behavior and outbursts of anger. In short, the royal weaknesses are deplored and the supposed royal strengths are exposed as displays of arbitrary power noticeably adrift from wise statecraft. Following the unrelieved self-congratulation of the Teacher-King, there is no statement in the book that attests to the virtues of kings. In a way, we have here as stark a difference in the assessment of kings as the so-called pro-monarchic and anti-monarchic strands of 1 Samuel.

It is also to be noted that these critical remarks are almost entirely reserved for the king's interaction with his underlings and thus for what goes on in inner court circles. The exception, and an extremely revealing one, as we have noted, is the pericope wherein the king is pictured as sitting atop a pyramid of bureaucrats, merchants, and landowners who violently oppress the poor with heavy taxes, onerous loans, and a corrupt legal system (5.8-9). As the putative speaker, the Teacher-King presumes to pass judgment on kings as a whole without either associating or dissociating his own rule from that of the rulers he pillories. This should be recognized as an attempt at adroit 'public relations' or political 'spin'.

In this way, the Teacher-King is able to decry the violent injustice of the state without accepting any responsibility as head of state to intervene on behalf of its victims. In spite of his efforts to disclaim involvement, the Teacher-King's stance toward public injustice is nearly identical with the stance of the king who heads a multi-layered bureaucratic system that robs its weakest subjects of land and livelihood. According to the dour political outlook taken as the base line of the book, both the king's officials and his subjects alike are meant to obey and serve the king without any promise,

much less assurance, of his caring for their welfare. In effect, the Teacher–King condemns his own misrule without realizing he is doing so!

The exploitative state is *explicitly* shown by what is said of kings who mistreat or disdain their officials and courtiers and likewise abuse those beyond court circles through taxes, foreclosed loans, and corrupted legal process. The exploitative state is *implicitly* disclosed by the Teacher–King’s nonchalance toward the effects of his rule on those beneath him and by his feigned lack of state power to prevent the injustices for which he thereby effectively ‘washes his hands’ of any responsibility. The overall cycle of oppression that emerges dialectically in the interface and counterpoint between the two voices is that the king and the state establishment, while purporting to be wise and just, are loathe to wield their undoubted power in the service of restorative justice for their wronged subjects. The rift that opens up in the profession of royal wisdom is the disturbing reality that the very foundations of the state establishment rest in large measure on an imbalance of power and a system of injustice that one-sidedly benefits the leaders, even as those leaders publicly claim a mantle of wisdom that only superficially cloaks their self-serving policies.

The Sociopolitical Circle behind the Teacher–King Persona

Self-criticism is not to be expected from a head of state, so the Teacher–King as formal speaker in the book ludicrously invites a negative evaluation of his own rule without sensing that he does so. From whose perspective then are kings being viewed? It is clear that the critique is not leveled from the point of view of a king. Nor is it a perspective issuing from parties outside the court, even when they are seen as negatively impacted by royalty. It is also not the outlook of those ‘still higher officials’ who, along with rich landowners and merchants, are said to oppress the populace. We are apparently left with Qohelet speaking from the painful experience of the lesser officials whose hold on their office, principally as scribes, counselors, and administrative staff, is tenuous. As ‘middle management’ types, these professionals are intimately familiar with the perils of serving a king who may reprimand, punish, demote or dismiss them at any moment. But they also know enough about how the socioeconomic and political systems operate to be able to see the injustices of the way the state apparatus depends on the uncompensated labor of those who work the land and the arbitrary behavior of the powerful toward those beneath them in the pyramid of state leadership. As literate professionals they have the skills to write such books as Qohelet, Proverbs, and Job and are able to find a way to write as they do without earning the wrath of the kings or higher officials they serve. The fictive encomium on the wise Teacher–King appears to insure that the cyni-

cal comments on other kings is taken in good humor, in the manner of the court jester.

At the same time, while sharply critical of royal rule, these mid-level bureaucrats are reluctant to pursue the consequences of their insight to the logical end. While they readily complain about the arbitrary whims of intemperate and inept kings, they only occasionally can bring themselves to comment directly on the attitudes and policies of the abusive system of which they are a part. They focus more on slipshod royal management of state and staff than on gross governmental wrongdoing. These court functionaries are enamored enough with the power of kings on whose favor they depend for livelihood that they can fantasize about a Teacher-King who grows wise but, in speaking of his rule, neglects to say anything about its baleful socioeconomic effects on his subjects.

In sum, the petty 'intellectuals' behind and within Qohelet are hesitant to own up to the unjust regime that supports them. It can be said of them what Adorno remarks in his critique of existentialism, 'The last word is spoken by tragic irony. The weaker the individual becomes, from a societal perspective, the less can he become calmly aware of his own impotence. He has to puff himself up into selfness [self-importance?] ... This is the insight that dignity contains the form of its decadence within itself. The fact can be observed when intellectuals become accomplices of that power which they don't have and which they should resist' (Adorno 1989: 163, 165).

Thus it may be said that Qohelet is a hesitating and timid protest against the sociopolitical power system that professional intellectuals participate in, their protest being a mixture of distaste, if not abhorrence, of its unfairness and a sizable dash of resentment that they lack the power to play a larger and more secure role in the system. Qohelet's acquiescence in the arbitrary ruling of kings—and of deity as well!—salves the conscience and comforts the spirit by assuring that the king's commands are supreme and the lot assigned by God is enduring. At the same time, the critical voice in Qohelet cannot quite swallow a total renunciation of free will and self-determination which, if embraced, would lock everyone within the prison of inscrutable and immutable injustice. Instead, the critical voice manages to salvage a modicum of 'decadent dignity' in the conduct of private life, even as the practice of wisdom in functions of state is chiefly reserved for self-protective measures against the arbitrary decrees of God and king. Not unlike the later Stoics, the self-assured Teacher-King who opens the book with his boast of achieving wisdom turns to bemoaning the plight of minor officials who struggle to purchase security and dignity in the one sphere they can master, namely, their own values and attitudes in the face of an inscrutable social system linked to an inscrutable God.

In sum, there is an unrelenting tension between the lavish claims Qohelet makes for wisdom in all the realms of life that it touches upon, on the one

hand, and wisdom's feeble sway in the public realm when it comes to the actual conduct of state affairs and social concourse, on the other. Professing wisdom, Qohelet in the end seems to be saying that the better part of wisdom is to recognize that foolishness more often than wisdom pervades and shapes the public order from which the sage can only disentangle himself and his fate with great difficulty. The contradictions prevail. Politics, led by kings and their minions, claims wisdom as its hallmark without notable success in showing the fruits of wisdom. Ostensibly wisdom can be deliberately cultivated by concerned individuals, at least in the private sphere, but it is no match for the corruption and stupidity that seem to be structured into the ways of the world and the power relations that shape it.

Clearly Qohelet is at a loss to formulate adequately the gaping chasm between the claimed marvels of wisdom and the lame practice of wisdom amid worldly power. The contending voices in the book can only express this contradiction symptomatically. To resolve this persistent tension between wisdom praised as a generality and its absence in life's particulars could only be accomplished within social and political conditions where wisdom was invested with power and rewarded in practice. Prophetic and legal traditions in the Hebrew Bible, implicitly acknowledging the oppressive state operative in the Tributary Mode of Production, were able to grasp the initial steps that would have to be taken to achieve a truly just, and thus wise, social and political order. Qohelet is left with recitation of the observed follies of actual kings, against which it can only advance the fantasy of a Solomon-like ruler whose 'wisdom' consisted at best of solipsistic self-indulgence.

Historical critics might well say, and some actually have said, that the openly expressed but unresolved contradictions of Qohelet mark it as a faulty work. The immanent critic, however, is likely to have the opposite opinion, for as Adorno has remarked, 'A successful work, according to immanent criticism, is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses this harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure' (Adorno 1967: 32).

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‘DIFFICULTY’ IN THE POETRY OF JOB

Edward L. Greenstein

‘The book of Job is by far one of the most difficult Hebrew texts in the Old Testament.’¹ This remark, by the late Gerald Wilson, is representative of the impressions of all those who delve into the Masoretic text of Job. Wilson attributes the text’s difficulty to ‘obscure, unknown, and unintelligible Hebrew words and phrases’, which ‘render precise interpretation of many passages difficult, if not impossible’. Yair Hoffman devotes a chapter of his book on Job to its ‘difficult language’.² In his analysis the difficulties are largely lexicographical: we do not know what many of the words mean. This may result from their being *hapax legomena*, or foreign, or figurative in usage. Hoffman reminds us as well that expressions may also have an ironic intention, which is hard for us to grasp.³

There is no doubt that the poetry of Job abounds in language that challenges our philological knowledge and abilities. I am also of the belief that the book of Job has undergone physical damage in the course of its transmission and that it is a miracle of preservation that we can understand as much of it as we do.⁴ It should be immediately observed, however, that none

1. Gerald H. Wilson, *Job* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), p. 5; cf., e.g., John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 3. An earlier version of this essay was presented in August 2009 at the World Congress of Jewish Studies. That version appears on-line on the website of the World Union of Jewish Studies. It is a pleasure to expand the paper for publication in tribute to my friend and colleague, Professor J. Cheryl Exum. I am grateful to Professor Herbert Marks for his careful reading of the pre-revised paper and for his learned advice for improving it. Only I am to blame for the shortcomings.

2. Yair Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; JSOTSup, 213; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 176-221.

3. For criteria for the identification of irony, see, e.g., Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 27-35. One should bear in mind Sharp’s observation (p. 27): ‘the interpretation of irony is always something of an art’.

4. Cf., e.g., Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), p. 547 (here specifically concerning Elihu). As Hartley points out (*Job*, pp. 3-5), the ancient translators already struggled with a text they could not entirely understand.

of Hoffman's categories needs in and of itself to make for difficulty. A *hapax legomenon* is easily intelligible if its context is clear.⁵ Accordingly, in the verse *קבר כי ימצאו קבר // ישישו כי ימצאו קבר*, 'Who are happy to reach the tombstone, / Who rejoice when they reach the grave' (Job 3.22),⁶ the word *קבר* is often understood to refer to some aspect of a tomb, on account of its parallelism with *קבר*.⁷ Similarly, in the verse *אם התרחצתי במו [כתוב] שלג // וזהזכותי בבר כפי*, 'Were I to wash myself with soap-plant, / And cleanse my hands with lye' (9.30), the *hapax legomenon* *שלג* can be understood as 'soap-plant' in consideration of the context and the corresponding term *בר*, 'lye', in the parallel line.⁸

Foreign words need not be a source of difficulty either. While some may be known only to the learned elite, others may be known to the common reader. Assuming, as I and many others do, that the book of Job was composed sometime in the Persian period, when Aramaic was the *lingua franca* in the Levant, the frequent use of Aramaic words and forms by the poet should have posed no difficulty at all. Words like *מלה*, 'word', *שהד*, 'witness', and *גלד* 'skin', were probably just as familiar as their Hebrew equivalents, *דבר*, *עד*, and *עור*. They have certainly presented no obstacles to understanding in the course of the book of Job's transmission and reception.

Nor need metaphors and other figurative uses of language impede comprehension. It all depends on how conventional and straightforward a specific usage is. When Job complains, for example, that 'Shaddai's arrows are in me, / and my life-spirit drinks up their venom' (6.4), the imagery is at least as clear as the concept of divine affliction to which it refers. (Parenthetically, I would mention that in the second clause of this verse, what is uncertain is not the general sense but rather the syntax.⁹ It cannot be decided whether Job's life-spirit ingests the poison on the arrows or whether the poison saps his life-spirit. The syntax is ambiguous. I shall return to the topic of ambiguity below.)

The fourth of Hoffman's categories, as I have enumerated them, is irony. However, irony, too, can be readily comprehended, when the context is

5. Cf. N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (rev. edn; Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), pp. viii-ix, for the following examples.

6. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

7. For etymological suggestions, see the discussion in my 'The Language of Job and its Poetic Function', *JBL* 122 (2003), pp. 657-72 (662-63).

8. See, e.g., Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, p. 171; see further my discussion in 'Remarks on Some Metaphors in the Book of Job', in Shmu'el Vargon *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, IX. Presented to Moshe Garsiel (Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), pp. 231-41 (in Hebrew).

9. Cf., e.g., David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC, 17; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), p. 158 n. 4c. Contrast Hoffman's dismissal of syntactic difficulty in the language of Job (*A Blemished Perfection*, pp. 177-78).

unambiguous. Toward the end of chap. 7 Job complains that God hounds his every move, finding fault in even the merest infraction. He begs the deity to ignore him, wondering why an insignificant mortal should draw so much divine attention. When, in such a context, Job addresses God as 'the Watcher of Humanity' (נֹצֵר הָאָדָם, 7.20), the ironic, more specifically sarcastic, thrust of the phrase is evident.¹⁰

So, if the book of Job's difficulty does not lie particularly in the uniqueness, foreignness, non-literality, and irony of its words, wherein does it lie?

Difficulty has been treated as a literary concept, and one that is often characteristic of poetry.¹¹ This concept has emerged in the wake of a number of early modern and modernist poets, such as Mallarmé and Wallace Stevens, whose work demands an extraordinary degree of analysis and reflection. George Steiner has contributed a very useful programmatic essay toward the elucidation of the concept of 'difficulty' in a poem, and he proposes to understand the difficult as being potentially of four different types.¹² Interestingly, only his first type is conventionally linguistic and philological. Only his first type covers the kinds of difficulty analyzed by Hoffman for Job.

Steiner's first category is that of 'contingent difficulties'. These comprise obstacles to ready comprehension that depend on what we know. These are things that we do not already know and that we need to figure out or look up. In poetry meaning is often compressed, so that words and their combinations convey a variety of meanings simultaneously (polysemy) or a number of alternate possibilities of meaning (ambiguity). A meaning may depend on an intertextual association or allusion or on the decoding of a neologism or another kind of unconventional linguistic usage.¹³ Let us

10. See, e.g., Clines, *Job 1–20*, p. 194.

11. See, e.g., Alan C. Purves (ed.), *The Idea of Difficulty in Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Steven Monte, 'Difficulty and Modern Poetry', *Literature Compass* 4 (2007), pp. 1133–57.

12. George Steiner, 'On Difficulty', in *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 18–47. For difficulty in Mallarmé, see, e.g., Steiner, 'On Difficulty', pp. 20 and passim; for Mallarmé and Valéry, see, e.g., Gérard Genette, 'Valéry and the Poetics of Language', in Josué V. Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 359–73; for difficulty in Stevens, see, e.g., the introduction and many of the reviews and essays in Steven Gould Axelrod and Helen Deese (eds.), *Critical Essays on Wallace Stevens* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988). Stevens is often characterized as 'obscure'; see further below.

13. Compare this summary of how a highly polysemous word can lead to a virtually endless search for sense in a Wallace Stevens poem: 'Beginning with the word *cure* in 'The Rock', the interpreter is led further and further into a labyrinth of branching linguistic connections going back through Whitman and Emerson to Milton, to the Bible, to Aristotle, and behind him into the forking pathways of our Indo-European family of languages' (J. Hillis Miller, 'Stevens', in *The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985], pp. 390–422 [422]).

consider a few examples of what might be contingent difficulties in the poetry of Job.

In Job 18.4 Bildad addresses Job disparagingly as *טָרַף נִפְשׁוֹ בָּאָפּוֹ*, 'the one who tears himself apart in his anger'.¹⁴ This is the only place in biblical literature in which a person tears (*טָרַף*) oneself. The usage would appear to be an innovation. It therefore needs to be decoded, in Riffaterre's terminology. Decoding is necessitated when the linguistic form one encounters is abnormal and unpredictable.¹⁵ Of course, the neologism, 'to tear oneself', entails the metaphor, 'An enraged person is an animal going wild', as the verb *טָרַף* is used fundamentally of a wild animal such as a lion.¹⁶ Compare, for example, the oracle of the Lord in Hos. 5.14: *כִּי אֲנֹכִי כְשָׁחַל לְאַפְרַיִם, וְכַכְפִּיר*, 'For I will be like a lion toward Ephraim, and like a predator toward the House of Judah; I myself will ravage (אֲטָרֵף) as I go along, carry off (my prey) with none to rescue (them)'.

In Job 18.4, I would suggest, it is not the metaphor that makes the phrase 'tears himself apart in anger' difficult; the metaphor is conventional and familiar. The difficulty is rather that one must do a double-take in parsing the phrase differently from the already known expression *טָרַף אֵף*, 'to be enraged', in which *אֵף*, 'anger', is the subject governing the verb *טָרַף*. Compare Amos 1.11: *וְיִטָּרֵף לְעַד אָפּוֹ // וְעִבְרָתוֹ שֹׁמֵרָה נֹצַח*, 'His anger rages forever, / and his wrath burns eternally'.¹⁷ Moreover, the idiom *טָרַף אֵף*, 'to be enraged', is intransitive, while the phrase in Job 18.4 employs *טָרַף* transitively. The subject of *טָרַף* in Job 18.4 is not *אֵף*, 'anger', but rather the implied third masculine singular personal pronoun 'he'. Job is the implicit subject of the verb, the one who tears himself apart, according to Bildad. The noun *אֵף* is given a different function, as the object of the preposition *בְּ*, forming an adverbial complement.

The poet has Bildad deconstruct and creatively reconstitute the idiom *טָרַף אֵף* as *טָרַף נִפְשׁוֹ בָּאָפּוֹ* as a response to Job's depiction of the deity as a wild animal, baring his teeth and steeling his eyes against him (16.9). In the course of that description Job uses the conventional idiom *אָפּוֹ טָרַף* to say that God 'became enraged' before assaulting him. Bildad's response is in the

14. For the difficulty this line poses for interpreters, see, e.g., Clines, *Job 1–20*, p. 405 n. 4b.

15. Michael Riffaterre, 'Criteria for Style Analysis', in Seymour Chatman and Samuel Levin (eds.), *Essays on the Language of Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), pp. 412–30 (416).

16. See BDB, pp. 382–83.

17. The use of *טָרַף* with *אֵף* is surely the result of a scribal error in Amos 1.11, where *נָטַר-שֹׁמֵר* was written for *וְיִטָּרֵף*. The actual poetic pair of verbs conveying anger is *נָטַר-שֹׁמֵר*, cognate to the well-attested Akkadian pair *šamāru-nadāru*; compare Jer. 3.8; and see Moshe Held, 'Studies in Biblical Homonyms in the Light of Akkadian', *JANES 3* (1970–71), pp. 46–55.

most basic sense poetic: he seizes upon Job's phrase, takes it apart, and invents an alternate usage in which it is not God who is going nuts but Job.¹⁸ The poetic turn that Bildad manifests illustrates the well-known Russian formalist notion that literary art is a 'making strange', a 'defamiliarization' of ordinary discourse in which 'poetry is a kind of abnormality'¹⁹—a deviation from the linguistic norm for the purpose of expressing a different perspective.²⁰

In post-modern discourse concerning language and literary art, it is typically claimed that the notion of literariness, a notion nourished by the formalists and by their structuralist successors, is dubious if not specious. Critics of the idea that literature is language governed by a particular poetics question the assumption that there actually are shared norms, from which the literary artist deviates, and point to the frequent difficulty of distinguishing between ordinary language and the poetic.²¹ The poetry of Job, with its unique multilingual language, whose poetics and functions I have endeavored to describe elsewhere,²² poses a special challenge to the post-structuralist criticism of literariness. In the following example an interpretative difficulty is occasioned by a certain complexity that is encountered only when one thinks intertextually. But before proceeding to that example, it will be helpful to return to the case of Job 18.4.

18. Cf. E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), p. 259.

19. Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 49. For the classic statement on defamiliarization, see Victor Shkolovsky, 'Art as Technique' [1917], in Hazard Adams (ed.), *Critical Theory since Plato* (rev. edn; Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), pp. 750-59. The formalists were anticipated by the great Romantic poet Shelley: 'Poetry ... awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the hidden veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar...' (Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'In Defense of Poetry' [1821], in Adams (ed.), *Critical Theory since Plato*, pp. 515-29 (519b).

20. For another example of the defamiliarized use of an expression in the poetry of Job, compare Job's use of בֶּן־בֶּטֶן, 'son of the belly', which in pedestrian Hebrew of the Persian period refers to the son/child of one's own belly or loins—one's own child—but in the poetry of Job refers to the child of the belly/womb out of which Job emerged, i.e., his sibling; for references and analysis, see my 'Features of Language in the Poetry of Job', in Thomas Krüger et al. (eds.), *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen* (ATANT, 88; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007), pp. 81-96 (84-86).

21. See, e.g., Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); cf., e.g., Stanley Fish, 'How Ordinary is Ordinary Language?', in *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 97-111; Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (ed. Derek Attridge; New York/London: Routledge, 1992).

22. See my 'The Language of Job and its Poetic Function' (n. 7 above) and 'Features of Language in the Poetry of Job' (n. 20 above).

Bildad's metaphorical reference to Job as a wild animal—one who is טִרְף—evokes intertextually the use of the lion in the Psalms and more locally in Job as an image of the wicked.²³ Recall, for example, Eliphaz's metaphor of the lion (4.10-11) who may seem to thrive for a long time but comes to a miserable end when his teeth crack and he is unable to feed himself or his cubs. Eliphaz wants to say that the wicked only seem to prosper when you observe them in their heyday. Job should know that in the end they receive their just deserts. Bildad's implication (in 18.4) that Job is wicked derives, then, not only from his characterization of him as self-destructive but from his association of Job with the wild animal, an image of the wicked.

My next example also involves an effort of intertextual analysis. In Job's reverie over his good old days, he describes them figuratively as follows (29.6): בְּרַחֵץ הַלֵּיכִי בַחֲמָה [בחמאה!] / וצור יצוק עמדי פלגי-שמן: 'When my feet were washed in cream (or curds), / and the rock poured streams of oil over me'. As in the previous example, it is not the idyllic imagery that complicates comprehension of the couplet. Rather the difficulty in interpreting this verse results from the effort that is entailed by the verse's intertextuality and the ambiguity that results from it. The use of the terms שֶׁמֶן, 'oil, fat', חֲמָה, 'curds, cream', and צוֹר, 'rock', in close proximity, on top of the image of liquid gushing forth from a rock, can hardly but evoke a well-known passage from Deuteronomy 32, a text that is often drawn upon in the poetry of Job (compare, e.g., Job 5.18 with Deut. 32.39; and the parody of Deut. 32.7 in Job 12.7-8).²⁵

In the course of relating the acts by which God took care of the Israelites in the wilderness, Moses says (vv. 13b-14a):

וַיִּנְקְהוּ דָּבֶשׁ מִסֵּלַע , / וְשֶׁמֶן מִחֲלָמִישׁ צוֹר /
חֲמַת בִּקְרָהּ וְחֶלֶב צֹאן , / עִם חֶלֶב כְּרִים וְאִילִים ...

He (Yhwh) suckled him (Israel) with honey from a boulder,
And with oil from a flinty rock;
With curds from cattle and milk from goats,
With milk from lambs and rams...²⁶

23. See my 'Remarks on Some Metaphors' (n. 8 above), pp. 236-37. For explicit associations between the lion and the root טִרְף, see Gen. 49.9; Num. 23.24; Deut. 33.20; Isa. 5.29; 31.4; Jer. 5.6; Ezek. 19.6; 22.25; Hos. 5.14; Amos 3.4; Nah. 2.13-14; Ps. 7.3; 17.12; 22.14; 104.21; Job 4.11; 38.39.

24. In parallelism with פְּלָגֵי שֶׁמֶן, 'streams of oil', we clearly must read חֲמָה, 'curds', for חֲמָה, 'venom, anger'; cf., e.g., BDB, pp. 326a, 237a.

25. There are additional instances. I am writing a separate study on the intertextuality of Deuteronomy 32 and Job. The following case study is derived from my paper, 'Remarks on David Clines's Job Commentary and the State of Job Philology Today', presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 2009.

26. For reasons of quasi-metrical balance between the two cola, I cannot agree that the term וְאִילִים, 'and rams', should be joined to the following colon, as is reflected in the

Moses is referring to an episode in which God provided Israel with nourishing liquid from a rock (see Exod. 17.1-7; Num. 20.7-13; cf. Ps. 78.15; 114.8). On one level, the nourishing liquid comes from a rock, from a צור. But on another level, the one who causes the liquid to burst forth from the rock is God. The term צור is, of course, a widespread metaphor for God: God is a rock (צור).²⁷ The proximate source of the nourishing liquid is the rock, but the actual source of the nourishing liquid, the subject of the verb הניק, 'to suckle', is God, who, several times within Deuteronomy 32, is called הַצּוֹר or צור, 'the Rock' (vv. 4, 15, 18, 31). In the biblical context, and especially in biblical poetry, the word צור is potentially ambiguous.

Returning to Job 29.6, in view of the language of the intertext Deut. 32.13, in which Israel receives oil from a rock—צור—the reader of Job 29 can no longer interpret the word צור as no more than a common noun.²⁸ Since the nourishing liquid comes most immediately from a צור in the sense of 'rock', the literal meaning applies. In employing the language of Deut. 32.13-14, Job would seem to be alluding to an episode in Israel's history in which the nourishing liquid comes to the recipient from a divine source, from the Rock, meaning God. In the preceding verses of chap. 29, Job explicitly cites the deity (שדי or אלוה) as the source of his former blessings. It is therefore appropriate that Job allude in his reference to the rock to the Rock that stands behind the oil that once anointed him. This allusion arises only when the word צור is understood to be ambiguous—it has a literal meaning and a metaphorical one, and both suit the present context. Verse 6b should accordingly be read in two different though related ways: 'when the rock poured streams of oil over me'—a literal reading of 'rock' in which the rock is personified—and 'when the Rock (namely, God) poured streams of oil over me'—in which the term for 'rock' is a metaphor.

Let me reiterate, however, that it is not the familiar metaphor 'God is a rock' that makes for difficulty in interpreting Job 29.6. It is rather the ambiguity that arises in the course of intertextual reading. The term צור was ambiguous all along, but its ambiguity only became an impediment to easy understanding when the intertext came into consideration.²⁹ Ambiguity, like

Aleppo Codex and defended by Tigay; see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), p. 305.

27. See Vesta M.H. Kowalski, 'Rock of Ages: A Theological Study of the Word צור as a Metaphor for Israel's God' (PhD dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, 1997), in which she indicates the ambiguity in both Deut. 32.13-14 and in Job 29.6.

28. The term צור refers to a physical rock elsewhere in Job (14.18; 18.4; 19.24; 22.24; 24.8; 28.10); nowhere in Job does it refer directly to God.

29. For ambiguity as a source of difficulty in poetry, see, e.g., John Sinclair, 'Poetic Discourse: A Sample Exercise', in Willie van Peer (ed.), *The Taming of the Text*:

polysemy, is among the hallmarks of poetic language, and it often makes special demands on the interpreter. Fletcher characterizes this type of difficulty as 'gnomic'.³⁰ Like many gnomic sayings, underlying the surface formulation is a secret allusion or idea. The obscurity prompts interpretive scrutiny, and this scrutiny raises questions of meaning.³¹ Fletcher relates the gnomic to the first three types of difficulty delineated by Steiner.

The kinds of difficulty presented by ambiguity, polysemy, arcane references, and such are, as was said, of a type that Steiner names 'contingent'. There are three other types of difficulty in poetry that are enumerated by Steiner. One is 'modal'; this type of difficulty in comprehension occurs when the reader cannot empathize with the sensibility that underlies the poem. One does not 'get' the perspective or feeling the poet is evincing. An example from Job might be his preference of death over life and darkness over light, as he expresses it primarily in chap. 3. This type of difficulty is essentially meta-linguistic. Another type of difficulty is 'tactical'; here there is a lack of sync between the apparent intention of the poet and the performative means that are employed. This may result from political or personal constraints imposed or self-imposed on the poet. This type of difficulty becomes linguistic in nature when the poet takes an ordinary usage and makes it strange for the purposes of defamiliarization—shaking the reader out of one's expectations or routine.³² As Shklovsky classically put it, 'The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms *difficult* [emphasis added], to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged'.³³ Fletcher attributes the aesthetic side of the gnomic to a 'knowing vision of perspectival contradictions, which result from adopting a slightly skewed viewing position'.³⁴

In this connection one might cite from Job the well-known oxymoron in which Job describes the realm of the dead as 'a land of darkness and deep-darkness (אֶרֶץ עִפְתָּה כְּמוֹ); a land of shining like darkness (אֶרֶץ חֹשֶׁךְ וְצִלְמוֹת);

Explorations in Language, Literature, and Culture (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 258-79 (267); and see the reference to Miller in n. 13 above.

30. Angus Fletcher, 'Allegorical Secrecy, Gnostic Obscurity', in *Colors of the Mind: Conjectures on Thinking in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 93-114.

31. See Fletcher, 'Allegorical Secrecy, Gnostic Obscurity'.

32. Cf., e.g., Irene R. Fairley, 'The Reader's Need for Conventions', in van Peer (ed.), *The Taming of the Text*, pp. 292-316.

33. Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p. 754a.

34. Angus Fletcher, 'Stevens and the Influential Gnome', in *Colors of the Mind*, pp. 266-87 (281).

אפל);³⁵ deep-darkness and amorphousness (צלמות ולא סדרים); it shines like darkness (ותפע כמו אפל) (10.21b-22).³⁶ In a similar vein, in the speech from the whirlwind Yhwh refers to the night of the wicked—the time they routinely perform their criminal activity—as ‘their light’ (אורם, Job 38.15). The dark serves them as the daytime of normal work, so that night for them is day.³⁷

The last type of difficulty enumerated by Steiner he calls ‘ontological’. In this type the poet seems to ‘put [...] in question the existential presuppositions that lie behind poetry as we have known it’.³⁸ Here it would seem that the poet is seeking not to be understood. Indeed, even though the goal of unintelligibility would appear to be a uniquely modern one, the question of whether the poet of Job was writing in a deliberately obscure fashion has been suggested by Hoffman and others.³⁹ Hoffman proposes that the poet’s obscurantism directly reflects his own psychological difficulty in dealing with the problem of innocent suffering and of expressing his sense of the incomprehensible.⁴⁰ Hoffman’s solution to the problem of difficulty in Job is reductionist as it makes the function of the discourse to represent the conceptual problem of the book iconically. It is this type of difficulty that is described in a well-known statement by Paul Celan, himself a notoriously difficult poet: ‘obscurity [is] associated with poetry for the sake of an encounter, by a perhaps self-devised distance or strangeness’.⁴¹

I find it difficult to accept the idea that the author of Job intended to be generally unintelligible. However, there is hardly a poem from the ancient world that is as difficult as Job. I think that, beyond textual and philological challenges, the overall difficulty of Job falls somewhere between Steiner’s categories of the modal and tactical. Job overturns and undermines many

35. For the understanding of עִיִּתָּה as ‘shining’ and its derivation, see H.L. Ginsberg, ‘An Unrecognized Allusion to Kings Pekah and Hoshea of Israel (Isaiah 8:23)’, in *Eretz-Israel* 5 (B. Mazar Volume; 1959), pp. 61*-65*.

36. Cf., e.g., Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 229. Saadiah Gaon discerns the oxymoron but, uncomfortable with its ostensible illogic, seeks to resolve it; see Lenn E. Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy ... by Saadiah Ben Joseph Al-Fayyūmī* (Yale Judaica Series, 25; New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 422.

37. See, e.g., Dhorme, *Job*, p. 582; and cf. my ‘Remarks on Some Metaphors’, p. 239.

38. Steiner, ‘On Difficulty’, p. 41.

39. Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*, pp. 203-12; see also, e.g., Jeffrey M. Green, ‘Reflections on the Book of Job’, *Ha-Do’ar* 82/4 (2003), pp. 52-58 (Hebrew).

40. Cf. Angus Fletcher, ‘The Language-Game of Prophecy in Renaissance Poetics’, in *Colors of the Mind*, pp. 115-27 (121-22).

41. Paul Celan, ‘The Meridian: Speech on the Occasion of the Award of the Georg Büchner Prize’, in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (trans. John Felstiner; New York/London: Norton, 2001), pp. 401-13 (407).

widespread conceptions and conventions. What the poet-critic Allen Grossman says of Hart Crane's poetry is, to my way of understanding, true of Job: 'It is the *strangeness*, the radical unfamiliarity of the thought, the unexpectedness of the cognitive demand that makes [him] "difficult". The difficulty is not stylistic. The difficulty is substantial, meta-logical...'.⁴²

Job in his poetic discourses tries to un-do time and retroactively to eliminate the day he was born and the night he was conceived (chap. 3).⁴³ He imposes a lawsuit on God.⁴⁴ He seeks death instead of life and values darkness over light. For him, it is darkness, not daylight, that shines (see above). For the poet of Job, God appears to Job, and immediately after demeaning him and refusing to explain to him the cause of his suffering, then declares that someone who speaks harshly but honestly about God is to be favored while those who defend the divine honor must be saved by the prayers of the theological critic (42.7-8).⁴⁵ It is Job the critic who is commended and his friends the defenders of the faith who are reprimanded. Following these lines of thought and principles of belief would be hard for anyone who thinks within the bounds of the conventional.

Grossman says, the function of poetry is to raise problems. The poetry of Job certainly does that. The difficulty of a poem, for Grossman, lies above all in its substance, and this difficulty is perceived only after the poem has been understood.⁴⁶ With respect to Steiner's categories, when dealing with a poem like Job, the resolution of contingent difficulties only means there are modal and tactical difficulties yet to resolve.

42. Allen Grossman, 'On Communicative Difficulty in General and "Difficult" Poetry in Particular: The Example of Hart Crane's "The Broken Tower"', in *True Love: Essays on Poetry and Valuing* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 147-62, 186-89 (161).

43. For Job's turn to the unreal in response to his reality, compare this observation of Brooke-Rose: 'If the "real" has come to seem unreal, it is natural to turn to the "unreal" as real' (Christine Brook-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially the Fantastic* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], p. 4).

44. Contrary to what is often claimed, Job's lawsuit against God is not metaphorical but real; it is played out to the end; see my 'A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind', in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. Michael V. Fox *et al.*; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 241-58.

45. Cf. my article, 'Truth or Theodicy? Speaking Truth to Power in the Book of Job', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27 (2006), pp. 238-58.

46. Grossman, 'On Communicative Difficulty', p. 159.

SAMSON IMPROVED FOR YOUTH IN AN AGE OF EMPIRE:
MR ATHERTON, GENTLEMAN AND GENIAL GIANT, IN
G.A. HENTY'S *MAORI AND SETTLER* (1891), AS A CASE
OF BIBLICAL RECEPTION*

David M. Gunn

Introduction: Retellings

As a young boy frequenting the Canterbury Public Library, in Christchurch in the South Island of New Zealand, I came across the historical novels of G.A. Henty and proceeded to read my way through the annals of British history as refracted by this prolific and popular late-nineteenth century writer of adventure stories for boys. Henty (1832–1902) published well over a hundred works of fiction between 1867 and his death. A good many of them were in the children's library, but curiously I do not remember the one that is the subject of this paper, the only one set in New Zealand, *Maori and Settler: A Story of the New Zealand War*, published in London in 1891.

Henty's readers were predominantly middle and upper class boys or 'youth' (of ten or twelve and upwards) in Britain, as well as young males throughout the Empire and in the United States. But Deidre McMahon (2010: 161-62) argues that the readership also probably included many females; a survey in 1886, for example, listed Henty as one the top ten authors read by colonial women and girls (Flint 1993: 161). She notes that Henty himself said that girls wrote to him almost as much as boys did 'to assure me that they liked my stories quite as well as their brothers did' (in an 1894 interview in *Chums* weekly) and according to his biographer George Manville Fenn he 'declared

* It is with great pleasure that I join friends and colleagues in honoring Cheryl Exum's quite extraordinary contribution to biblical studies—as literary critic, feminist critic, and, not least, cultural critic (often all combined). Since she is *par excellence* the person to read on Samson—and has been since her graduate years—it is with some trepidation that I venture this whimsical piece on Samson and Delilah. But having lived in England, an expatriate, for a good many years (as I have done), she may, I dare hope, appreciate Henty's effort to straighten out these biblical characters in a proper British manner.

that girls write more intelligently and evince greater judgment in their criticism' (Fenn 1907: 324). Many women 'fondly remembered reading boys' adventure novels', the evidence shows (citing Flint 1993: 202), and she concludes that it was probable 'that girls read adventure stories for the same reason boys did: to escape into a world of travel, action, and autonomy'. Today, in the United States, Henty is making a big comeback as favorite reading in the conservative Home School movement, though whether as co-ed reading or just for boys is not clear to me (cf. McMahon 2010: 155; and just Google!).

The story of *Maori and Settler* follows the fortunes of a 16 year-old English boy whose family suffers a major financial loss (a typical Henty plot opener). Mr Renshaw, the rather useless (which is to say, academically inclined) father decides to emigrate to New Zealand, at the urging of his very capable wife (a character frequently found in Henty stories)¹ and their two children, Wilfrid and his year-older sister (and great chum) Marion. A better choice than Canada, it is concluded, because it was a pleasanter climate and a better class of people were settling there due to the higher passage-money (the United States does not rate consideration). Half the book is about the adventures of their six-month passage out, via Cape Cod, in the company of a fellow passenger, Mr Atherton, a much-traveled man of means. The rest of the novel recounts the family's settling in the Hawke's Bay area of the North Island, with Mr Atherton as a temporary neighbor, and then their all becoming entangled in the clash between settlers and Maori led by the soon-to-become famous Te Kooti.² They name their new property The Glade. The time is the late 1860s. (Earlier in the decade my own paternal grandparents settled in the South Island.)

As the story was getting under way, my interest was piqued by a reference to Mr Atherton, who was a very large man, in his mid-thirties, as a 'Samson' (p. 49). Reading on, I began to suspect that this explicit allusion to the biblical story was not an isolated instance but merely the most direct of a number of significant connections between Henty's story and that of the biblical strongman. The explicit allusion, made by Wilfrid's sister Marion, invites a comparison between Samson and Mr Atherton. And while the novel in many respects conforms to Henty's regular plot structure and characterization (on which see Huttenback 1965: 65), it is the exploits of Mr Atherton,

1. As McMahon puts it: 'Mothers in Henty's novels are usually paragons of intelligence, culture, and common sense' (2010: 163).

2. Te Kooti understood himself to be a prophet and saw himself in the role of Joshua, taking back the land and expelling the Canaanites. This was an identity which infuriated European settlers who castigated the missionaries for their contribution to such views by promiscuously putting the Bible into the hands of the natives (Gunn 1998). The definitive work on Te Kooti is by Judith Binney (1995).

the mature man of prodigious strength, rather than those of young Wilfrid, around which this particular novel really turns. Moreover, with the fighting done, it is Mr Atherton rather than Wil who is the subject of romantic interest at the novel's close. And it is Marion, not Wil, who turns out to hold the key to the resolution of Mr Atherton's restless wandering. Mr Atherton, long in love with the young woman (as he confesses), finally proposes to her. She warmly accepts and accompanies him home to England. More than Wilfrid, then, Mr Atherton is the novel's hero and Marion the companion who provides a happy ending. Wil is there because boys' adventure books must have a boy hero. It is no accident that most of the original illustrations depict Mr Atherton's exploits. This is a story of a British Samson.

Patrick Dunae observes that Henty's books point to 'a decline in religious enthusiasms; they reflect the secular ideals and the materialistic spirit which came to characterize late Victorian imperialism' (1980: 110). I do not doubt this. I suggest, nonetheless, that in this novel (and it may well be the case in others) we see religion, in the form of the culture's religious text, the Bible, finding expression in his writing. Henty may not have been writing out of religious enthusiasm but the Bible was an indelible part of his cultural heritage.

The well-known story in Judges, I propose, is a cultural template that lends shape and meaning to Henty's story. I am not sure I could argue that the novel is a deliberate reworking of the Samson story. But I do see evidence that the biblical story lies close at hand as a significant influence, much as Anthony Swindell finds the Samson story to be what he calls a 'hypertext' of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Dred* (1856), or, in Gérard Genette's terms, a 'submerged interpolative rewriting' (Swindell 2010: 122). Swindell views *Dred* as 'a modified and complicated Samson story, adapted to the world of southern slavery in America' (129). In another example of re-use, from Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), Swindell describes the character Henchard as a 'submerged Samson-figure' who 'echoes the physical strength and impulsiveness of the biblical Samson and also engages in two seriously unsuccessful relationships with women'. As in the case of *Maori and Settler*, there is only one specific reference to Samson, when Henchard, near the end, is described as 'a Samson shorn' (Swindell 2010: 123).³

If *Dred*, the escaped slave, is a Samson-character, so too, in my reading, is Mr Atherton, the wandering gentleman. Moreover, I will suggest, Marion is Delilah's counterpart. The novel does much more than 'use' a direct allusion

3. See further Swindell's discussion of terminology (2-5) and his chapter on the reception-history of Samson in literature (113-29); more broadly on the reception-history of Judges 13-16 see Gunn 2005.

to the Bible by way of an incidental comparison. Rather, I take that one explicit allusion to be a clue to a much more pervasive intertextual connection. Whether Henty intended his readers to see his story as a companion-text or even (at least in part) a counter-text to the story in Judges, his readers had good reason to imbibe *his* Samson story (consciously or not) alongside his story of Wil and Marion and Mr Atherton. A reader so inclined (which might exclude a good number of those lads who sped through the adventure, reading for the plot), who consciously brings Samson into conjunction with Mr Atherton, might well find the comparison interesting, not least because of what Mr Atherton has to say (or what Henty, through Mr Atherton, has to say) about Samson. Leigh Cushing speaks of approach, stance, and filter when examining a text's reception (2008: 5-8, 209-17). Using her categories, I might say that as a retelling the novel approaches or gains entry to the biblical text by echoing, in a very different setting, significant elements of plot and character; that it takes both a sympathetic and a critical stance towards the biblical text (that is, it partly embraces but also attempts to conquer or subvert); and that its primary filter, the lens through which the retelling examines the telling, is unquestionably an ideology of Empire, specifically the British Empire.

Mr Atherton and Samson

Among the episodes of the Samson story retold and pictured through the centuries, ubiquitous is his encounter with the lion on his way to Philistine Timnah (Judg. 14.5-6). Attacked by the beast, he kills it barehanded, usually by grasping its jaws and tearing or strangling it. Common also are accounts of his slaying of a thousand Philistines at Lehi with an unconventional weapon, the jawbone of an ass (Judg. 14.14-16), and of his carrying away the gates of Gaza in a feat of strength (Judg. 16.1-3). Another favorite was the story of how he became weak, as a consequence of his dalliance with Delilah, but finally regained his strength to bring down the house or temple of Dagon (Judges 16). Henty would have been well acquainted with these stories, as would the vast majority of his readers.

Mr Atherton's Exploits

It emerges early in the novel (Chapter 3), as the emigrants sail to New Zealand, that Mr Atherton is a formidable fighter. The First Mate, Mr Ryan, has sailed before with Mr Atherton and gives the passengers an account of how this gentleman successfully resisted mutineers in the China Seas:

Then suddenly drawing weapons from beneath their clothes they rushed up the gangways on to the poop; and as none of us were armed...they would have cut us down almost without resistance had it not been for our friend

here. He was standing just at the top of the poop ladder when they came up, headed by their seraing. Mr Atherton knocked the scoundrel down with a blow of his fist, and then, catching him by the ankles, whirled him round his head like a club and knocked the fellows down like ninepins as they swarmed up the gangway, armed with knives and creases ... Anyhow, Mr Atherton saved our lives and the ship, so I think you will agree with me that he can hold his own in a scrimmage (47-48).

This account leads to some reflection on the part of Wilfrid and his sister.

'Who would have thought', Wilfrid said to his sister as he looked at Mr Atherton, who had taken his seat in a great Indian reclining chair he had brought for his own use, and was placidly smoking a cigar, 'that that easy, placid, pleasant-looking man could be capable of such a thing as that! Shouldn't I like to have been there!'

'So should I', Marion agreed; 'though it must have been terrible to look at. He doesn't look as if anything would put him out. I expect Samson was something like him, only not so stout. He seems to have been very good-tempered except when people wanted to capture him; and was always ready to forgive that horrid woman who tried to betray him to his enemies. Well, everything is very nice—much nicer than I expected—and I feel sure that we shall enjoy the voyage very much' (49).

So Mr Atherton is explicitly likened to Samson whom, we might note, Marion views rather favorably as good-natured and forgiving unless set upon. (We shall have more to say about Marion and Mr Atherton later.) Alert now to other possible allusions to the biblical hero we might tentatively compare Mr Atherton's use of the seraing's body as a club, 'knocking the fellows down like ninepins', to Samson's wielding of the ass's jawbone to slay the Philistines at Lehi, 'heaps upon heaps'.

In the next chapter (4), Wilfrid and the Allen brothers go ashore at Madeira, stay late, and encounter four lurking men, 'rough-looking fellows'. The men rush upon the youngsters and overpower them. But all is not lost. The step of a man approaching at full speed is heard. As the leader advances, knife in hand, his wrist is grasped and

a tremendous blow was delivered in his face, hurling him stunned and bleeding on the ground. With a bound the new-comer threw himself upon two of the other men. Grasping them by their throats he shook them as if they had been children [Figure 1], and then dashed their heads together with such tremendous force that when he loosened his grasp both fell insensible on the ground. The other robber took to his heels at the top of his speed. All this had passed so quickly that the struggle was over before Wilfrid and the Allens could get to their feet. 'Not hurt, I hope?' their rescuer asked anxiously. 'Why, Mr Atherton, is it you?' Wilfrid exclaimed. 'You arrived at a lucky moment indeed...' (65).



Figure 1. *Mr Atherton to the rescue* (p. 64)

Of course, it was not luck but Mr Atherton's thoughtful watching out for the boys' return from their visit to the foreign city and his deciding to go looking for them that saved the day. Samson turns aside from the path and his parents to chance upon the lion. Mr Atherton deliberately goes looking for the young lads who are beset by men of ill intent. Samson, in popular telling, seizes the lion by its jaws, or strangles it, and tears it apart. Mr Atherton grasps the two men by their throats, dashes their heads, and renders them insensible. No weapon is in the hand of either hero.

By Chapter 7 the ship has reached the Austral Islands after weathering a bad storm. The captain seeks a spar to replace the lost mainmast. Fortunately for the plot, the natives, known to be a treacherous lot, live up to their reputation.

With the ship at anchor and a deal with the natives agreed, Mr Atherton supervises a diligent and suspicious watch. Sure enough, when the task is all but completed the visiting chief strikes down the captain and a melee ensues

(141-43). But Mr Atherton is up to the task. Each shot from his revolver tells with fatal effect. The poop deck cleared, Mr Atherton now confronts the natives swarming up the port side ladder. He snatches Mr Renshaw's discharged musket.

He then clubbed the weapon, and whirling it round his head as if it had been a straw fell upon the natives, who were just pouring up on to the poop, shouting to the passengers, 'Fire on the mass below! I will keep these fellows at bay!' Every blow that fell stretched a man lifeless on deck, until those who had gained the poop, unable to retreat owing to the pressure of those behind them, and terrified by the destruction wrought by this giant, sprang over the bulwark into the sea (142).

So the ship is cleared. Mr Atherton has taken charge. 'Mr Renshaw, will you and some of the other passengers carry down those ladies who have fainted, and assure them all that the danger is really over.'

Mr Atherton, this 'giant', as Samson is often called, has once again wielded an improvised club to deal death to many and instill panic in the hostile throng. Henty's description of the hero wielding his club against overwhelming odds has plenty of parallels in accounts of Samson for youth, from well before Henty to long after him. 'Rushing impetuously among his enemies, who were overwhelmed with surprise and consternation, he assailed them, one after another, with this strange weapon. Wielded by his powerful arm, the blows inflicted by it caused death in every direction. The slain lay upon each other in heaps ...' (Gallaudet 1839: 144). 'Thrashing on every side, he killed several thousand and put the rest to flight' (Buel 1887: 175). Samson 'like a madman, dashed out the brains of all who came his way' (Begbie 1956: 120). He picked up the jawbone 'and cracked one man's skull after another with it until he had piles of dead lying all around him' (Boyd 1921: 93). 'Left and right he swung the large bone, hitting furiously from side to side... whoever came near him paid with his life. Those who were able turned and ran in panic' (Anon. 1953: 185).

This occasion is not the last time we see Mr Atherton as Samson at Lehi. The next time will be on dry land again, inland from Poverty Bay in the North Island of New Zealand. Wilfrid, wounded in a fight against the forces of the Maori leader, Te Kooti, is taken to Poverty Bay, and, feverish, is nursed assiduously first by Mr Atherton and then, as his fever worsens, by his mother who comes to look after him. The house in which they are lodging belongs to a settler—named Sampson (279).⁴

Te Kooti attacks the settlement at Poverty Bay and the white (*pakeha*) household escape across country, seeking to find safety with a friendly tribe, the Mahia. Fleeing are Mr and Mrs Sampson and their ten year old child,

4. This spelling of the biblical name has a long history, going back to the Septuagint. The 1395 Wycliffe Bible spells it this way, but later English versions use 'Samson'.

Mrs Renshaw, Wilfrid, still weak and needing to be carried, and Mr Atherton who is doing the heavy lifting. A party of Te Kooti's men follow them. Mr Atherton sends the women and child on ahead and the two men take up a position at the head of a ravine with Wilfrid ensconced on a ledge just above them. The natives rush the mouth of the defile. Three are shot dead. But despite the slaughter more rush forward.

There was no room in the narrow defile for two men to swing their rifles, and Mr Atherton and the settler [Sampson] stepped forward to meet the foe with their clubbed rifles in their hands (294).

They deliver blows to good effect, but, despite Wilfrid's covering fire, the settler is quickly brought down,

and he fell in a heap upon the ground. The tremendous strength of Mr Atherton stood him in good stead now. The first blow he had dealt had smashed the stock of his rifle, but he whirled the iron barrel like a light twig round his head, dealing blows that broke down the defence of the natives as if their tomahawks had been straw, and beating them down as a flail would level a wheat stalk [Figure 2]. Those in front of him recoiled from a strength which seemed to them superhuman... At last, with a cry of terror, the surviving natives turned and retreated at the top of their speed.

‘Hot work, Wilfrid’, Mr Atherton said as he lowered his terrible weapon and wiped the streaming perspiration from his face... This is a bad business of poor Sampson’s [Figure 3]. I will help you down first and then we will see to him...’ (294-95).

The ordinary man, the settler Sampson, can only do so much against a determined foe, despite his courage. Mr Atherton, on the other hand, like the biblical Samson endowed with superhuman strength, can prevail against all-comers. ‘Superhuman’ and ‘supernatural’ are both terms used often of Samson.⁵

Helped by Mrs Sampson, Mr Atherton tends to the terrible wound. ‘I wish we had some more water’, he says to her, ‘but as we haven’t we must do without it, and I daresay we shall come across a stream soon’ (297). A reader with the biblical story in mind might remember that at Lehi, having slain his foes, Samson is ‘sore athirst’ and challenges the Lord to make that right. Whereupon the Lord ‘clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived’ (Judg. 15.18-19 KJV). Mr Atherton’s hope for water is, to be sure, more mundane! The resourceful strong man devises a litter and they all set off towards a friendly village and, hopefully, some water along the way. Sure enough, they soon find the necessary stream.

5. For example, Samson ‘did some great works for God requiring superhuman brute force’ (Armstrong 1884: 82).



MR. ATHERTON KEEPS THE MOUTH OF THE DEFILE.



MR. ATHERTON FINDS THE SETTLER STILL BREATHING.

Figure 2. *Mr Atherton keeps the mouth of the defile* (frontispiece)Figure 3. *Mr Atherton finds the settler still breathing* (p. 295)

Mr Atherton takes the bulk of the weight, the more so as the journey progresses and he takes the girl on his shoulders. Wilfrid, however, cannot long continue and is left behind, well hidden. Having reached safety, with the wounded Sampson now in good hands, Mr Atherton, despite the extremely arduous trek, turns around and, with a small party of Mahia Maori and a litter, makes the long journey back to Wilfrid, and then all the way back to the village again. Through comments by Wilfrid (299) and a detailed account from Mrs Sampson (307-308), Henty stresses Mr Atherton's amazing feat of strength and endurance in making what Mrs Sampson sums up as 'a terrible journey'. A recent commentator picks up the term Henty uses earlier to describe Mr Atherton's fighting: carrying the frail and wounded involved 'almost superhuman strength' (Clark 2009: 246). But whereas Samson uses his superhuman strength to carry off gates to mock his enemies, Mr Atherton uses his to carry to safety people in dire need.

The Samson story is not only the story of the lion, Lehi, and the gates of Gaza, but also of Delilah. The novel, I suggest, also has its Delilah (or two), and as in Judges the relationship with the woman leads to the story's ending. But just as Mr Atherton and Samson carry to different ends, the endings of

their two stories are very different. Henty's ending is an inversion of the biblical account.

Mr Atherton in Love

When Marion, early in the novel, likened Mr Atherton to Samson, she demurred on one point. Samson would not have been 'as stout'. The first step needed, then, for Mr Atherton to become more truly like the Samson who wooed Delilah, was for him to lose weight! And indeed, this is what he sets out to do.

Although Mr Atherton had not gone through any such fatigues as those that he had endured at Poverty Bay [i.e., the journey to safety], he had continued steadily to decrease in weight. Feeling himself so much lighter and more active on the return from the expedition, he had continued to stick to long and regular exercise, and was out every day [collecting plant specimens]...from breakfast-time until dark. As he steadily refused to take any food with him, and fasted from breakfast-time till supper, the prolonged exercise in the close heat of the woods did its work rapidly, and at the end of a year from the date of his taking up his abode at The Glade he could no longer be called a stout man, and new-comers looked with admiration at his broad shoulders and powerful figure (332-33).

At this point in the story the question of marriage for Marion has arisen. She turns down a proposal from Bob Allen, Wilfrid's friend. Wilfrid cannot understand this rejection. 'Girls', he says to his sister in wonderment, 'are extraordinary creatures', pointing out to her that the young man 'is as steady as possible, and safe to get on well, and as nice a fellow as I know'. Marion, however, has other ideas. 'He is all that, Wilfrid, but you see I don't want to marry him. I like him very much in the same way you like him, but I don't like him well enough for that'. And she firmly suggests that he is in no position to lecture her on the topic (336).

In the meantime, Mr Atherton has decided that at age thirty-eight it is time to settle down and go 'home'. "What! Are you going home?", Mrs Renshaw exclaimed. "Yes, I am going home", he said more seriously than he usually spoke' (337).

Shortly thereafter, Mr Atherton asks Marion to put on her hat and go for a ramble with him, not an unusual request since she often accompanied him when he was not going far into the forest. They set off, Mr Atherton more silent than usual. Finally Marion speaks.

'A penny for your thoughts, Mr Atherton', she said at last with a laugh. 'It seems to me that you would have got on just as well without me' (342).

In return she gets a speech about falling in love, and about folly and weakness and wisdom.

'Well, I was just thinking that I was a fool to ask you to come with me, child.' Marion opened her eyes in surprise. 'You see, my dear', he went on, 'we all make fools of ourselves sometimes. I started in life by making a fool of myself. I fell in love with a woman whom I thought perfection. She was an arrant flirt, and was only amusing herself with me till she hooked a young lord for whom she was angling. That was what sent me roaming for the first time; and, as you know, having once started I have kept it up ever since, that is till I came out here. I had intended to stay six months; I have been here three years. Why have I stopped so long? Simply, child, because I have again made a fool of myself. I do not think I was conscious of it for the first two years, and it was only when I saw, as I thought, that young Allen would win you, that I recognized that I, a man of thirty-seven, was fool enough to love a child just eighteen years younger than myself. At the same time I was not fool enough to think that I had the smallest chance. I could not stop here and watch another winning you, and at the same time I was so weak that I could not go away altogether; and so you see I compromised matters by going away for weeks and sometimes months at a time, returning with the expectation each time of hearing that it was settled. Now I hear that you have refused him, and, just as a drowning man grasps at a straw, I resolved to have my fate absolutely settled before I sail. Don't be afraid of saying "no", dear. I have never for a moment looked for any other answer, but I think that I would rather have the "no" than go away without it, for in after years I might be fool enough to come to think that possibly, just possibly, the answer, had I asked the question, might have been "yes"' (342-43).

He stops in his walk and she looks up in his face.

'Do you think I did not know', she said softly, 'and didn't you really know too? You are not so wise a man as I thought you. Why, ever since I have known you it seems to me that—that—'

'That you have loved me, Marion; is it possible?' he said taking her hand. I

'Of course it is possible', she said almost pettishly; 'how could I help it, I should like to know?' (343-44).

Hero or Fool

So there we have it: well-to-do older man loves, and is loved by, younger woman who will come into a life of plenty. But that is not what is intriguing to our reader who has Samson in mind and has been brought up properly. Someone versed in the literature of Samson for youth, whether before or after Henty, knows that the key question about the biblical figure is whether he is hero or fool. Had he wisdom, would he have conducted himself so with women, above all, with Delilah? Why was he so foolish as to trust her, to love her? Wise and foolish are often the measure of Samson's life.

'But Samson was a very foolish man, and did not obey God's commands', writes Mrs Trimmer in 1790 (59). On the other hand, the Revd Alexander Fletcher assures his young readers that 'His mind was endowed with uncom-

mon bravery, and his body with miraculous strength. He was evidently marked out by the Holy Ghost for great exploits...' (1839: 62).

Trimmer and Fletcher signal two main threads of evaluation that adults have offered young people for more than two centuries. In the main, however, most writers, including Fletcher, have been inclined to qualify the biblical hero's bravery and miraculous strength. Caroline Hadley writes that 'though he was a *strong* man, he was not a *great* man. He wanted what is called *moral* courage, that is courage of the soul... He is truly brave who dares to do right through difficulty, danger, and scorn' (1868: 144-45).⁶ Harvey Peet, in his *Scripture Lessons for the Young* (1849), echoes Trimmer in using the language of 'folly' to speak of Samson's failure. Moreover, like many another writer, he is specific about the root of his judgment: 'Samson foolishly married a Philistine woman, named Delilah'. The qualification that Samson lacked wisdom has endured: 'And Samson had not wisdom', writes Olive Beaupré Miller, 'nor was he strong as a wise man is strong, for his heart now [going to Gaza] inclined to folly even as once to wrath' (1940: 165). 'A brave man who used his strength foolishly', is how another describes him (Cohen 1946: 185). Not a few have faulted him for indiscriminate and excessive violence—'a violent man', Trimmer calls him (1805: 145)—but Peet's judgment is widely shared: Delilah is the ultimate cause of Samson's downfall. She is a mercenary wretch, greedy, treacherous, a wicked woman. Even Fletcher, eager to acknowledge Samson's special gifts, is even more anxious to alert his young readers to Samson's fatal flaw: 'Here we see to what a miserable depth of degradation, of sin, and misery, Samson was brought by the temptations into which he fell. Young friends, flee youthful lusts. Flee from temptation as you would flee from the pestilence, or the devouring lion' (1839: 64). The temptations are women and Delilah above all.⁷

In short, Samson for youth is both hero and fool. His exploits of strength and bravery, including his end, have long been among the best known of biblical stories, a source of attraction for numerous readers and listeners.

6. The standard commentary literature for adults is often a resource for authors writing for youth. In this case, compare the Reverend Adam Clarke's popular commentary: '[Samson] was not a *great*, though he was a strong man; and even his muscular force would have been lost or spent in beating the air... Samson is a solemn proof of how little corporeal prowess avails, where *judgment* and *prudence* are wanting' (1833).

7. Recent scholarship has observed this line of interpretation. Mieke Bal comments: 'In our culture, the story of Samson and Delilah is the paradigmatic case of woman's wickedness... However strong a man is, and Samson *was* strong, he will always be helpless against woman's strategies of enchantment. Once seduced, he will be betrayed' (1987: 38); cf. Koosed and Linafelt (1996: 176). Cheryl Exum argues that this view of women as powerful and dangerous belongs to the text's gender ideology (1993: 86). Exum and William Whedbee observe in Samson a 'fatal weakness for women' so that he 'repeats his folly' (1985: 27, 28).

Even his reputation as a mischief maker who poses riddles and sets fiery foxes into fields, while garnering criticism from the educators, has also appealed to a wide audience among the young. He is, however, a hero who fails, who is perhaps given too much to violence but whose undoubted weakness or folly is over women.

The Measure of Mr Atherton

If that is the Samson with whom Henty and his readers would have been familiar, how does Mr Atherton measure up? As to violence, some years back I suggested that Samson could be read as desiring not to wander as God's violent servant (propelled by God's violent spirit) but to find a wife and settle down at home (Gunn 1992; cf. Vickery 1981).⁸ As it happens, if we go back to the original allusion in the novel, Marion's Samson sounds rather like that:

'He doesn't look as if anything would put him out. I expect Samson was something like him, only not so stout. He seems to have been very good-tempered except when people wanted to capture him; and was always ready to forgive that horrid woman who tried to betray him to his enemies' (49).

Marion's Samson is violent only when others seek to capture him. Perhaps she gives us a clue that Henty has a soft spot for Samson. Huttenback observes that 'Henty was more interested in physical courage than moral virtue. He considered action superior to contemplation.' As Henty wrote in his personal introduction to one of the novels, of all vices cowardice was the most contemptible and of all virtues bravery was the most estimable (Huttenback 1965: 66-67). Accordingly, Samson's violence, which troubled some commentators for youth in the nineteenth century and many more in the twentieth, was very likely not a concern of Henty. The Philistines probably deserved it, he may well have thought, just as he makes clear that the many trouble-making natives in his novels deserved only so much forbearance.

If there was any doubt on the matter of appropriate violence, however, Mr Atherton sorts it out. Like Marion's Samson, Mr Atherton (as Henty's readers would likely see it), does not go seeking violence, but uses his strength appropriately to defend himself and others. He only joins the expedition against Te Kooti because he understands the Maori party to be planning violence against the settlers. (He does not question the settlers' right to be making incursions into the land in the first place.) Hence Mr

8. Exum writes of how she 'felt no more than a perfunctory sympathy with poor Samson' until she saw Lovis Corinth's *Blinded Samson*. Having reflected on the biblical Samson in light of that painting, however, she came to the conclusion that, 'even if the story is not tragic, the hero himself is, in his unsought role as an instrument of no consequence in a divine vendetta against the Philistines' (1999: 157, 166).

Atherton's recourse to violence cannot be deemed erratic, capricious, or excessive, as the biblical Samson's recourse was sometimes deemed.

As to folly over women (and one in particular), Mr Atherton also sorts things out, though only with Marion's help. In the long speech in which he proposes to her, as he recounts his relationship with another woman and with her, the object of his affection, he reiterates the terms 'folly' and 'fool'—as if to cast himself as another Samson. His folly was first to pursue an 'arrant flirt'—a Delilah, the tradition might say—and then to fall in love with a woman so young she could not possibly want him. His love made him weak, so that, on the one hand, he could not speak to her of his folly, but, on the other hand, he could not altogether leave her. But now in foolish desperation he declares his love. And she, who has known all along and been patiently waiting (as decorum required), declares hers. How could he not have known about her love? 'You are not so wise a man as I thought you', she says reproachfully, affirming that in matters of love the ever-capable Mr Atherton (like Samson) was indeed more foolish than wise.

Mr Atherton and Marion

Mr Atherton falls in love with his Delilah but, unlike Samson, his folly leads not to imprisonment but wandering. And wander he does, like Samson earlier in the story, until he comes to rest, for a time, at 'The Glade'. In this Valley of Sorek, however, dwells a woman who is the opposite of tradition's Delilah. She is virtuous. She is a caring and listening companion. She does not press, but rather patiently waits. And when he declares his love, she declares that she loves him in return. The biblical story, by contrast, tells us of Samson's love for Delilah, but nothing of its reciprocation. Finally, there is another key contrast. A long tradition of retelling makes Delilah a Philistine, a designation not given in the Bible. Samson's problem is not just his fondness for women, but his weakness for *Philistine* women. His parents were right, he should have married one of his own people. 'Samson made too many friends among the Philistines, who were enemies of his people', writes Caroline Hadley, 'and as you know, foolishly married a Philistine wife ... then he went to see another Philistine woman, named Delilah, and betrayed his secret to this wicked woman' (1868: 144-45). It was the Philistine women who drew him into sin, declares the Revd John Eadie in another popular commentary (1860: 279). Mr Atherton makes no such mistake. Unlike Samson, Mr Atherton seeks in a strange land one of his *own* people. Marion is one of his own kind. He loves and marries an Englishwoman.

Not a few of Henty's novels come to just such a conclusion (Marquis 1999: 62, 66), though usually it is the story's young hero whose marriage brings the novel to a close. While we learn that in time Wil does himself find a wife, the right kind, naturally, it is unquestionably Mr Atherton and Marion who dominate the concluding pages of *Maori and Settler*. For Henty,

such a marriage is fundamental to his imperial ideology and McMahon shows well the way the ideology plays out in Henty's novels. Race and nation trump all other values. Even gender roles become flexible in the adventurous world of the colonies. Marion, for example, has become adept with a rifle, a fine shot—not one of her homeland sisters' usual accomplishments (McMahon 2010: 164-65). She has done all manner of practical and unladylike things to establish a piece of England in *The Glade*, in a faraway land. [Figure 4] But she remains a white woman, and in particular an Englishwoman, even if she has bent the rules of class and gender.

Marion, then, is Delilah's counterpart by contrast. Marion starts out as 'other' to Mr Atherton—she a young sheltered woman ('child', he calls her in the idiom of the times), he a much traveled and adventured man in his prime. She progresses to being his 'chum' and then his wife, but no doubt still his 'chum'. She is the woman Samson should have married for the story to end properly, as it should have done. But, after all, he was not British.



Figure 4. *Marion covers the native with her rifle* (p. 227)

Mr Atherton Goes Home with a Wife

Henty, writes Huttenback, rarely strayed far from the formula whereby 'the successful hero never stayed in the colonies, but, having proved himself, returned to the higher existence in England' (1965: 69). Accordingly, Mr Atherton returns home to England, accompanied by Marion, to live on a large house on an estate he has inherited. Mr and Mrs Renshaw also go home and take possession of the 'snug and comfortable' dower house on the estate where Mr Renshaw (whose practicality has improved no end, due to his colonial experience) acts as the agent. Wilfrid, the book's nominal hero, will remain in New Zealand to look after the farm (and in due course marry the daughter of other English settlers who themselves return home). Every five years, Wil and his wife—and as time went on his family—paid a visit to England, in the meantime successfully expanding their business. In due course, it is Wil's turn to return permanently. The business, reports the narrator at the story's conclusion, 'is now conducted by his sons, he himself having returned home with his wife and daughters with a fortune amply sufficient to enable them to live in ease' (352).⁹

Samson's story also ends with his return home to a permanent repose: 'Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying-place of Manoah his father' (Judg. 16.31). Ironically, wandering Samson only finds rest at home in death (Gunn 1992: 248-50). Cheryl Exum and William Whedbee also see a homecoming for Samson in death: 'Finally, his burial by his brothers in the tomb of Manoah his father serves as the final symbol of his integration into the society which he represents, but in which he has functioned so obstinately and independently' (1985: 23). Wandering Mr Atherton, on the other hand, returns home very much alive to settle down, though not entirely to a life of ease. After all, besides being 'an energetic magistrate', he works hard to keep his weight down 'by dint of devotion to racquets and tennis in summer, and of hunting and shooting in winter' (351).

Delilah disappears from the biblical story with her money in hand and still, it would seem, an independent woman. Marion, who has exercised considerable independence in the colony, goes home with a rich husband. 'There are women in Henty's novels—mothers, sisters, heroes and wives-to-be—and they often act in highly unconventional ways', observes McMahon (2010: 161). Both boys and girls learned about British identity in these novels but they also saw 'a conspicuous elasticity of gender roles within a specifically imperialist project' (161). The egalitarianism between genders, however, was only temporary, serving 'to shore up colonial racial divi-

9. In my childhood the phrase 'go home' was still used by many second and third generation New Zealanders (like my parents) to mean 'visit Britain'.

sions'—by making the primary social divide that between the British colonizers and the indigenous peoples. Ultimately, however, the stories always took a turn which enabled them 'to re-establish conventional domesticity and sex-specific codes of behavior' (162; cf. Marquis 1999: 63). In this case, Marion gets married and goes home, presumably to become once more a proper English woman, docile and domestic. Still, it is hard to erase her colonial experience, just as in the Book of Ruth the actions of Ruth are hardly erased by her disappearance into the home of Boaz at the story's end. Henty tells huge numbers of young people what females in the colonies could do (indeed, he rather ratchets up what they could do). So why not some of his young readers? How many girls who read Henty's story and saw what Marion was able to do filled the ranks of suffragettes in later years, I wonder.

But what of the 'other' New Zealanders, the Maori? Like the Philistines, they rarely get more than a corporate presence. Praised for their wartime prowess, and valued for their (mostly) friendly relations with the settlers, in the end, through the way the Te Kooti campaign is framed, they are marked with the label 'treacherous'. That is characteristic of Henty who, while ready to portray 'good' natives as faithful, self-sacrificing servants or companions, as well as worthy opponents, 'was a firm believer in the uniqueness of the European and particularly of the Anglo-Saxon'. No native 'had in full the qualities reserved by God solely for Englishmen' (Huttenback 1965: 71). The Maori are 'other', just like the Philistines, and just like Delilah. That was how the Empire preferred it.

To sum up, what Henty's story offers readers familiar with the Bible is a redeemed text. This is a Samson story as the British (and well-bred Americans) would have it, a Samson story that resolves any ambivalence concerning Samson's violence but above all addresses the widespread dismay over his perceived weakness for women—his *folly*. Mr Atherton, in partnership with patient Marion, offers the reader a glimpse of a Samson restored.¹⁰

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10. Swindell so titles his section on Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (2010: 116-18); my borrowing the phrase is not intended to make some claim of comparative literary merit on Henty's behalf. That would be foolish.

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THE 'DESCRIPTION POEMS' IN ANCIENT JEWISH SOURCES AND IN THE JEWISH EXEGESIS OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Sara Japhet

1

Among the characteristic components of the love poetry in the Song of Songs are the poems of praise, which describe at length and in detail the physical beauty of the lovers. These poems represent a particular literary genre, known in scholarly terminology as *wasf*, or 'description poem'.¹ The application of the term *wasf* to the love poems of the Song of Songs was made already at the end

1. Song 4.1-5; 5.10-16; 6.5-7; 7.2-7. Three of the poems describe the female body while one (5.10-16) describes the male. There is no consensus among scholars regarding the precise literary boundaries of the poems, but their identification is generally accepted. For a definition of the genre and its description, see Richard N. Soulen, 'The *wasf* of the Song of Songs and Hermeneutic', *JBL* 86 (1967), pp. 183-90; Marcia Falk, *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs* (Bible and Literature Series, 4; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1976), pp. 80-88; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 7C; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 56-57, 67; Yair Zakovitch, *The Song of Songs: Introduction and Commentary* (Tel Aviv: Am 'Oved; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1992), pp. 89-90 (Hebrew); Athalya Brenner, 'Come Back, Come Back, the Shulamite (Song of Songs 7.1-10): A Parody of the *wasf* Genre', in Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 234-57; J. William Whedbee, 'Paradox and Parody in the Song of Solomon: Towards a Comic Reading of the Most Sublime Song', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion*, pp. 266-79 (271-74); J. Cheryl Exum, 'Developing Strategies of Feminist Criticism/Developing Strategies of the Song of Songs', in David J.A. Clines and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Auguries: The Jubilee Volume of the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies* (JSOTSup, 269; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 206-47 (240-42); Fiona C. Black, 'Unlikely Bedfellows: Allegorical and Feminist Readings of Song of Songs 7.1-18', in Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (eds.), *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (2nd series, 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 104-109; J. David Bernat, 'Biblical *wasfs* beyond Song of Songs', *JSOT* 28 (2004), pp. 327-49 (328-34); Yair Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied* (trans. D. Mach; HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), pp. 180-82; Exum, 'The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs', in Anselm C. Hagedorn (ed.), *Perspectives on the Song of Songs* (BZAW, 346; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 78-95.

of the nineteenth century,² but the interest in the genre greatly increased because it was discovered to be an element in ancient Near Eastern love poetry, particularly in Egypt.³ Some contemporary scholars reject the term *wasf* for the description poems of the Song of Songs,⁴ mainly because in its Arabic usage the *Sitz im Leben* of the genre is the event of marriage, while this connection is altogether absent from the Song of Songs and other manifestations of the genre. One may, however, preserve the term *wasf* for the sake of research continuity, as long as the genre is seen in terms of its literary features rather than in light of its supposed sociological origin. The connections between this genre and the more general category of 'list' or 'catalogue' poetry have strengthened its position as one of the genres of ancient poetry.⁵

We might measure the cultural impact of the description poem either through its recurrence in Jewish writings subsequent to the Song of Songs, or through the recognition and interpretation of the genre in later rabbinic exegesis of the Song itself. The current paper pursues both avenues. As is well known, no secular Jewish poetry has survived from the literature of the postbiblical and early rabbinic periods, and certainly no love poetry. However, in three places in this literature we find expressions or echoes of the literary genre of description poems. The next three sections of this paper look at each of these instances; I then turn to later interpretations of the Song of Songs to see how this genre is understood by later interpreters.

B

The earliest postbiblical example of a description poem was identified by Moshe Goshen-Gottstein in 1959.⁶ This is the description of Sarah's beauty in the *Genesis Apocryphon* (20.2-8).⁷

2. The application of the term *wasf* to the poetry of the Song of Songs was made by Karl Budde, in his commentary on the Song of Songs (*Die fünf Megillot: Das Hohelied, das Buch Ruth, die Klagelieder, der Prediger, das Buch Esther* [ed. Karl Budde, Alfred Bertholet, and G. Wildeboer; KHAT, 17; Freiburg: Mohr, 1898]). Budde viewed this genre as the key to the interpretation of the Song of Songs.

3. See Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 269-84; Pope, *Song of Songs*, pp. 54-85 (with extensive bibliography); Zakovitch, *Song of Songs*, pp. 17-18; Wilfred G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (JSOTSup, 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2nd edn, 1995), pp. 353-56.

4. See Fiona C. Black, 'Beauty or the Beast: The Grotesque Body in the Song of Songs', *BiblInt* 8 (2000), pp. 300-23. Exum does not criticize the term itself, but regards it as unhelpful for the interpretation of the Song of Songs (see her *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 19-20.

5. See Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 352-53; Bernat, 'Biblical *wasfs*', pp. 330-31, with previous literature.

6. Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, 'Philologische Miszellen zu den Qumrantexten',

...how splendid and beautiful the form of her face, and how pleasant and soft the hair of her head; how lovely are her eyes, and how graceful is her nose; all the radiance of her face []. How lovely is her breast, and how beautiful is all her whiteness. Her arms how beautiful! And her hands how perfect! And how attractive all the appearance of her hands. How lovely are her palms and how long and dainty all the fingers of her hands. Her feet how beautiful. How perfect are her legs. There are no virgins or brides who enter a bridal chamber more beautiful than she. Indeed, she greatly surpasses in beauty all women, and in her beauty she ranks high above all of them. Yet, with all this beauty there is much wisdom in her, and whatever she has is lovely.

The description of Sarah's beauty enumerates in a regular order her face, hair, eyes, nose, and complexion; breasts and whiteness (of the belly?); arms, palms and fingers; legs and thighs, and then concludes: No one among the maidens is more beautiful than she. The description thus moves in order from top to bottom: head, body, and limbs (hands and legs).

Most of the body parts are not actually described, either directly or in figures; the only ones so qualified are the hair, which is 'soft', and the fingers, which are 'long and dainty'. Her beauty, however, is repeatedly referred to by means of a great variety of nouns and adjectives from the semantic field of 'beauty': splendid (נְצִיחַ, once); beautiful, beauty (שָׁפִיר, nine times); pleasant (נעים, once); lovely (יָאֵה, four times); graceful (רַגְג, once); perfect (כָּלִיל, twice); and attractive (חָמִיד, once).

The description concludes with praise for Sarah's wisdom. This element is not mentioned explicitly in the description poems of the Song of Songs, but it is perhaps alluded to in the reference there to the woman's speech: 'and your speech (Heb. מְדַבֵּר) is lovely' (Song 4.3).⁸

The passage in the *Genesis Apocryphon* is by no means a description poem, and it lacks the extravagant metaphors that characterize the body descriptions in the Song of Songs.⁹ Nevertheless, one cannot mistake the basic features of the genre. The general context is a praise of beauty, and the woman's body parts are listed in physical order, moving in a regular

RevQ 2 (1959–60), pp. 43–51 ('Das Schönheit Sara's (1Q Genesis Midrash) und das wasf in Hoheliede', pp. 46–48).

7. Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judea* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1956). The English translation follows Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1 (1Q20): A Commentary* (BibOr, 18B; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 3rd edn, 2004), p. 101.

8. There is no reason to regard the word as a reference to the mouth, as do many English translations, including Exum (*Commentary*, p. 151 and n. f on p. 153). See however, the ancient versions, followed by the NEB ('your words').

9. See Exum, *Commentary*, pp. 17–22.

direction. The selection of the body parts in each of the descriptions of the Song of Songs seems to be flexible—some parts, like the eyes, are repeated in all the descriptions while others appear in one and are missing in another. This variation is illustrated also in the description of Sarah, inasmuch as two of her body parts—the hands and the thighs—are included in the Song of Songs in the praise of the male (Song 5.14, 15) and are missing from the praise of the female. It seems therefore that while the main lines of the genre—including the enumeration of the body parts and their regular direction—are fixed and strictly followed, the selection of the body parts is left to the poet's freedom.

C

Another literary source which testifies to the use of the genre of description poems—although not in itself a poem—is a short passage found in tractate *Nedarim* in the Babylonian Talmud. The passage tells the story of a man who vowed to abstain from his ugly wife until the famous Rabbi Ishmael—renowned for his eagerness to absolve vows—finds in her something beautiful. The case is brought before R. Ishmael, and in order to meet the challenge, he presents a series of questions: 'Is her head beautiful... Is her hair beautiful? ... Are her eyes beautiful? Are her ears beautiful? ... Is her nose beautiful? ... Are her lips beautiful? ... Is her neck beautiful? ... Is her belly beautiful? ... Are her feet beautiful?' The answer he gets to each of the questions is in the negative.¹⁰ The end of the story takes a humorous turn: to his last question, 'Is her name beautiful?', R. Ishmael receives the answer that her name is 'slut' (Heb. לַכְּלוּכִית). He then decides that since her name suits her, she does have 'something beautiful', and absolves the vow.

The description of the woman's looks—in this case her ugliness rather than her beauty—follows a regular order and her body parts are presented from top to bottom: head (hair, eyes, ears, nose, lips), body (belly), and limbs (feet). The passage in the Talmud is certainly not a poem, but rather a humorous anecdote, the aim of which is to illustrate R. Ishmael's dedication to the absolving of vows. However, the technique followed in the story is that of the description poems: the assessment of a person's beauty—or non-beauty—is executed by presenting the body parts in physical order and in one direction.

D

The characteristic features of the description genre are extensively illustrated in the third literary work considered here—in itself also not a description

10. B. *Nedarim* 66b.

poem. This is the Jewish mystical work known as *Shi'ur Qomah* (= 'Measure of the Body'), which belongs to the broader corpus of mystical writings known as Hekhalot literature, the earliest literature of Jewish mysticism.¹¹

The *Shi'ur Qomah* presents a detailed description of the body parts of the Godhead, with their names and measurements. The order of the body parts is as follows:¹² Soles, the right foot, the left foot, the right ankle, the left ankle, the right calf, the left calf, the right knee, the left knee, the right thigh, the left thigh, the loins, the right shoulder, the left shoulder, the neck, the head, the circumference of the head, the crown of the head, the hair, the forehead, the right ear, the left ear, the black of the right eye, the black of the left eye, the white of the right eye, the white of the left eye, the opening of the eyeballs, the eyebrows, the right eyebrow, the left eyebrow, the face, the cheeks, the nose, the lips, the tongue, the upper lip, the lower lip, the beard, the right shoulder, the left shoulder, the right arm, the left arm, the right hand, the left hand, the fingers of the right hand, the fingers of the left hand, the thumb, the toes of the right foot, the toes of the left foot.

Each of the body parts is followed by its measurements and name. While the parts are those of the human body, presenting the image of God in stark anthropomorphic terms, the enigmatic, absolutely unintelligible names of these parts, and the enormous measurements, which are beyond the grasp of the human mind, make the figure of God completely inaccessible, either to human sight or to human comprehension.¹³

The provenance and dating of this literary work are a matter of scholarly debate, as is also the nature of the text. The great scholars of the *Shi'ur Qomah*, Gershom Scholem and Saul Lieberman, regarded the work as an early, tannaitic, mystical midrash on Song 5.10-17. It is thus seen not merely as connected to or associated with the biblical text but actually emanating from it in the form of an interpretation.¹⁴ On the other hand, Martin Cohen

11. Scholarly research on this literature has greatly increased in recent decades. See the recent review in Joseph Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism: Ancient Times* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2008), II, pp. 678-715, with extensive bibliography (Hebrew). For the texts, see Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1981). For the text of *Shi'ur Qomah* and its English translation, see Martin S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (TSAJ, 9; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985); see also Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983).

12. The list follows Ms. New York 8128. See Cohen, *Texts and Recensions*, pp. 54-76. A list of the body parts may be found also in Dan, *History*, III, p. 899. There are quite a few textual differences and textual corruptions, but these do not affect the general picture.

13. For this dialectic within the *Shi'ur Qomah*, see Dan, *History*, III, pp. 903-904.

14. Gershom G. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1976), pp. 157-72 (Hebrew); Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah*

(following earlier scholars) is of the opinion that the *Shi'ur Qomah* is a rather late work in which the text of the Song of Songs plays only a secondary role, as a kind of a proof-text, together with other biblical texts such as Daniel.¹⁵

The relationship between the *Shi'ur Qomah* and the Song of Songs is defined in different terms by Joseph Dan. While he follows Scholem in ascribing to it an early dating and describes it as the 'first treatise on the nature of God', Dan avoids the term 'midrash' and regards the Song of Songs as 'a point of departure' for the *Shi'ur Qomah*. In his view, the second century's interpretation of the Song of Songs is the 'context' in which the *Shi'ur Qomah* was composed.

The point emphasized by Scholem and his followers is the transformation in the understanding of the Song of Songs in the first half of the second century, connected with the name of R. Akiba. The Song of Songs was conceived of as 'holy', that is, as relating to the divine sphere rather than to the human sphere, as expressed in R. Akiba's famous statement, 'All Scriptures are holy but the Song of Songs is holiest of all' (or: 'holy of holies').¹⁶ Consequently, the male protagonist of the Song was seen as God, and this led to the interpretation of Song 5.10-17—the description of the lover's body—as describing the body of the Godhead.¹⁷

While the interpretation of Song 5.10-17 as a description of the divine body is certainly a result of the view that the Song 'is holy', it is my opinion that this perception is not necessarily the origin, the point of departure, or the 'context' of the *Shi'ur Qomah*. The ancient Jewish mystics did not need a change in the understanding of the Song of Songs as a 'springboard' for their views of the Godhead. The conceptual foundation of the *Shi'ur Qomah*, that God is corporeal and can be viewed by the human eye, is not an innovation of this work, or this circle of mystics, but rather is attested in various biblical texts. According to these biblical texts, viewing the Godhead is indeed forbidden, but not impossible. Moses, for one, is allowed to see 'God's back' (Exod. 33.26); the elders who went up with Moses to the mountain 'saw the God of Israel' (Exod. 24.10); Ezekiel saw 'something that looked like a human form' (Ezek. 1.26); and Daniel described in detail how he 'saw that chairs were put and the Old One was seated, his dress white like snow, and the hair of his head like clean wool' (7.9).

Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), pp. 36-42; Saul Lieberman, 'Mishnat Shir Hashirim', in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 118-26 (Hebrew). Lieberman's final statement is: 'The Midrash on the Song of Songs is the Work of the Chariot (מעשה מרכבה), is the *Shi'ur Qomah*' (p. 126).

15. Cohen, *Liturgy and Theurgy*, pp. 51-76; Cohen, *Texts and Recensions*, pp. 1-2.

16. M. *Yadayim* 5.3.

17. See, among others, Scholem, *Elements*, pp. 166-68; Dan, *History*, III, pp. 892-95.

This basic concept underlies the *Shi'ur Qomah* and is elaborated to the extreme in several directions. For the purpose of our discussion the great innovation is the extensive use of the description poem genre as the literary tool by which this viewpoint is presented. The description of the divine body parts includes all the features of the description poem. The basic structural principle of the description is the listing of the body parts in order, one after the other, in one consistent direction. In the *Shi'ur Qomah*—as we have seen—the description moves from bottom to top and then again downwards: legs, body, head, shoulders and hands/feet, with the head receiving the greatest attention. The *Shi'ur Qomah* also expresses the aspect of praise, as it describes the boundless greatness and power of the divine being. Indeed, the connection between the ‘measurements’ and the ‘praise’ is expressed explicitly in the repeated statements ascribed to the founders of this spiritual movement: ‘Rabbi Ishmael said... Rabbi Akiva said to me: whoever knows this measure of the Creator and the praise of the Holy One Blessed Be He ... is assured of life in the world to come’.¹⁸

The description of *Shi'ur Qomah* also includes the element of beauty, expressed in the aesthetical proportions between the measures. These proportions refer to two different aspects: (a) the distances between the body parts: ‘From his foot until his ankle; from his ankles until his knees; from his thighs until his shoulders; from his shoulders until his neck’ etc.; and (b) the relative lengths of the individual members: ‘The size of his eyebrows is the same as the eyes’, ‘the height of the shoulder is as the height of the neck’, ‘the length of the nose is like the length of the pinky finger’, and finally: ‘the height of the cheeks is half of the circumference of the head, and such is the case for any person (וכן של מדת אדם)’.¹⁹

The affinity between the *Shi'ur Qomah* and the Song of Songs is undeniable and was justly pointed out by all scholars. Its cause, however, is the similarity of contents and the common employment of the literary genre. It is not surprising that the authors of *Shi'ur Qomah* regarded Song 5.10-17 as the text nearest to their own views and interests, but the origins of their views lie elsewhere.²⁰

18. מי שהוא יודע שיעור זה צרנו ושבחו של הבה הוא מכוסה מן הבריות מובטח לו. לחיי העולם הבא ומשיב לו בעולם הזה (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §952)

19. Cohen, *Texts and Recensions*, pp. 65 (line 117), 67 (lines 133-34, 138-39, respectively). See Dan, *History*, III, p. 892. The element of beauty is emphasized by some scholars but downplayed by others.

20. Watson claims that the primary use of the *wasf* genre, as illustrated in the literature of the ancient Near East, was in the description of the gods, and that only secondarily was the genre transferred to the love poems between humans (see Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 355-56). An example of this usage is indeed attested in the description of the ‘statue’ in Dan. 2.31-33. Should one look in this direction in the search for these origins?

As already stated, *Shi'ur Qomah* is not a description poem in the strict—or common—definition of the term. Nevertheless, it is a loud testimony to the vitality of the genre and to its various manifestations in the literary world of ancient Judaism.

E

The three foregoing examples illustrate the variety of ways in which the genre of the description poem was understood and employed in earlier Jewish literature, both independently of and in reference to its appearances in the Song of Songs. How were the body descriptions of the Song of Songs itself interpreted in the rabbinic world, the mainstream of Jewish literature and thought? As already mentioned, the ancient exegesis of the Song of Songs, both Jewish and Christian, was based from its earliest stages on the assumption that the Song is concerned with the divine sphere rather than with the human sphere: with the relationship between God and his people in Judaism; and between Christ and his Church, or between Christ and the individual believer, in Christianity.²¹ Thus all the poetic statements within the Song, concerning nature, society, and humanity, were interpreted by rabbinic exegetes as bearing a national/historical meaning, applicable to the relationship between God and Israel in the past, the present, and the future; this line of interpretation has been applied to the description poems as well. While the detailed metaphors of these poems have received ample attention in rabbinic midrashic interpretation, only limited attention has been paid to their literary structure. The most elaborate passage devoted to this issue is found in *Midrash Tanhuma*, as follows:²²

‘And he gave unto Moses, etc.’ (Exod. 31.18). Scripture states elsewhere in allusion to this verse: ‘Thy lips, O my bride, drip honey’ (Song 4.11). R. Abba the son of Judah said: The community of Israel praised the Holy One blessed be He from on high to below, while the Holy One blessed be He praised Israel from below to on high. Israel praised Him from on high to below when she caused Him to descend from the upper spheres to the lower spheres, as it is said: ‘that they may make me a sanctuary’ (Exod. 25.8). He praised them from below to on high when he said ‘The Lord thy God will set them on high’ (Deut. 28.1). ‘Who is she that cometh out of the wilderness’ (Song 3.6).

21. For a concise review of the allegorical interpretation of the Song, see Exum, *Commentary*, pp. 73-77; Zakovitch, *Commentary*, pp. 32-37 (Hebrew), pp. 94-101 (German). More generally on the Christian commentators see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

22. *Tanhuma*, Ki Tisa, 18. The same homily also appears, with some different readings, in the Buber edition of the *Tanhuma*, and very concisely in *Song of Songs Rabbah* 6.4 (at the end) and in *Yalqut Shimoni* §987.

She praises him from above to below, that is, from his head to his foot: 'His head is as the most fine gold...his locks...his eyes...his cheeks...his lips...his hands...his loins...his legs...his mouth is most sweet ... This is my beloved' (Song 5.11-16). While he praises her from below to above: 'How beautiful are thy steps...the roundings of thy thighs...thy navel is like a round goblet...thy belly is like a heap...thy two breasts...thy neck is as a tower...thy eyes...thy nose...thy head upon thee is like Carmel' (Song 7.2-6). 'Thy lips drip honey' (Song 4.11).²³

Even a cursory look at the homily reveals its superficial connection to the lemma of Exod. 31.18, and even to the opening citation of Song 4.11, which serves as a kind of 'jumping board' to the Song rather than the actual textual starting point of the homily. The homily is in fact an independent literary passage, concerned with two of the description poems of the Song of Songs: the description of the male in 5.10-16 and that of the female in 7.2-6. The homily defines the two passages of the Song as poems of praise, and attempts to uncover the literary principle that governs their structure. It emphasizes the orderly listing of the body parts and its consistent direction, 'from top to bottom' for the male, and 'from bottom to top' for the female. According to the homily, it is this sequence in its two different literary expressions that carry the message of these description poems.

While the main message of the homily is common to all its versions, the text cited above from *Midrash Tanhuma* stands out in its extensive detail and elaboration. In this text the homily is composed of two parts, the first concerned with the meaning of the body descriptions on the allegorical level, that is, in the context of the relationship between Israel and God. The second section is concerned with the meaning of the body descriptions on the literal level, as actual depictions of the human body through metaphor. The allegory follows the traditional symbolic identification of the Song's protagonists: the female, the community of Israel, praises the Lord 'from top to bottom', and the male, the Lord, praises the community of Israel 'from bottom to top'. Then the meaning of this sequence is explained: the community of Israel 'brings the Lord down' and the Lord 'raises the community of Israel up'. Both actions are illustrated by biblical verses: 'Bringing the Lord down' signifies his coming to dwell among his people, made possible by the building of the Tabernacle; 'raising up of the community of Israel' means Israel's elevation above all the nations: 'The Lord your God will set you up above all the nations of the earth' (Deut. 28.1).

There seems to be a certain imbalance between the significance assigned to the different directions. While the 'bringing down' of the Lord secures the

23. The English translation is by Samuel A. Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma—Yelammedenu, Genesis and Exodus*, Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1996), p. 597, with necessary adaptations to the Hebrew original.

presence of the Lord in the midst of his people and may be seen as an act of a purely religious and spiritual nature, the 'raising up' of Israel is seen as primarily a political act, one which secures Israel's place among the nations of the world. This imbalance is even more emphasized in the version of the homily found in *Tanhuma* Buber: 'Because she was down and he raised her up. When she was enslaved with bricks he redeemed her. But she praises him from top to bottom: when he was set above the seven skies she brought him down to herself.'²⁴

This section is extant in all versions of the homily—with slight variations not relevant for the present discussion. In the version of *Midrash Tanhuma* cited above, however, there is a second part, which enumerates the details of the body descriptions as set forth in the poems of the Song, first for the male lover, following Song 5.10-16, and then for the female lover, following 7.2-6. This careful repetition of the details of the biblical texts, peculiar to the version of the homily in *Midrash Tanhuma*, seems to stand on its own, as a literary unit in its own right. It presents the plain interpretation of the text, independent of its significance on the allegorical level.

The two parts of the homily testify to the fact that the compiler of this midrash was aware of the origin of the description poems and their function: as songs of mutual praise for the male and female lovers, expressed by means of detailed descriptions of their beauty.

F

The interpretation of the description poems along the lines of this rabbinic midrash was adopted and continued by several classical commentators, among them the two great commentators of the French medieval school of exegesis, Rashi (1040–1105) and Rashbam (about 1085 to after 1159).

In his commentary on the Song, Rashi refers twice to the body descriptions, in his comments on Song 7.2, 5. His comment on Song 7.2 is as follows:

Israel praise Him from top to bottom. They begin with 'his head is finest gold' (5.11) and go on descending until 'his legs are like marble pillars' (5.15) because they come to please Him and to move his dwelling down from the upper (spheres) to the lower (spheres). And He tells her praise from bottom up, 'how lovely are your steps' (7.2)—these are the legs—and goes on listing until 'the head upon you is like Carmel'²⁵ for He comes to draw her to Him.

24. The English translation follows John T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma: Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes* (S. Buber Recension). II. *Exodus and Leviticus* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1993), pp. 153-54, with some adaptations.

25. NJPS 'like crimson wool'.

Rashi's interpretation is clearly dependent on the homily of *Midrash Tanhuma*—one of his most favorite sources—but its form and style are more condensed and concise. Rashi's interest is restricted to the allegorical interpretation and so he joins the two separate parts of the midrash into one comment and integrates the second part, which listed the body parts in order, into the allegorical interpretation. He also deviates from the midrash in his understanding of the significance of the movement from 'bottom to top'—the structural spine of the passage on which he comments.

As we observed above, in the midrashic passages concerned with this matter, the significance of the female description 'from bottom to top' is expressed in concrete historical terms, illustrated by a verse from Deuteronomy, 'The Lord your God will set you up above all the nations of the earth' (28.1). We also observed the imbalance between the two directions of the descriptions created by this interpretation.²⁶ This imbalance disappears in Rashi's interpretation, because the directions assume a more similar meaning: 'they come to please Him and move his dwelling down from the upper (spheres) to the lower (spheres)...and He comes to draw her to Him'. Thus, the 'raising up' alluded to in the description of the female does not imply a historical, political supremacy but a spiritual, perhaps mystical, significance. The precise form or meaning of this 'drawing up', however, is not spelled out.

Rashi's second reference to the description poem is found in his comment on Song 7.5. The issue at hand is the meaning of the figure, 'Your nose is like the Lebanon tower'. Rashi states emphatically that the word which usually means 'nose' (אף) has a different meaning in this verse, that is, 'forehead'. His argument proceeds as follows: (a) 'I cannot explain it to mean "nose", for what kind of praise of beauty is there in a big nose, upright like a tower?' (b) 'I say that "your nose" means "face" (פנים); and it is phrased in the singular [rather than plural for פנים]...because he speaks about the forehead, which is the true splendour of the face'. (c) 'You should realize that he praises her from the bottom up..."your eyes are like pools in Heshbon" and then the forehead.'

Rashi's argument in this comment deals with the interpretation of a linguistic detail and is purely literary, devoid of any allegorical connotations. In the context of our discussion it illustrates in the most persuasive way that Rashi was fully aware of the literary principle which governs the body descriptions: praise of the lover through the regular listing of the body parts in an orderly direction. According to this literary principle, the eyes should not be followed by the nose but by the forehead!

26. See above, p. 225.

G

Rashi's interpretation of the description poems finds its continuation in the work of his grandson, R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), who enlarges somewhat upon the literary significance of the description genre. Rashbam dwells on the structure of the body descriptions in his comments on most of the passages in the Song in which the issue is relevant, four times altogether. He begins the comment on Song 4.1-6 with the observation, 'Now he tells the praise and beauty of his beloved', and concludes it with, 'Until now he told the beauty of his beloved from top to bottom: her hair and eyes and teeth and lips and words and face and neck and stature and breasts'.²⁷ On the poem of 5.8-6.3 he comments: 'He is beautiful and glorious in all his limbs, from his head to his feet ... as I will tell you from top to bottom'.²⁸ Then again, on the poem of 6.11-7.11: 'He answers her to reconcile her and to tell her praise from bottom to top', and concludes with 'Now she is reconciled and pleased by his words, as he told the praise of all her body from the bottom up'.²⁹

Rashbam's dependence on the *Midrash Tanhuma* and Rashi is obvious, and yet by the very repetition of the topic, he points out that the direction of the descriptions is a literary structural principle that does not have any inherent meaning in and of itself. As we saw above, both the midrash and Rashi claimed that there is a difference between the praise of the male and the praise of the female in the direction in which the limbs are listed, and that this difference expresses a special meaning.³⁰ Rashbam opposes this view, not by any explicit polemic statements, but by demonstrating that the same difference exists between the two poems that describe the female: she is indeed described 'from bottom to top' in Song 7.2-6, but she is described in the opposite direction, 'from top to bottom', in the poem of 4.1-6.³¹

Another aspect of Rashbam's handling of this matter is the fact that he restricts his notes concerning the direction in which the limbs are listed to the literal level of the interpretation of the parable and refrains from repeating these comments in the allegorical section of the commentary.³²

27. On Rashbam's method of interpreting the biblical text—that is, by literary units rather than by individual verses—, see Sara Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Song of Songs* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies and The Rabbi David Moses and Amalia Rosen Foundation, 2008), pp. 113-16 (Hebrew). The quotations are from pp. 253 and 257 respectively.

28. Japhet, *Rashbam on the Song of Songs*, pp. 263-64.

29. Japhet, *Rashbam on the Song of Songs*, pp. 271 and 272 respectively.

30. See above, pp. 225, 226.

31. Indeed, both the midrash and Rashi refrain from commenting on the literary structure of Song 4.1-6.

32. Rashbam's commentary makes a very systematic division between the two spheres

Again, as we saw above, this was the main point in the interpretations of the midrash and of Rashi: They both regarded the direction in which the limbs were listed as highly significant, pointing to the relationship between the God of Israel and the community of Israel. Rashbam's avoidance of this matter on the allegorical level of his commentary is particularly surprising, and therefore itself significant. Rashbam's general approach is to discern an essential bond between the two levels of meaning expressed by the Song.³³ He also follows the traditional lines of the allegory in providing allegorical equivalents to the limbs themselves. Nevertheless, the discussion of the sequence of the description remains restricted to the literal level of the interpretation.

These two aspects of Rashbam's unique approach—his repeated notes on the literary technique of the descriptions and his avoidance of these notes at the allegorical level of the interpretation—indicate that his dependence on his sources in this matter is limited to recognition of the literary phenomenon and does not apply to its significance. Together with the detailed descriptions of the physical bodies of the lovers, one stage after the other, and the general contents of the allegory in the entire commentary—which is strictly national/historical—his method seems to express his anti-mystical world view. Rashbam does not state this goal explicitly, but this conclusion seems to provide a plausible explanation for his exegetical procedure, and may shed light on one of his theological motives in writing the commentary.³⁴

The observation that the poems of praise are structured in a regular direction is also made by the two philosophical commentators on the Song of Songs in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Moses ibn Tibbon (d. 1283) and Gersonides (1288–1344).³⁵ The two philosophers regard the

of interpretation, the level of the text as it is and the level of the allegory. See Japhet, *Rashbam on the Song of Songs*, pp. 82–85, 165–66.

33. Japhet, *Rashbam on the Song of Songs*, pp. 120–22, 166–68.

34. Explicit anti-mystical statements may be found in Rashbam's commentaries on Qoheleth and Job. See Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on Qoheleth* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), pp. 52–53; Sara Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Book of Job* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2000; second printing, 2009), pp. 153–58 (Hebrew); see also Sara Kamin, 'Rashbam's Conception of the Creation in Light of the Intellectual Currents of his Time', in Sara Japhet (ed.), *Studies in Bible* (ScrHier, 31; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1986), pp. 27*–68*; the paper also appears in Sara Kamin, *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2nd edn, 2009), pp. xxxvi–lxxiv.

35. Moses ibn Tibbon, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Lyck, 1874), pp. 19b, 21b (Hebrew); M. Kelner, *Commentary on the Song of Songs by Rabbi Levi ben Gershon* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2001), pp. 67–68, 114, 139–40 (Hebrew).

'changing orders' (Gersonides, p. 67) of the praise as either stemming from a philosophical premise or having a philosophical meaning.

H

Like many biblical genres, and as far as we know, description poems did not survive in later Jewish literature. Although the great love poetry of the Spanish school in the eleventh and twelfth century was heavily dependent on the Song of Songs and adopted many of its poetic features, it did not adopt the model of the description poems. Also, after the flourishing of the *peshat* school of exegesis, with its attention to the literary aspects of the biblical text, the interest in such matters declined, and there was only a limited continuation of the fine observations on the genre and its significance, all restricted to the allegorical level. Thus, the literary tradition of the description poems, on the one hand, and the awareness of the specific uses of the genre in the Song of Songs, on the other hand, were gradually forgotten. The description poems of the Song had to wait until the nineteenth century, when the recognition of parallel phenomena, first in the Arabic poetry of Syria and then in the poetry of the ancient Near East, led scholars to their rediscovery in the Song. Now that these poems have become a standard element in the scholarly parlance about the Song of Songs, it is appropriate that their echoes in early Jewish literature, and the contribution of the Jewish commentators, should be integrated into the scholarly discourse on the Song of Songs.

THE BOOK THAT CANNOT BE READ

Francis Landy

Gott, ich liebe dich in deinem Rosenkleide
Wenn du aus den Gärten trittst, Zebaoth.
O, du Gottjüngling,
Du Dichter,
Ich trinke einsam von deinen Düften

Else Lasker-Schüler, *Zebaoth*

In this essay I will undertake a close reading of Isaiah 29.1-14, in part because one of the best discussions has been by Cheryl Exum (1981: 338-52), and in part because it focuses on some of the central issues of Isaiah, in particular the possibility of finding a poetic language adequate for the vision of the new world the prophet proleptically inhabits. Cheryl's essay concerns similes, which, she shows, are complex, ambiguous, and frequently doubled. Similes evoke a different reality, brought to aid in the comprehension of the message the prophet wishes to communicate, but distanced from it and rendered uncertain by the comparative particle. 29.1-14 pre-eminently blurs the boundaries between death and life, dream and waking, the book and the vision. As many commentators note, it is one of the most conspicuous reformulations of the commission in 6.9-10 to speak so as not to be understood, which may be regarded as a metacommunicative key to the book (Liss 2002, 2003). The commission has attracted a vast amount of theological explanation, which for the most part either further muddies the waters or resorts to simplistic reductivism.¹ However we understand or do not understand the ethical implications of God's instilling incomprehension so as to avert repentance, it does suggest that the message cannot be understood, either by contemporary listeners or potentially any future ones,² and thus invites infinite

1. Exemplary of this are the more naïve versions of the *Rückprojizierungsthese*, the hypothesis that Isaiah wrote the account in chap. 6 in order to justify his failure. See Kaplan (1921), Hesse (1955) and many others; indeed, the thesis has mediaeval antecedents (Gruber 2004: 602). For a more sophisticated version, see Barthel (1997: 115-17), who points out that no experience is unmediated. Ironically, Isaiah is presented in chaps. 36-38 as the most successful of all prophets.

2. Sonnet (1992: 233-39), in particular, has argued that the command is temporally open-ended, so that future generations would also consider themselves bound by it.

interpretation. In this way God, 'du Dichter', points the way to a poetic language which is inexhaustible, and whose meaning exceeds the literal denotations of the words. Or to put it otherwise, if Isaiah, through his initiation, is inducted into a new language and new world, he can only translate that language and world back into that of his own age by insisting on its strangeness, its difference, its incommunicability. To paraphrase Elliot Wolfson (2005: 164), the secret is revealed, but only as a secret.

The book of Isaiah is in part an attempt to explicate the vision, to transmit it to the future, when the ears of the deaf shall open (35.5). It is the result of a process of reflection, of exegesis, and of resistance to the founding trauma, a will to make sense despite the impossibility of doing so. At the same time it perpetuates the command, leaving us to wonder why God acted so strangely through his messenger, and whether we are implicated in it. The reader is in a different situation from the original audience. Whereas the latter are constructed as being recalcitrant, the reader is assumed to be motivated to read, to be a belated disciple. Reading enables time for reflection, for rereading, for living with the text, making it part of one's life; it substitutes for the tense interactions of God, prophet and people, in the context of historical crisis, a set of mediations and displacements. For instance, the readers are both identified with the people addressed in the commission, and potentially disassociated from them, as a faithful remnant. Above all, the book reflects the history of the book, its reception, transmission, expansion and response to changed circumstances, in other words its redaction history. I do not want to enter into the can of worms of the different reconstructions of this history, its relationship to a reader-centered approach, and to literary interpretation.³ Suffice it to say that although they may be non-exclusive, they also work against each other. The more, for instance, that we think in terms of anonymous accretions, each representing a single ideological point of view, the less we will see the text synchronically, as the work of an imaginative poet, expressing a complex reality.⁴ The book, moreover, becomes a figure in the book. It represents the totality of the vision, as suggested by the superscription in 1.1. As such, the history of the book is subsumed by the vision, by the book as a symbol, encompassing all of reality. That is the subject of this essay.

3. A fascinating examination of the methodological issues is the debate between James Nogalski and Ehud Ben Zvi in *Two Sides of a Coin* (2009). See also my intervention from a literary perspective, 'Three Sides of a Coin: In Conversation with Ben Zvi and Nogalski, *Two Sides of a Coin*', *JHS* 10/11 (2010).

4. See Landy (2010). Ben Zvi (2009: 63) notes that he does not deny that redactional processes took place, but that they are too uncertain to be useful for the historian. He also argues that, from the point of view of the ancient reader, the received text erased all memory of preceding texts (59).

1. *The Parable of the Book* (29.11-12)

We will begin with one of the most notable, as well as puzzling, reflections on reading in the book, in 29.11-12:

And the vision of all shall be for you like the words of a sealed book, which they give to one who knows how to read, saying, 'Read this, please', and he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed'.

And the book is given to one who does not know how to read, saying, 'Read this, please', and he says, 'I don't know how to read'.

Whatever this strange passage means, it suggests that the book is something that cannot be read and is not intended to be read. It thus repeats the commission of 6.9-10: the book is proffered, only to frustrate the hope of interpretation. But what is the function of the doubling of the image? Why is there the illiterate recipient in v. 12? And why does he say, 'I cannot read' rather than 'it is sealed', and thus conceal his illiteracy? One might see him as a stock comic figure, as in Proverbs, the unlearned fool who has not the wit to disguise his ignorance. Equally, however, the joke may be on the carriers of the book, who think the illiterate may be more capable of reading it than the literate, or on us, who cannot read and understand it.

The story is a rudimentary parable, introduced as a simile, and thus provokes us to discern its meaning. The expert reader is easily identified as the sage, who is the object of satire in this chapter as well as in chaps. 5 and 28, and hence of the worldly wisdom that is the opposite of the true wisdom communicated by the prophet.⁵ The ignoramus correspondingly would represent the common people, who might be able to respond to the vision when the scribal elite fails. That he does not renders the story pointless, or at least provisional.

What is the point of a pointless story? Gibbs, commenting on Derrida, writes of absurdity as the other side of the system of meaning.⁶ As with the nonsense language of 28.9-13, it suggests both the desire to find meaning and repose, and the elusiveness of that quest. As there too, those who potentially

5. Beuken (2000: 96; 2010: 121-22), citing Kimchi, thinks that the parable is critical of the people, in that they are uninterested in breaking the seal, and incurious about the contents. Similarly, Wildberger (1997: 84). But the point of the seal is that it renders the text inaccessible except for the one for whom it was intended, especially if it is a metaphorical seal. On this, rightly, Exum (1981: 348), and Blenkinsopp (2006: 13-14), whose book-length study argues that 29.11-12 was germinal to the development of the esoteric interpretation of Isaiah in the Second Temple period. See also Ferry (2008: 146), who thinks it is proto-apocalyptic (*contra* Sonnet, n. 13 below).

6. Gibbs (2000: 73) writes: 'For the absurd... is simply a mirror image of the thematic of the intending to say, a negative image that helps form a metaphysical system'. Gibbs is commenting on an interview with Derrida in Derrida (1972: 14).

have access to the secret are precisely those who are not initiated into conventional wisdom, since language has to be learned from the ground up.

'The vision of all' (חזון הכל) recalls the 'vision of Isaiah' (חזון ישעיהו) at the beginning of the book.⁷ As there, it promises a clarity of vision unimpeded by obstacles such as language. Similarly, it is a vision of totality, as if everything in the world and all history can be apprehended in a single revelation. The seer has a God's-eye view, at least as God is understood in the ontotheological tradition. From the point of view of Levinas, it is precisely this view of totality that needs to be critiqued; the value of scepticism, for instance, is that it will expose the flaws in an encompassing theory⁸—the word 'theory' itself etymologically associated both with pretensions to divinity and the optical faculty.⁹

'The vision of all' is translated into, and is in some sense 'like', 'a sealed book'.¹⁰ 'The vision of Isaiah', as I have noted above, is often understood as a technical term for a prophetic book, or some part of it;¹¹ it may be equivalent to or transcend our book of Isaiah, for example if the book does not exhaust the vision. As a metaphor, however, it conjoins opposites.¹² The limitless vision is compressed into a book, which is sealed and hence invisible. The seal is presumably both literal and metaphorical: it is a real seal that can only be opened by one who is authorized to open it, for whom the book is destined, and a metaphorical one, in that the words conceal their meaning.

The sealed book may be the book of Isaiah, especially if, as many historical critics assert, this passage is late;¹³ it may be any part of that book at any

7. There are different interpretations of the referent of 'all'. Most relate it to the immediate context (Exum 1981: 349), or to a greater or lesser collection of prophecies (Beuken 2000: 95; 2010: 121; Conrad 1993: 131, who thinks it refers to chaps. 6–39), or the entire prophetic tradition (Barthel 1997: 383). Irwin (1977: 53) suggests that it is a subjective genitive, referring to the sleeping 'heads' and 'eyes' of the previous verse. I think that חזון should not be restricted to a particular text or content.

8. See, in particular, the section on 'Scepticism and Reason' in Levinas (1981: 165–71).

9. Taylor (1991: 5) writes: 'The very word *theoria* is embedded in a metaphysics of vision and sight that is inextricably bound to the presuppositions of western philosophy and theology'.

10. I follow most commentators in adopting the Qere and 1QIsa^a as against the Ketib which has 'the book'.

11. It occurs also in the superscriptions to Obadiah and Nahum. For the view that it is a dead metaphor, see Ben Zvi (1996: 12), and the long discussion by Williamson (2006: 18–19). On the other hand, Melugin (2009: 9) alerts us to the title communicating that this is 'a poetic vision'.

12. See my article, 'Vision and Voice in Isaiah' and references therein (2000: 19 n. 1; 2001: 371 n. 1).

13. It is generally attributed to later stages of redaction. Blenkinsopp (2000a: 405),

stage of compilation, or any piece of prophetic writing, or indeed any text whatsoever. In any case, the book signifies and contains the vision, sealed and secret in its midst, just as the book of Isaiah contains and transmits the vision of chap. 6. If we understood the book, we would understand everything. Instead, the book becomes the means for concealing knowledge.

In 8.16, the identical metaphor is used for the prophetic tradition: **צֹר תְּעוּדָה חֲתוּם תּוֹרָה בְּלִמְדִּי**, 'Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching (Torah) in my disciples'.¹⁴ Here, in a context very similar to chap. 29, the disciples are the equivalent of the book and convey it to the future when the seal would be broken. Whether the disciples themselves understand the teaching we do not know; they too may be under the interdict. In that case the teaching undoes itself: the disciples of the prophet are taught not to know, or what they are taught is misleading. This may be true of the prophet, if he cannot comprehend what he has to say.

Torah here refers to the prophecy; it is parallel to **תְּעוּדָה**, 'testimony', which serves to witness to the veracity of divine predictions.¹⁵ It evokes two different usages of the term 'Torah' in 1.1–2.4. In 1.10, Yhwh condemns the 'people of Gomorrah' precisely for their observance of cultic Torah; in 2.3, Torah emanates from Zion and is universally accessible (Landy 2003).¹⁶ Here, the Torah sealed in the disciples links the condemnation to the future revelation. They are the conjunction between the two images of the prophet and prophetic language in the book: the prophet who inhabits this world and the one who foreshadows the world to come. In them, however, Torah acquires another connotation: it is esoteric. Words do not mean what they say; the true meaning is waiting to be revealed.

who assigns it to a 'glossator'; Childs (2001: 218), who sees it as 'a further secondary prose commentary'; Wildberger (1997: 82); and Kaiser (1980: 270), both of whom regard it as postexilic, are representative examples. Sweeney (1996a: 386) seems to be an exception, holding the whole of vv. 1–14 to derive from the prophet. Sonnet (1992: 235 n. 63), however, thinks it is anti-apocalyptic, and that it comes from the last stages of redaction.

14. This verse has attracted a great deal of attention as evidence of the early transmission and recording of Isaiah's prophecies; cf. Beuken (2003: 231; Barthel 1997: 233–36; Blenkinsopp 2000a: 243–44).

15. **תְּעוּדָה** only occurs elsewhere in 8.20 and Ruth 4.7. The latter occurrence suggests a visible sign, which most commentators take to be a text. For dissenting views, see Wildberger (1991: 366) and, more recently, Carr (2005: 60). However, the thematic connection with the summoning of witnesses to a text in 8.1–2 would support that 8.16 refers to a written legacy; cf. Blum (1997: 27).

16. Sweeney (1996b) argues that Isaiah, paradigmatically in 2.3, presents a prophetic Torah for the nations which is intended to complement the Mosaic Torah given to Israel (cf. esp. p. 59 for the contrast with priestly instruction). For a detailed contrast, see Landy 2003.

If the disciples are the authorized carriers of the book, they are the ones who bring the book to the readers. The passage is then self-referential, a reflection of the book on itself. We, both inside and outside the book, read about the readers, in other words ourselves. We cannot win: neither experts nor illiterates are competent to read it, the first disqualified by their expertise, the second by their lack of scribal knowledge. Of course, this melancholy conclusion invites a resolution, which it finds in 29.18: 'then will the deaf hear the words of the book'.¹⁷

2. *The Cosmic Book* (34.16)

Elsewhere, 'book' (ספר) has a cosmic significance. In 34.16, the readers are urged to inquire into or expound (דרשו) the book of Yhwh (ספר ה') where they will find that not one of his predictions remains unfulfilled. The book of Yhwh is presumably the prophetic book, perhaps the book of Isaiah, of which our sealed book is an exemplar or a harbinger.¹⁸ Indeed, the book of 29.11, like the book of Isaiah in general, is 'a vision of all', in which the whole of history is encapsulated. At the same time the book of Yhwh is not necessarily identical to the book of Isaiah. It may be the book Yhwh writes, and is certainly that which he endorses. Whatever human strain, or difference, pervades our book, as illustrated by the constant appeal to divine authentication, no longer applies here. The book of Yhwh is an ultimate book, whose completion is coterminous with that of the universe. It may be associated with the Torah of Yhwh, תורה ה', as a book which bears witness to the future and in which destiny is recorded (Deut. 31.24).¹⁹ The concept of a book of memory (Mal. 3.16) or of life (Ps. 69.29), one written or erased by God (Exod. 32.32-33) or before him (Mal. 3.16), is very widespread in the Hebrew Bible, though the locution 'the book of Yhwh' (ספר ה') only occurs here.²⁰ The book of Yhwh is, in any case, a pre-existent script which is decoded as the history of the world.²¹

17. Beuken (1992: 56-59) shows in detail how 29.18 reverses vv. 11-12.

18. Most commentators see in the phrase a reference to some version of Isaiah (Kaiser 1980: 359; Wildberger 1997: 338). In contrast, Blenkinsopp (2006: 4) limits it to some lost book containing imprecations against Edom or other nations, and rejects universalistic interpretations. Beuken (2000: 302; 2010: 310), more broadly, suggests that it includes all texts regarded as scripture at the time. Sweeney (1996a: 441), in contrast, thinks it is 'a more general or foundational document for Yhwh's relationship to the world'. Miscal (1999: 87), similarly, describes the image as 'multi-levelled'.

19. For a book length study of the concept of the book in Deuteronomy, see Sonnet (1997).

20. Blenkinsopp (2000a: 454) provides a list of references. In his 2006 monograph, he traces the development of the theme of the heavenly sealed book in Daniel, Enoch, and other Second Temple literature (2006: 14-27). See also the detailed study of Paul (1973).

21. The idea that the world is a text is implicit in the motif of the divine tablet in

The book of Yhwh suggests a perfect unity of the world and the book, in which everything fits together, *אִשָּׁה רַעוּתָהּ*, 'one to another'.²² But what is outside this unity? Derrida wonders whether outside the book there is 'radical illegibility'.²³ But this illegibility, as we have seen, is also to be found inside the book. The book of Yhwh contains the book that cannot be read, with its attendant absurdity. From the outside, the reader reads of himself or herself reading a book that cannot be read.

The book of Yhwh contains the totality of what can be said, a closed poetic universe. From the point of view of Levinas, it is *le dit*,²⁴ allowing neither supplement nor ambiguity. What then is the status of the reader, who is invited to inquire (*דַּרְשׁוּ*) and read (*קִרְאוּ*)? This depends on the interpretation of *דַּרַשׁ*, itself a word for interpretation. Is the reader asked to confirm what is in the book, or to seek out its hidden meaning? In that case it is the reader who holds the key to the book; the privileged interpreter is the locus of meaning, which is found in a range of secondary literature, such as the Qumran scrolls or Midrash.

The reference to the book of Yhwh closes an oracle against Edom, which is representative of all peoples, as evidenced by the grandiloquent opening of the chapter (34.1-4). This oracle matches that against Babylon in chaps. 13-14, and completes a section of the book, before turning to the redemption of Israel in chap. 35.²⁵ As many have noted, chaps. 34-35 are a conclusion to Proto-Isaiah.²⁶ Thus the positioning of the appeal to the 'book of Yhwh' is

Mesopotamian literature e.g. Enmeduranki and Enuma Elish. See also Crenshaw (2000: 42) and Schniedewind (2004: 33-34).

22. This strange phrase is repeated from the previous verse (v. 15), where it is used of the gathering of kites. Blenkinsopp (2000a: 449) thinks it has been misplaced. Others limit its application to the list of animals that haunt Edom in vv. 13-15 (e.g. Beuken 2000: 303; 2010: 323). Tanghe (1991: 342) argues that it refers to the divinely appointed lands of the nations, none of which have disappeared, in a later scribal critique of 34.1-15. Wildberger (1997: 338) points to its open-endedness. I think that it looks back over the whole of chap. 34, and by implication over everything else prophesied in the 'book'.

23. Derrida concludes his essay on 'Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book' (1978: 64-78) with a reflection on the primacy of writing and the text which also preoccupies *Grammatology*. He asks, however, 'But what if the Book was only...an *epoch* of Being... If the Being of the world, its presence and the meaning of its Being, revealed itself in illegibility, in a radical illegibility...' (1978: 77).

24. Levinas divides discourse into two categories: *le dit* ('The Said'), which refers to the totality of discourses that have already been spoken, and *le dire*, which denotes the readiness to speak.

25. The linkage between chaps. 13 and 34 has been perceived by many scholars, and has been subject to a full discussion by Dicou (1991: 37-41) and Mathews (1995: 55-66). See also Zapff (1995).

26. That chaps. 34-35 form a pair is the thesis of both Miscall's and Mathews's mono-

strategic, and measures the trajectory from the commission to its fulfilment in a book.²⁷ At the same time, chaps. 34–35 do not mark the end of the book. There are the narratives of chaps 36–39, and Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah. What is the relationship of these parts to the figure of the book in the middle? Does the book contain Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, or do the latter testify to the incompleteness of the book of Yhwh and of Proto-Isaiah? Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, moreover, both complement Proto-Isaiah and are inconclusive. The return home, however intensely anticipated, never quite happens.

More seriously, the book of Yhwh, in which everything is fulfilled, excludes the ethical responsibility of what Levinas calls *le dire*, the response to the call of the other, before anything has actually been spoken. If the message of the book, at least in Proto-Isaiah, is the summons to justice and righteousness, beyond and above politics (as for instance Liss says),²⁸ then the destruction of the nations and, in particular, Israel's alter-ego, Edom, constitutes a denial of that responsibility, of the interchangeability of self and other, exemplified by the Oracles concerning the Nations in chaps. 13–23.²⁹

The image of the book appears earlier in the same chapter: וּנְגִלוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּסֵפֶר, 'and the heavens shall be rolled up like a book' (34.4). If the book of Yhwh is coterminous with history, here the end of history is figured as the closure of the book. The end of the book is then contained within the book,

graphs, from very different methodological perspectives. The consensus was challenged by Steck (1985; 1991), who argues that chap. 35 was composed as a bridge between Proto- and Deutero-Isaiah, and is considerably later than chap. 34. For a compelling critique of Steck, see Mathews (1995: 140–48). Dicou (1991: 41–42) argues that both chaps. 34 and 35 comprise the bridge.

27. Barthel (1997: 253–54, 384) and Steck (1989: 382; = 1991: 23) argue that 34.16a marked a conclusion of one edition of Proto-Isaiah, completing an arc from the oracle against Babylon to one against Edom. See also Steck (1985: 52, 56a), who argues that 34.16–17 were a much later addition. Mathews (1995: 66) points out that it would be unlikely that the book would end without a section on the restoration of Israel. Dicou (1991: 41) notes the many verbal connections with Deutero-Isaiah.

28. Liss's thesis is that through various techniques of defamiliarization Isaiah inaugurates a 'theopolitical revolution', which transcends conventional politics and ideology, whereby Yhwh is transformed from a national to a supranational deity (2002; 2003). Liss is situated within a Jewish philosophical and commentarial tradition, going back, for instance, to Rosenzweig and Buber.

29. The oracles concerning the nations include expressions of sympathy and identification with the plight of the nations, as well as condemnations of them, for example in the oracles concerning Moab (16.1–4, 9–11). Jones (1996) regards these as ironic, but there is no evidence for this; he assumes the Bible is monologic. The paradigmatic instance of identification with the other nations is Isaiah's walking naked in token of the captivity of Egypt and Ethiopia in chap. 20.

though displaced as a simile. The simile inserts a certain difference between the subject and the image, as if the book were not really equivalent to the universe. The rolling up of the book dramatizes the end of significance, of the imaginative coherence of the world, just as the removal of the heavens, and in particular of its stars, is an uncreation. The fracture of the world and book may be suggested by the simile itself, and indeed by its conventionality, which bestows upon the image an archetypal, canonical authority. The parting of the ways between the world and the book is represented by that between the conventional image and its supersession. In the revelatory clarity of the book in 34.16, one can see not only its past illegibility, but its future resealing and storing away. It becomes once again mysterious, as an emblem of an inaccessible past. What will succeed the book?

3. *The Vision of All* (29.9-10)

Going back to 29.11, the word *חזון* 'vision', may also mean 'compact', and is used for the compact with Death and Sheol in 28.15 and 18.³⁰ The linkage between the two is evident: the prophetic vision is antithetical to the vision/compact with death, and the necromancy with which it is accomplished.³¹ At the same time, the 'vision of all' includes the vision of death, and the vision/contract made with death. It is consequently ambiguous, since it is a vision of death as well as life, and ensures the catastrophe it announces through its enjoined incomprehensibility. Yet the prophet offers a lifeline, a compact or covenant in his turn, perhaps through his disciples, a mode of survival despite every catastrophe. This, implicitly, is equivalent to the primal covenant, between God and Israel, and God and humanity, and contrasts with 'the covenant with death' that the rulers/aphorists of Jerusalem claim to have concluded in 28.15.³²

Vision is ambiguous, since it may be illusory. It may refer to dreams, and does so twice in this chapter. In 29.7, the multitude of the nations who wage war against Jerusalem will be 'like a dream, a vision (*חזון*) of the night'; in 29.10, in the verse immediately preceding the parable, the heads of those upon whom Yhwh has poured a spirit of deep sleep are 'seers' (*חזינים*).³³

30. In 28.15, the variant *חז* is used. The pun is commented upon by several scholars, for example Blenkinsopp (2000a: 475), whose sees an ironic allusion to the Sinai covenant. Exum (1982: 137-38 n. 31) translates *חז* as 'vision' in 28.15, 18 too.

31. See van der Toorn's (1988) exemplary study of necromancy in 28.7-22.

32. The literature on the covenant with death is substantial. Many think that the reference is to negotiations with Egypt, associated with the cult of death. For the association with the Canaanite god Mot, see Blenkinsopp (2006b: 477-78) and van der Toorn (1988: 477-78).

33. Most scholars see 'prophets' (*הנביאים*) and 'seers' (*חזינים*) in this verse as glosses

Whereas in 28.15 and 18 the ‘compact/vision’ with Death and Sheol is designed to ward off the impending threat, here it is that very threat that is the illusion. Similarly, in 29.10 the visionaries are the prophets and the heads of the people, evidently associated with the rulers/aphorists of 28.14 and the inebriated prophets and priests of 28.7-8. Their vision, especially if manifested in *Realpolitik*, is now exposed as blindness or sleep. However, whereas in 28.18 the covenant with death is antonymic to that with God and is purged (כפר) with the very death it tried to avoid, here Yhwh is responsible for the slumber. In other words, Yhwh is responsible for the covenant with death that betrays the people’s guilt and their trust in illusion. The vision of all—the true and ideal vision of the prophet—has become a sealed book for those who are immersed in the phantom world of the political and intellectual elite and their recourse to the visionary accord with Sheol. The true vision, as it were, contains and programs the false one. But they also change places. For the sages, the prophet’s language is strange and his vision unreal; for the prophet it is the current reality that vanishes. The world of the living has become indistinguishable from that of the dead; one effect of the compact with Sheol is that Sheol has cast its spell on the living.

29.9-10 combines the commission scene of 6.9-10 with the drunken priests and prophets of 28.7-8:

Tarry and be bewildered! Delight and blind yourselves! They are drunk, but not with wine; they stray, but not with drink! For Yhwh has poured upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and he has closed your eyes, and he has covered the prophets and your heads, the seers.

There is a similar paradox here to that in 6.9-10. On the one hand, the addressees are to obey the imperatives, on the other they are comatose and hence incapable of acting. It eliminates the double bind of hearing and not understanding, seeing and not perceiving in 6.9,³⁴ since there is nothing contradictory in tarrying and wondering, delighting and blinding oneself, as well as the mediating role of the prophet. His task is to observe and to communicate, hence the oscillation between the second and third persons,

that restrict the scope of the condemnation, largely on metric and syntactic grounds (e.g. Barthel 1997: 378, 382; Liss 2003: 205 n. 6; Wildberger 1997: 81). Blenkinsopp (2000a: 404) attributes it to postexilic polemic against unauthorized prophets; cf. Beuken (2000: 95). On the other hand, it does correlate with the motif of prophets and seers in 28.7 and 30.10, as mentioned by Liss, and for this reason I regard the supplements, if such they be, as an intrinsic part of the text continuum, as will be clear in subsequent comments. Watts (2005: 453) notes that there is no textual basis for the consensus.

34. For the double bind in 6.9, see Landy (1999: 70; 2001: 310). The people are instructed to understand not to understand. The more they faithfully obey the command, the less they do so.

but not to block the people's consciousness, unless the commission of 6.9-10 applies here too.

However, in place of the neat antitheses of 6.9, in which faithful attention is coupled with incomprehension, the imperatives here blend sonorously through a series of reduplicated syllables: *התמהמהו והשתעשעו* 'Tarry and be bewildered, delight and blind yourselves', whose effect is to intensify the confusion they mandate. The doubling of *שמעו שמעו*, 'hearing, hear', and *ראו ראו*, 'seeing, see', in 6.9 emphasizes the insistence on hearing and seeing; the doubled syllables of *התמהמהו* and *השתעשעו* suggest delay and dallying. The real problem, though, is the meaning of these terms, and their linkage with their complements, *תמהו* and *שעו*. Are the latter pared down versions of the former, as some critics suggest?³⁵ The interfusion of syllables implies a convergence of meaning, as with all significant puns. The delay evoked by *התמהמהו*, 'Tarry', in which the repeated syllables onomatopoeically convey protraction, merges with astonishment, which induces a mental or physical paralysis in the face of that which overwhelms the senses. Likewise, *שעשע* is associated with play and the pleasure one takes with children; in Prov. 8.30-31 it refers to the pleasures of wisdom, and in Ps. 119.174 to the delights of Torah. In 11.8 the infant plays (*שעשע*) over the adder's hole, as a sign of Messianic peace. Here, however, it is coupled with *שעו*, which combines the meanings of looking intensely and rendering opaque;³⁶ it may be a reflexive, doubled form of the verb. So playing, pleasure and the delights of wisdom intersect with the self-blinding or smearing over of the eyes and the visionary spectacle. The verb *שעע/שעע* provides the strongest lexical connection between this passage and 6.9-10; however, responsibility for the blinding/gaze is transferred to the people. What does it mean to blind oneself? It may, in the first instance, refer to the capacity for self-delusion, and thus be allied to astonishment, procrastination, and fantasy.

But one should also look at the context. In 29.5 the enemy disappears 'in an instant, suddenly' (*כפתע פתאום*); the bewilderment, the inability to take it in, is the response to the unexpected. The slow motion, the deferral of

35. Many critics emend *התמהמהו* to *התמהו* as a hithpael of *תמה*, 'be astounded', so as to conform to the alleged repetition of the root *שעע* in the parallel colon. The duplication is accounted for by dittography (Wildberger 1997: 80; Liss 2003: 202 n. 2; Barthel 1997: 378; Clements 1980: 238; Blenkinsopp 2000a: 403). However, Beuken (2000: 92) defends the MT (as does Watts 2005: 452), as suggesting complementary states of mind. Correspondingly, the same scholars see *השתעשעו* as unambiguously a hithpael form of *שעע*. For its derivation from *שעשע*, see Beuken (2000: 92-93), who rightly comments 'the semantic word game being played with these four verbs is highly intricate' (93). See also Beuken 2010: 118.

36. For the multiple puns in 6.10, and specifically on *השע*, see Landy (1999: 71-72; 2001: 312).

understanding implied by *הַתְּמָהָהוּ*, inserts a temporal gap, corresponding to the immediacy of the transformation.

Robert Carroll describes the ambiguity of *שַׁעַה/שַׁעַע* as 'blindsight', a very productive metaphor, adapted in part from Paul de Man's insight that creative reading requires apperception (1997: 90).³⁷ The term refers to vestigial, peripheral or projected visual senses among the blind (1997: 80). As Carroll understands it, only through blindness can one achieve insight. Only through undoing all the structures of our habitual perception, can we see afresh, as if for the first time. Carroll writes, 'Or is Isaiah such a blinded text that only a blinded critic can read it?' (1997: 92). A blinded critic, as I understand it, is one who, like Gloucester in *King Lear*, is violently deprived of sight and has to wander in darkness in the night without recourse to familiar props; a blinded text is one that I imagine looks at us and interrogates us, but only with eyes that are empty and are signs of human pain and accusation. Of course, I do not know what Carroll meant, and I am not sure he did either; in this essay, in particular, he gives the impression of walking in darkness. Not only does Carroll's apothegm describe the plight of the reader of the sealed book, when the text is invisible and the reader is, at least functionally, blind, but it communicates the simultaneity of revelation and astonishment in our passage. The addressees are amazed because their eyes have been opened.

The continuation of the verse—*שָׁכְרוּ וְלֹא יֵין נָעוּ וְלֹא שָׁכַר*, 'they are drunk, but not with wine; they stray, but not with drink'³⁸—recalls the drunken priests and prophets of 28.7-8, especially since they are identified as prophets and seers in the next verse. However, unlike the former, they have imbibed no alcohol; their drunkenness is hence metaphorical. It is not clear, however, what the metaphor means. Drunkenness may indicate prophetic trance and possession, or be the effect of bewilderment; in any case, the significance of 28.7-8, especially if it refers to a funerary feast, carries over to our passage and is nullified there.³⁹ The revellers have nothing to revel with. Instead they are overcome by profound unconsciousness, like the drunkards of Ephraim in 28.1.

37. Carroll refers specifically to de Man's essay, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness', in his *Blindness and Insight* (1984), whose subject is Derrida's reading of Rousseau. The blindness may be that of a critical reader to certain aspects of the text, as de Man claims of Derrida, or it may be inherent in the text itself (1984: 141).

38. Some critics change the verbs into imperatives to conform to v. 9a, in line with some versions and a possible reading of 1QIsa^a (Wildberger 1997: 81; Blenkinsopp 2000a: 403; Barthel 1997: 378). Liss (2003: 206) defends the MT as providing a better syntactic connection to v. 10a; similarly, Beuken (2000: 93) thinks it makes better sense of the current situation.

39. Barthel (1997: 380) rightly sees it as climactic; likewise Beuken (2000: 93-94), who points out the contrasts with 28.1.

As Hanna Liss (2003: 206-207) points out, the word תרדמה, 'deep sleep', usually refers to an extraordinary state of unconsciousness for the sake of revelation, an expectation reinforced by its source in a divine spirit and the identification of the recipients as prophets and seers.⁴⁰ Elsewhere in the book, moreover, the spirit does bestow special gifts of clairvoyance and transformation, as in 11.2, 32.15, and 63.1. Here, however, nothing happens. Yhwh covers the visionaries' heads, thus ensuring that they will not see. The violent energy of the first verse is transformed into an image of stillness, as if it were but a dream.

4. *Like a Dream of the Night* (29.7-8)

Dream imagery occurs also in 29.7-8, in tandem with חוֹן, 'vision':

And it shall be like a dream, a vision of the night, the multitude of all the nations who wage war against Ariel, and all its hosts, and its siegeworks, and those who constrict her. And it shall be like one who starves and dreams and behold, he eats, and he wakes up, and is empty, and one who thirsts and dreams and behold, he drinks, and he wakes up, and is exhausted, and his throat is parched, so will be the multitude of all the nations who wage war against Mt Zion.

Until this point one would have thought that the oracle against Ariel,⁴¹ of which this is part, were entirely negative.⁴² חוֹי, 'Woe', already leads one to expect a denunciation; the reference to David, to the annual cycle of festivals, introduces a backdrop of nostalgia, a reminder of an ideal age and normative sacred order, against which to measure the current vicissitudes and degeneration.⁴³ Yhwh himself fights and lays siege to Jerusalem; if the context is the Assyrian invasion, then the enemy is but a figure for Yhwh

40. Vermeylen (1978: 405) thinks that the oracle was originally directed against the enemies of Jerusalem and immediately followed 29.7. Thereby he misses the connection with 6.9-10.

41. Ariel, as a sacred or poetic term for Jerusalem, occurs only here, and has occasioned extensive discussion. Beuken (2000: 81 n. 9) says that the old translation as 'lion of God' is obsolete; it is maintained, however, by Blenkinsopp (2000: 400-401) and Watts (2005: 450). It refers to the altar in Ezek. 43.15-16, and appears on the Moabite stone. It may be related to the obscure אֶרְאֵל in 33.7.

42. Barthel (1997: 354-68) lengthily argues for the attribution of the negative and positive predictions to different redactional stages, on the grounds of the latter's inconsistency with Isaiah's continued depreciation of Jerusalem elsewhere (e.g. 1.8), even after the Assyrian siege; cf. also Kilian (1994: 165-66). For a contrary view, see Beuken (2000: 77). Wong (1995) argues that it is negative throughout, and that v. 7 represents a real nightmare. Against this, however, is the association of dreams and visions of the night with illusion.

43. Watts (2005: 449) sees the context as being a festal drama of humiliation.

himself. This is in keeping with his strange work in 28.21-22, and the entire motif of Assyria as Yhwh's instrument. Here, however, for the moment the enemy disappears; Yhwh alone constructs siegeworks and camps against Jerusalem, as did David.⁴⁴ History is repeating itself in reverse, as it does in 28.21. Yhwh, however, is attacking a city that is already half-dead: its voice comes up from the earth like a ghost, and chirps from the dust (v. 4).⁴⁵ The vision/compact with Sheol results in Jerusalem crossing the boundary between life and death, becoming a ghost of itself. In vv. 5-6, the multitude of human enemies investing Jerusalem is described as being like fine dust and whirling chaff in the divine storm wind; again we think that the comparison is with their innumerability and the fierceness of their onslaught, especially since the verb **תפקד**, 'it shall be visited', is feminine and can only refer to Ariel/Jerusalem.⁴⁶

Then we come to our image, 'and it shall be like a dream, a vision of the night', and to the moment of agnōrisis: the crisis was but an illusion. Retrospectively, the images of dust and chaff can be decoded, quite conventionally, as similes for flimsiness and impermanence; just as they are raised up, so can they be blown away. The nightmare, in which one experiences oneself as a ghost with a monster god stalking the ramparts, is just that.

The **חזון לילה**, 'the vision of the night', may be just a dream. The word **חזון**, though, associates it with visionary experience, including both the necromantic visions of/with the underworld in 28.15 and the overarching vision (**חזון**) of the prophet in 1.1. Dreams are a source of revelation and represent another, imaginary, but perhaps more real, world. In our context, moreover, this alternative nocturnal world is real. In the previous chapter, the 'surging scourge' passes by day and night, and 'it is but horror to understand that which is heard' (28.19). In other words, the assertion that it is but a dream puts into question the entire rhetoric (and reality) of catastrophe that haunts Isaiah.

It is followed, however, by a double simile, like that in vv. 11-12:

And it shall be like one who starves and dreams and behold, he eats, and he wakes up, and is empty, and like one who thirsts and dreams and behold, he drinks, and he wakes up, and is faint, and his throat is parched, so will be the multitude of all the nations who wage war against Mt Zion.

44. The connection is made by Wildberger (1997: 74), reading **כדור** with the LXX rather than **כדור** with MT. See also Exum (1981: 342).

45. These are familiar images for the sounds of the dead; cf. 8.19; 38.14.

46. Beuken (2000: 71), however, sees it as neuter, i.e. 'it will be visited', *contra* Sweeney (1996a: 382). Exum (1981: 343) thinks it is ambiguous. The ambiguity, however, rests with the significance of **פקד** and not with the subject. See also Childs 2001: 217.

Many scholars think that the subject is the ‘multitude of all the nations’, who dream about capturing Jerusalem and find it to be unattainable.⁴⁷ Alternatively, the dreamer may be Ariel itself, in parallel with v. 7. Just as the dream there was of the nations, so here the food and drink correspond to the invaders and the cold awakening to their departure. Of course, the simile would then contrast relief to disappointment. But that would be the point. The end of the nightmare would leave a gap. A similar moment is found in 33.18: ‘Where is the scribe? Where is the weigher of silver? Where is the enumerator of towers? The fierce people you no longer see...’ The vacuum would account for the perplexity of the addressees of vv. 9-10, since this is something the prophets and seers could not foresee.

The dreamers, in this case, are those who have a vision/compact with death and who have turned Jerusalem into a simulacrum of the dead. They comprise the entire political-sapiential order, encapsulated in the pun on מְשֻׁלִּים, ‘rulers/aphorists’, in v. 14. In 8.21, the necromancer is ‘hungry’, and perhaps represents the unappeased hunger of the dead. In 5.11-14, the revelers who go down to Sheol are figures of excessive consumption and extreme hunger and thirst, and feed its insatiable appetite.⁴⁸ To be hungry and thirsty, then, for the dreamers, may represent human need at the base of the appeal to the dead, the accumulation of wealth, and even, perhaps, the ritual cycle evoked at the beginning of the oracle.⁴⁹

The oracle thus presents, simultaneously, danger and reprieve.⁵⁰ Yhwh suddenly and inexplicably switches sides. We read the story backwards as well as forwards: only when we reach v. 7 do we realize that it has to be reread as an account of deliverance rather than disaster. The Janus-parallelism of כִּפְתָּה פְּתָאוֹם, ‘and it shall be in an instant, suddenly’, is crucial in this regard. It both completes the previous phrases about the invasion of the fearsome strangers and introduces the following verse about the divine volte-face.⁵¹ The suddenness of the onslaught meets that of Yhwh’s intervention.

47. Exum (1981: 346), Beuken (2000: 88) are examples. Blenkinsopp (2000: 402), in contrast, sees it as ‘an effective analogy for the prophetic sense of the insubstantiality of the display of military and political power juxtaposed with the abiding reality of the divine’.

48. 5.11-14 is replete with difficulties, word plays, and typical Isaianic ironies. Many scholars think that v. 14 is secondary, because of the repetition of לִכְ, ‘therefore’, and because of the uncertain references of the feminine suffixes; see, however, Beuken (2003: 150-51). Verse 14 conforms to the topos of ‘death drinking the drinkers’, like 28.7.

49. Especially if one understands תַּאֲזִיזָה וְאֲנִיָּה as cultic lamentation, perhaps including fasting (Beuken 2000: 82).

50. See the excellent analysis in Sommer 2008: 335-37.

51. Most commentators, in fact, see it as introducing v. 6 and do not recognize the Janus-parallelism (e.g. Wildberger 1997: 76; Beuken 2000: 85).

The retrospective interpretation means that the two possibilities are superimposed on each other.

This brings us to a fundamental problem. In 6.9-12, the difference between the eras of incomprehension and elucidation is marked by absolute destruction followed by partial restoration; here the two moments are simultaneous, the destruction averted by miraculous escape. The same pattern is repeated several times in these chapters, notably in 31.4-5 and in 37.36. Whereas in 6.10, the occlusion of the eyes is to prevent self-recognition and thus healing, here the same word, שעה/שעה, is used for astonishment at their survival. They have radically different functions. Moreover, if Isaiah elsewhere posits total discontinuity between the present age and the new age, here they overlap. Nothing will account for the persistence of the reprobate beyond the threshold marked, for instance, by the destruction of the Assyrian army. Except perhaps for common sense.

There may be historical explanations, for instance as evidence of different ideological perspectives and periods in the development of the book.⁵² One cannot expect unity and consistency. There is, however, a tension between the temporal scheme, with its projection of the age of comprehension to the far future, and the simultaneity of comprehension and non-comprehension, or the lapse of those whose eyes have been opened into error, of which the most obvious example is Hezekiah's fatal display of the Temple treasures in chap. 39. For instance, the sealed book of 29.11-12 may already be available to the prophet, or the prophet may understand and not understand his vision at the same time. Thus alongside the temporal dimension there is a potential coexistence of the two domains. This would correspond to Liss's view that what Isaiah teaches is a 'theopolitical revolution', whose meaning is beyond historical events and politics. From that point of view the new Temple of 28.16-17 is already being founded, in Isaiah's words and in justice and righteousness.

The ambiguity is evident in the phrase in 29.9, שברו ולא יין נעו ולא שכר, 'they are drunk, but not with wine; they stray, but not with drink'. Being drunk but not with wine is a frequent metaphor for grief,⁵³ and would fit the first reading, in which 29.1-8 describes an irresistible attack on Jerusalem. It would then contrast with the alcoholic excess of 28.7-8. On the second reading, the metaphor becomes open-ended; it cannot simply refer to grief. Especially if the sleep which is the sign of divine inspiration is equivalent to the dream in vv. 7-8, they are still living the nightmare. Bewilder-

52. For instance, Barthel (1997: 364-69) attributes vv. 5-7 to the Josianic period on precisely these grounds. For a critique of this kind of approach, see Childs (2001: 215-16).

53. E.g. Jer. 25.15-31; Isa. 51.17, 22. Wildberger (1997: 83) does take it in this sense, as a prediction of future horror.

ment, delusion, delay and drunkenness without wine would be symptoms of that state.

Unlike the double simile of vv. 11-12, the second simile of v. 8 merely repeats the first, using thirst as the example rather than hunger. The redundancy may simply be indicative of verbal profligacy, like the drunkenness of the prophets. But it also draws attention to the dream, to the simile itself. The dream, marked as a different imaginative realm by the comparative, contrasts reality and illusion, inner and outer worlds. For a moment, on waking up, one may still hesitate between the two.

וְהָתַמְהוּמָהּ וְהָתַמְהוּמָהּ, 'Tarry and be bewildered', opens a space for the undoing of the conventional structures of thought, which is matched at the end of the woe-oracle by the dissolution of wisdom and understanding: וְאִבְדָּהּ: חִכְמַת חֲכָמָיו וְבִינַת נַבְנֵיו תִּסְתַּחֲתַח 'and the wisdom of its wise men shall perish, and the discernment of its discerning ones shall be hidden' (v. 14b). This is part of a reprise of 5.20-21, in which traditional wisdom is turned on its head. This is coupled, parallelistically, by a curious amplification of divine transcendence of normal cognition: לִכֵּן הִנְנִי יוֹסִיף לְהַפְלִיא אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה הַפְלֵא וּפְלֵא 'Therefore, behold, I continue to bedazzle this people with amazing wonder' (v. 14a). The threefold repetition of the word פִּלְא corresponds to the doubling of הַכְּמָה, 'wisdom', and בִּינָה, 'discernment'. The insistence suggests a violent and cumulative overload of the mind, leading to a breakdown of wisdom and comprehension, both as an inherent aptitude and an intellectual tradition. The wonder may be a succession of disasters or of salvific interventions. That it is punitive predisposes us to think of disaster; nonetheless, the parallel with v. 9 and the context of the disappearance of the enemy in vv. 5-8 makes it indeterminate—as does the open-endedness of the word פִּלְא.⁵⁴

In 28.29, the same word recurs: הַפְלִיא עֲצָה הַגְדִּיל תוֹשִׁיָּה 'He makes counsel wondrous, he magnifies resourcefulness'. There it is at the end of a parable that concerns the survival of seed despite being rolled over by a cart, an evident metaphor for the imperial armies. If 28.29, which begins 'Also this comes forth from Yhwh of Hosts', echoes 28.22, and hence revises its prediction of total disaster, it anticipates or programmes our expectations when it appears here. The wisdom of the wise may perish, but the divine counsel persists.⁵⁵

The penalty is motivated by condemnation for pious conformity: 'And my Lord said: Because this people have drawn near with its mouth and with its

54. Beuken (2000: 76, 91, 98) also notes the indeterminacy of פִּלְא. Exum (1981: 350) likewise argues for its irony and ambiguity. For a philological discussion, see Wildberger (1997: 91). Sawyer (1984: 243) suggests that there may be an element of parody of the Exodus traditions (as indeed in the whole passage).

55. Barthel (1997: 344, 380) thinks that 28.29 is also critical of the 'wise'.

lips have honoured me, but its fear of me is a commandment learned of men' (v. 13). This verse is often correlated with the rejection of the Temple courts in 1.10-17, and is linked to the evocation of the festival cycle in v. 1.⁵⁶ It participates in a prophetic paradigm, the critique of cultic practice divorced from ethics. Here, however, the appearance of the paradigm is pallid; there is none of the disgust of 1.10-17, for instance, and little contextual appositeness. 'This people' may be those to whom the book is given, as well as those who are astonished in vv. 9-10 and 14, represented by their prophets and sages.⁵⁷ Later in the chapter, in language seemingly borrowed from Amos, their defect may be associated with injustice (v. 21).⁵⁸

Verse 13, however, recalls chap. 6.⁵⁹ In 6.5, Isaiah complains that he is טמא שפתים, 'impure of lips', and that he dwells among a people who are טמא שפתים, 'impure of lips'; in response, the seraph touches his mouth, and says that his scorched lips have become the means of purification. This initiates Isaiah into prophetic language. There the lips are a synecdoche for the whole person and people. Here, the lips signify the difference between speech and interiority, the 'heart' and expression. Humans are divided and dissimulate. The apparently pure lips provide an alibi. Purity, which enables the lips to approach God, is the ground for separation. As in chap. 6, כבוד becomes ambiguous; on the people's lips it becomes pro forma.⁶⁰

Another connection is the word רחק, 'made distant'. In 6.12, Yhwh distances human beings; here the heart distances itself from God. As the lips draw nearer, so the heart becomes more remote. As the affective/intellectual centre of human beings, and as that which, according to 6.10, should understand, it thus removes itself from allegiance to 'my Lord', from proper relationship.

As in 6.9-10, the people are set apart as 'this people', both here and in v. 14, as subjects of the discourse of the prophet and God. 'This people' contrasts with 'my people', dissociates them from God and prophet. Their piety (literally, 'reverence') is 'a commandment learned (מלמדה) of men'. The

56. The connection is made by Blenkinsopp (2000a: 406), Barthel (1997: 351) and Exum (1981: 351), who indicates the *inclusio*.

57. The association of the phrase with prophets and sages is evident in 28.11 and 14, to which this passage is evidently linked (cf. Barthel 1997: 300).

58. A number of commentators note the similarity to Amos 5.10 and 12 (Wildberger 1997: 114; Watts 2005: 457; Sawyer 1984: 244). For the influence of Amos on Isaiah, see Blenkinsopp (2000a: 106-107), though he does not refer to our passage.

59. Williamson (1994: 60) notes the correspondence, though without providing detail.

60. The 'glory' that the seraphim celebrate in 6.3 becomes heaviness in the people's ears in 6.10, perhaps as a metaphor for self-glorification (Landy 1999: 71-72; 2001: 311-12).

root לַמֶּדֶד is used also for the prophet's disciples (לַמֶּדֶד), in whom his Torah is sealed in 8.16. The two kinds of education diverge; one wonders what both consist of.

The end of v. 14b, וְאִבְדָה חִכְמַת חֲכָמָיו וּבִינָת נַבְנִי תִסְתָּחַר, 'and the wisdom of its wise men shall perish, and the discernment of its discerning ones will be *concealed*', is immediately echoed by the beginning of the next oracle: לִסְתֵּר עֲצָה, הוּא הַמַּעֲמִיקִים מִדָּה, 'Woe, those who burrow deep from Yhwh to *conceal* counsel' (v. 15a). The two oracles are thereby bound together;⁶¹ Beuken (1992) has argued at length that vv. 15-24 reverses vv. 1-14.⁶² The connection suggests poetic justice. Because the wise men sought to conceal their schemes from Yhwh, their understanding is concealed from themselves. Or it could be a symptom of their folly. The loss of wisdom and understanding is, in both vv. 13-14 and 15, correlated with a dissonance between behaviour and consciousness, appearances and intentions. The wise men say, 'Who will see us? Who will know us?'⁶³ Their conviction of invisibility and secrecy enables ethical irresponsibility, in contrast to their public persona.

Unlike 6.9-10, our passage seems to offer a way out, through the dissolution of wisdom, the ambiguity of פֶּלֶא, the challenge to and openness of reading. As the oracle in vv. 15-24 continues, the wise men are associated with the hubris of the Assyrian emperor in 10.5ff, who boasts against Yhwh, whose instrument he is (10.15);⁶⁴ similarly, the imagery of the enemies in v. 5 is internalized.⁶⁵ For instance, the fearsome assailants (עֲרִיצִים) of v. 5 become stereotypical oppressors of the righteous and poor in vv. 20-21.⁶⁶

61. Williamson (1994: 61) observes that they are connected through inverted catchwords.

62. Some place the structural break after v. 16 (Barthel 1997: 259; Vermeylen 1977: 407). It is more natural to see הוּא in v. 15 as introducing a new oracle, with Sweeney (1996a: 377-78), Beuken (2000: 101-28). Others regard vv. 15-16 as an independent snippet, e.g. Williamson (1994: 61), Wildberger (1997: 94-102).

63. Williamson (1994: 58) remarks on the close association of these phrases with 6.9-10.

64. The connection is noted by Beuken (1992: 54; 2000: 118).

65. Verse 5 is, however, textually ambiguous, since 1QIsa^a reads זִדִּיךְ, 'your insolent ones', a reading adopted by Wildberger (1997: 66). Clements (1980: 236-37) curiously thinks that זִדִּיךְ refers to the external enemies. For a defence of מַטְ זִדִּיךְ, see Barthel (1997: 352-53) and Irwin (1977: 52). See also Exum (1981: 344), who argues on the basis of the parallel with vv. 7-8.

66. The rhyming couplet כִּי אַפְסֵ עֲרִיץ וְכֹלָה לֵץ, 'For nought is the terrible one and destroyed is the scoffer', in v. 20 has a proverbial ring. Vermeylen (1977: 408) assigns vv. 19-21 to a late editorial stage, associated with Trito-Isaiah, and comments on their anthological style.

5. Conclusion

29.1-14 reworks some of the themes and the structure of chap. 28, which itself consists of two matching panels (28.1-13, 14-29). The correlations may be represented diagrammatically as follows:

28.1-13	28.14-22 (29)	29.1-14
Hoy oracle against Ephraim (v. 1)	Oracle against Jerusalem (v. 14)	Hoy oracle against Ariel/Jerusalem (v. 1)
Motif of Drunkenness	Motif of Wisdom	Drunk but not with wine/wisdom
The enemy compared to storm/strong and mighty to my Lord (v. 2)	Enemy compared to storm (vv. 15, 17b-18)	Enemy/Yhwh compared to storm. Yhwh as enemy (vv. 5-6)
The last minute transformation: the throne established in justice (vv. 5-6)	The New Temple (vv. 16-17a)	The last minute transformation: like a dream (vv. 7-8)
The <i>marzeah</i> feast (vv. 7-8)	The covenant with death (v. 15)	Ghostlike (v. 4)
Prophets (v. 7)	Vision/compact (חזוֹת) (vv. 15-18)	Prophets: vision (חזוֹת) (vv. 9-10)
Strange language (vv. 10-13)	Strange actions (v. 21)	The sealed book (vv. 11-12)
	Allusions to David (v. 21)	Reference to David/ideal past (vv. 1, 3)
	'Has made counsel wondrous' (v. 29)	Wonderment (v. 14)

29.1-14, in contrast to chap. 28, repeats figures of unreality, spectrality and secondariness. The *marzeah* feast and the covenant with death culminate in Ariel becoming like a ghost, already enacting its afterlife.⁶⁷ Instead of the solid edifice of the new Temple, and, correspondingly, the vision of the

67. There is widespread support for the identification of the feast in 28.7-8 with the *marzeah* or funerary banquet. One may note the special studies of Blenkinsopp (2000b); van der Toorn (1988); Halpern (1986: 118-19); Lewis (1989: 135); and especially McLaughlin (2001: 169-80).

enthroned figure ruling in justice in 28.5-6, there is just the vanishing of the enemy and the wonder it occasions. The drunkenness of the prophets exhausts itself in sleep; the violence of the enemy, communicated through metaphors like שוט שוּטָר, 'the surging scourge', is reduced to particles, 'fine dust' (אֶבֶק דָּק), against which are set the siegeworks (vv. 3, 7), whose construction ironically displays the insignificance of the human agents.⁶⁸ The principal figures are the dream and the book, which are similes of each other. The past is like a dream or a tale written about another and inaccessible world. The dreamer and the reader may be in the position of the prophet of the future age, beyond the threshold of comprehension; at the same time what they experience is empty. Their throat/soul (נֶפֶשׁ) is dry; they are famished; the book is illegible. Between the person who dreams and the waking self, the writer and the reader of that which is hidden, there is a relationship of exclusion and nostalgia. One dreams of oneself as an ancestral ghost, from the outside, revisiting a past that haunts one and makes its claim, whispering and chirping, a past, however, that is already dead even when alive. One reads of oneself in the book, a metonymy for the entire imaginary world of Isaiah, where one is unable to read. Freud's theory of the Uncanny, whose eeriness is the consequence of its being familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, maternal and deadly, as the place of irrecoverable origin, may be helpful here—and directs us to the discourse of Deutero-Isaiah.⁶⁹

The passage is remarkable for its superabundance of similes, as has been pointed out by Cheryl Exum (1981: 339). Similes are a technique not only for suggesting alternative worlds, but for generating a sense of uncertainty; a simile is a second-order reality, whose precise referent may not be known. 'Alles Irdische ist nur ein Gleichnis' may not be completely apposite, but the more similitudes, especially complex and embedded ones, the more one is aware of the difficulty of figurative language in communicating prophetic vision.

One example may suffice. The oracle begins, הוֹי אֲרִיאֵל אֲרִיאֵל, 'Woe, Ariel, Ariel!' We do not know the exact significance of Ariel, but its unique occurrence as a poetic designation for Jerusalem has powerful emotional and symbolic freight. In the next verse, it comes back as a simile: וְהָיְתָה לִי כְּאַרְיֵל, 'And she shall be for me like Ariel'.⁷⁰ 'Like Ariel' may convey an

68. Again, there are textual problems. Many scholars read מִצְרֵי־יָהּ, 'her siegeworks', as in v. 3, with 1QIsa^a for MT מִצְדֵּתָהּ, 'her fortification', with a commonplace interchange of ד and ר; cf. Blenkinsopp (2000a: 399). For an adoption of MT, see Watts (2005: 448) and the discussion of the alternatives in Irwin (1977: 54).

69. Freud's essay 'The "Uncanny"' (1919) has, perhaps ironically, had immense influence in literary criticism, including literary criticism of the Hebrew Bible. See, for instance, Bal (1988: 186-92) and Pardes (2000: 113-14).

70. Exum (1981: 343) comments that it may not be possible to recover the full

ideal Jerusalem, a memory to set against God's present animosity. In any case, the simile makes Ariel something other than itself—as if Ariel is no longer like Ariel. The displacement into simile measures the gap that the poem tries to close, for instance between illusion and reality, disaster and deliverance, through techniques such as the overlapping readings of vv. 5-8.

Simile might be a metaphor for the reading experience. We come to the book knowing how to read and then discover we do not know how to read. Reading, and writing about reading, is always an experiment, to imagine what it is like, or would be like—what it is like to be God, or the prophet, or the enemy, or the dreamer. Or dead. It is also repetition, a piling on of apostrophes: **הוֹי אֲרִיאֵל אֲרִיאֵל**, 'Woe, Ariel! Ariel!', a city conjured up only to be grieved over. Year follows year, all alike and all different: **סִפּוּ לָכֶם שָׁנָה עַל שָׁנָה**, 'add for yourselves year upon year'. They are characterized by festivals, the seasonal, mythical cycle: **הַגִּידִים יִנְקֹפוּ**, 'festivals come around'. But these are replaced by, or perhaps always were occasions for, repeated mourning, either by God or humans: **וְהָיְתָה הָאֲנִיָּה וְהָאֲנִיָּה**, 'and it shall be mourning and lament'. The years accumulate and are cancelled out, at the same time. Reading is necromancy, a resurrection of the dead, that turns us into simulacra. We read of ourselves unreading, dissolving the letters, not being able to recognize the signs, decomposing. We cover our eyes, to ward off whatever the text has to tell us. Hillis Miller (2008) writes of criticism as apotropaic, a counter-magic, a way of not reading. We look backwards and forwards, across all the texts, falling like leaves, Rosenkleide. And the years of friendship too.

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significance of the pun, and note the discussion in Wildberger (1997: 74) which, as he says, leaves the reader 'in a quandary'.

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FLESH OF MY FLESH

Burke O. Long

Jacob Finkelstein lay on a filthy pad of dried palm leaves in a one-room hovel, half a roof and three tumble-down rows of stone near the Damascus Gate. He had come home to Jerusalem, to die.

He had not washed in days. He smelled of urine. He faded into delirium, then restless sleep, and now felt dimly conscious, floating in a cacophonous muddle of distant church bells, snarling dogs and guttural shouts. Hovering over him, a blurred face. 'Yasha, Yasha.' He tried to focus his eyes. 'So many months. You go wandering to find God, and now, for what?' Brilliant red hair, prominent lips, shoulders hunched, a threadbare shawl—Maria, wringing her hands. 'And what of them? Yasha, Yasha, what of your flesh and blood?'

Jacob squinted and peered across the tiny room, trying to see his daughters, Lidiya and Anna. He suddenly heaved and hacked up bloody sputum. Jagged spikes of pain ripped through his chest. Slowly, grunting and puffing, he pulled himself erect. 'Mashenka!', he cried to his wife. Maria grew rigid, her eyes helpless with panic. Lidiya and Anna rushed to their father's side. He pushed Anna away and clung to Lidiya, the taller of the two. 'It's time', he mumbled, steadying himself on Lidiya's arm. 'Hold me up.' From his pocket he retrieved a small Bible and, dazed, began to read. Lidiya strained to extract words from his gravely whisper.

'He was ruddy, withal of a beautiful—my Lidiya—a beautiful countenance, my Lidiya, goodly to look at.' Jacob's breathing faltered. Tears and spittle dropped onto Lidiya's dress. He waved one arm stiffly. 'Arise, anoint him—her—for this is he—this is Lidiya, this is he—my Lidiya, Lidiya, oh, my son Absalom! My son, my Lidochka, anoint her.'

'Here am I, Father', Lidiya said.

'Bring the word. From Jerusalem. Bring it to the world!' He swayed as if the effort were exhausting the little vital force that remained to him. He grasped at Lidiya's shoulder, but his hand slid away. He collapsed. The Bible skittered across the dirt floor, its pages flapping like the wings of a wounded bird. Anna rushed to retrieve it, but she was too late. Lidiya grabbed the stricken book and clutched it to her tiny breasts. 'I shall do it, Father', she said, looking to the dirt floor where he lay. And to Anna, 'Become my help meet'.

1884

The letter from the British and Foreign Bible Society arrived by late afternoon post, addressed to 'Madam Lidiya Mamreov von Finkelstein', Irving Place Hotel, New York. The bellman lingered at the threshold, tugging at

his too-short jacket sleeves. He shifted his gangly frame from foot to foot. Dismissing the boy with a coin, Lidiya closed the door and slid the letter from its enclosure. Finding the writer's hand nearly indecipherable in the gray-purplish dusk, she walked to a floor-to-ceiling window to catch the remaining daylight. In silence she read.

'Anna', she called to her sister. Enclosed within the yellow glow of an oil lamp, Anna sat at a polished mahogany desk, engrossed, sorting through bits of paper and photographs, laying them out, re-arranging them, studying each configuration with a slight frown.

Anushka's obsession, Lidiya thought, watching her sister. How should I ever manage without her? Anna kept her black-brown hair pulled into a tight bun, and as she bent over the desk, errant strands of hair fell over her forehead. Anna delights in her scrapbooks, she's like a taxidermist, preserving the sleek specimens of my performances, shaping their bodies out of newspaper clippings, photographs, letters, and visitor cards. My triumphs. I might have become a Sarah Bernhardt or a Charlotte Cushman, Lidiya told herself, but for two circumstances. She was devoted to moral entertainments and to the duty that her father had laid upon her.

'Anna!' Lidiya called again, excited and impatient. 'I have no inclination ... I cannot, refuse this!'

Anna was not yet ready to break her concentration. She studied a yellow ribbon that lay out of place on the desk. Two years ago, in San Francisco, a woman and a little girl, seven or eight years old, had stood at the main door of the City Temple waiting to see Lidiya. When she finally emerged, fog had crept over the city, depositing chill and water droplets on street lamps and tree branches. The woman tugged at the hair ribbon—it shone brightly in the gray light. The girl clapped her small hand over the ribbon, but relented as the woman forcibly removed it. 'Accept, please', she said to Lidiya. The woman's speech was breathy and guttural, her syntax skewed, as though some force had pushed the words out of place. 'I have memento for appreciation, Miss Finkelstein. For your Bible life.' She turned to the little girl. 'Alexandra, thank you the famous Miss Finkelstein.' The child's eyes were wide and innocent, her smile sweet. Reddish brown curls bounced loosely on her head. She flared her skirt, bent one leg behind the other and curtsied.

How I would relish a child like that, Anna thought as she slipped the yellow ribbon into the scrapbook page from which it had fallen. Well groomed, schooled in the measure of polite intercourse. A child with spark—that little girl must have loved her hair ribbon, so reluctant was she to give it up. But at age forty-one, dare Anna hope that marriage and motherhood would present themselves?

'I'm sorry, Lidi. What did you say?', Anna asked, suddenly aware that Lidiya stood at the desk, excitedly waving a piece of paper in her hand.

'Build up the church in India!', Lidiya cried. 'That's how the Secretary puts it here.' Lidiya moved away. She turned, hand outstretched, chin uplifted, projecting her voice toward the settee in the middle of the room. 'Like St Paul, I shall make Christians strong in the Lord!'

Anna rose from the desk and sat on the sofa, an audience of one for the drama she knew would arise from the paper her sister held. How young Lidiya still looks, she thought. Yes, tightly corseted, but actually trim, few facial wrinkles—almost none. Only her hair, rolled and pinned into great billows of black streaked with silver, might suggest she's thirty-six. And of course, her secret, the muslin chinstrap she wears to bed. But her eyes bespeak youth and energy: startling blue framed by black lashes, eager, commanding eyes. Like the day she grabbed Father's Bible and pushed me aside. She took possession of that stage, even as poor papá, delirious with opium, heard roaring fire-breath and saw only Lidiya's comely form—or maybe it was God he saw.

'Listen to this, Anna', Lidiya declaimed, letter in one hand, reading glasses held up to her eyes.

"Should you accept the Society's invitation, Miss Finkelstein, I am well assured that your endeavor in East India will yield a mighty harvest, not unlike, may I humbly propose, the mission which St Paul undertook to the churches of Asia Minor." Signed "Anthony Fortesque Millard, Honorary Secretary to the British and Foreign Bible Society".

She placed the letter in Anna's hands, and stepped back. 'The honorary secretary! All charity and duty favorably urge me to accept this. What do you say, Anushka?'

Anna quickly read the secretary's words. He expected hundreds to attend Lidiya's performances at the seminary and normal school in Bhagalpur, landowners and high-ranking British officials in the district, girls and young women training to be teachers—there were some four hundred, mostly native, all in desperate need of moral instruction, the sort that Miss Finkelstein's Bible tableaux and enthralling lectures could give them. And the headmaster, Commander Hartley, a gentleman and officer of the Queen, he would surely represent Miss Finkelstein to his young charges as the sort of Christian he hoped to nurture.

'Consider it, Anna! India!', cried Lidiya. She moved to the window and turned to face Anna. Her face glowed against the now darkened glass. 'Let us carry the Lord's word to India', she intoned. 'The Secretary suggests November or December, the dry season. Then on to Europe, and to England! And perhaps appearances in London, under the Society's auspices.' She strode to the desk and placed her hand on the open scrapbook. 'And after all this, Anushka, you shall record our magnificent voyage home, emboldened by the astern winds of triumph!'

'It's settled, I see', said Anna. She hardly expected otherwise after Lidiya's far-flung journey had leapt full-bodied onto a stage of her making. Whither thou goest, I will go, Anna thought, and where thou lodgest, I shall lodge, and thy God will be my God. She sometimes imagined herself on stage, speaking to Lidiya those terms of endearment that Ruth had offered Naomi long ago. Feeling its truth flowing like blood, for it *was* true, conforming her body and breath to Lidi's, as one sister cleaves to the other, bonnet to bonnet, ribbon to ribbon. But she lacked a flare for the dramatic. How foolish! Allowing that little girl's hair ribbon to stir impossible hope. Of course, the matter is settled. Lidi will go to India, and Anna, 'til death do us part, will go, too.

Anyway, the prospect was not unappealing, since travel to the Far East had become fashionable among the better classes. Yet, weeks of steamer travel—would it be six or eight? And the unfamiliar details to be attended to. She began a mental list. Contact Thomas Cook, yes, we'll need assistance, perhaps a guide. Passports, customs—that could be troublesome. What of quarantines? Very hot climate—how do ladies cope? Lidiya's costumery, arrange for carriage and delivery. Remove each item and inspect it. She loved examining Lidiya's Arab dresses, the white robes of ancient priests; clay lamps and jars, shepherds' staffs, King David's lyre; farmers' plows, seeds, the boxes of Bedouin beads and jewelry. Anna would look for breakage, the tiniest imperfection, as a mother anxiously counts her newborn's fingers. And such relief to discover all was well.

'A new audience in Asia', Anna said brightly. 'I suppose that we must depart, let's see, after Washington, no, after St Louis, in late November', she said, already ordering the months following their stay in New York as if reserving blank pages in the scrapbooks.

'Oh, yes, Anna. I shall reply immediately in tomorrow's post.'

1885

The East India Railway train hissed and creaked, slowly sliding north by west from the Grecian temple-like Howrah terminus of Calcutta. Beyond the city's spread, the line of four-wheeler wagons passed through rice paddies, and swinging more to the north, entered vast stretches of browned fields and open grassland veined by shallow streams. Lidiya idly watched the horizon, where dense clumps of black-green jungle appeared and slowly receded from her view. 'Darkness on the skirt of civilization', she said to Anna.

The Thomas Cook agent had been insistent. 'Ladies, you *must* take a first-class compartment to Bhagalpur.' Lidiya and Anna stood outside the Auckland Hotel, next to a carriage whose driver awaited their trip to the depot. The agent suspiciously eyed two men in white wrap-around skirts, *palki* bearers to judge from the tough, leathery skin of their shoulders. They heaved trunks

onto a bullock cart. 'You there! Careful!', he cried sharply. 'Lash them down!' Across the corner, on the Old Courthouse side of the street, hemp sellers sat cross-legged, their jabbering cries loud and sharp. Dark-skinned dyers spread a quilt of vibrant blue and orange and vermillion fabrics out to dry in the sun; vegetable traders, some shaded by spindly cloth tents, shouted to passersby and gesticulated over their baskets. A brightly painted tramcar rumbled past. 'You are *memsahib* here', the Thomas Cook man said. 'Mind the unruliness, and be firm, *never* be familiar with the natives.'

The train finally climbed into forested hills, a welcome change. Lidiya watched a British military officer in a nearby compartment draw smoke through a *hookah*. A turbaned man, black as coal, polished his boots. She did not regret agreeing to first-class accommodations and its civilized comforts. In Calcutta, she'd been drawn to the English styled mansions overlooking the Houghly River, their green window blinds drawn against the sun, deserted porticos awaiting, she'd imagined, fashionable swirls of gentlefolk enjoying evening socials. Now, after ten days consumed by tedious planning, and some twenty hours creeping through the blank reaches of East India, she fully appreciated the silken music of *memsahib* sung by the porters. Even Anna took to it, though perhaps with less enthusiasm. A lady from Europe or America—what did the dark races know of such distinctions? *Every* white lady a *memsahib*. And of course, a lady to be waited upon. Though, really, the railway servants were quite tiresome—so many of them, and they took perverse pleasure in a mystifying division of labor. One to sweep the floor, another to freshen the sleeping cots suspended along the compartment wall; two for the water closet behind a curtain—one to bring thin towels and fill the bowl and pitcher, another to swab the toilet that lay open to the rail bed; yet another to bring cups of tea and curries and rice in tin containers.

A few hours later, the train descended into the cultivated Ganges plain, rounded a gentle curve, slowed and collapsed into a clanking shudder. Lidiya read the neatly lettered sign outside the window. 'At last', she said to Anna. Railway porters appeared suddenly, jabbering excitedly, reaching for trunks and personal luggage—'Bhagalpur! Bhagalpur! Come, *memsahibs*.' Anna walked to the doorway. 'Those three', she said, enunciating carefully and pointing toward Lidiya's steamer trunks. Moments later, weary and dusty, Lidiya and Anna stood on a practically deserted station platform surrounded by their heavy luggage and personal satchels. A stooped beggar wearing a simple loincloth loitered nearby. The locomotive belched yellowish-white smoke and, sending a wave of thud-dinks from coupling to coupling, crept forward. Open-sided third-class trucks soon trundled past, stuffed with brown- and black-skinned people who held aloft bundles and baskets and chickens to make room for their arms and legs.

A man dressed in a khaki uniform approached. He clasped his hands together in greeting and gently introduced himself as Kumar from the school.

Lidiya exhaled, 'Oh yes, Mr Kumar. Thank goodness, you've found us.' Briskly waving his hand, Kumar summoned a group of loin-clothed boys from the station house. They eagerly rushed to him and, chattering and fussing about like crows, heaved trunks and satchels onto their shoulders. They followed Kumar in a merry band through the red-brick station house to the hard packed dirt road beyond, where they unloaded their burdens onto a bullock cart. 'Your *gharry*, *memsahibs*', said Mr Kumar, gesturing toward a black hearse-like carriage inscribed with 'Bhagalpur Christian Seminary and Normal School'.

Some three quarters of an hour later, Kumar set Lidiya and Anna down in front of a massive white fortress of windows and doors and towers that rested low to the ground, as though having just settled from the sky and attached itself to earth. A British flag hung limply over one of the towers. 'This is headmaster's residence, *memsahibs*', Kumar said. Nearby, a few low buildings sagged forlornly, awaiting reclamation by the surrounding jungle. 'I take your luggage now, the bungalow where you sleep.'

'No. Wait!', Anna cried. 'The trunks marked "Orientalisms"—do you read English? Look here, this is the word.' She pointed to a label. 'The trunks so marked must go to where my sister will give her lectures.'

'Yes, *memsahib*. I take them to Holbrook Assembly Hall.'

* * *

Two days after Lidiya's performances, Headmaster Commander Hartley, a pear-shaped man with a missing hand and a fondness for brandy, presided over an evening's entertainment. Lidiya and Anna were guests of honor. 'Sure, my dears, there won't be much goin' on 'til ye're a friend here', Mrs Hartley said in a thick Irish brogue. She tugged at Lidiya and Anna, parading them past tuxedoed British officials, festooned military men, a rugged and tanned plantation owner, wives and female acquaintances aglow in rouge and satin floor-length gowns. At dinner, seated beneath swaying *punkahs*, guests were served heaped trays of rice, breads, gingered chicken, tinned meats imported from England, and finally, Eccles cakes. As each course arrived, the Commander jovially directed the barefoot servants, 'First to the ladies Finkelstein', and quickly returned to orchestrating affability among his guests at table.

After the meal, the men retired to the smoker room, where they spoke of business and politics, lamenting the appalling lack of attention that Calcutta, not to mention London, paid the Queen's outpost in Bhagalpur. In the parlor, sipping mango juice, Lidiya and Anna listened politely to complaints about the difficulties of maintaining standards. 'Whom can we trust, really, among the native classes?', asked the wife of the local British governor. 'And yet, we must, mustn't we, my dear', said another with a sigh. 'For me household', offered Mrs Hartley, sweeping her hand toward two boys standing watchfully

in the corner, 'it's a question of boys and girls, the orphanage, d'ye see.' The English women nodded, humoring the familiar but suspect claim of their Irish hostess. 'Sure, growin' in home, they'll not disgrace yer name.'

Suddenly the men entered the room like a noisy flotilla, flags of rank and privilege at full mast, sails filled with a tobacco-scented wind. As though rushing down to the quays of London, the women quickly reclaimed their companions. The plantation owner, Mr Herndon, and his wife approached Lidiya.

'Fascinating, my dear Miss Finkelstein, and most edifying', Mr Herndon said, offering his hand as though to rescue her from some present danger.

'We had no clear idea what to expect', said Mrs Herndon abruptly, glancing at her husband. 'Though of course the Bible Society informed us of your splendid reputation. Naturally, Mr Herndon and I are delighted to have received your inspired impersonations of the Bible.'

'Yes, yes, indeed', Mr Herndon said. His eyes roamed, flitting from person to person before returning to Lidiya.

'We try so hard to raise the level of society out here', Mrs Herndon said. 'Is this your first mission to India?'

'Yes, it is. My sister and I, we ...'

'I do hope your impressions have been favorable.'

'So far, of course, we ...'

'The songs, the cries of city streets, the many tongues you speak!', said Mr Herndon, eagerly. 'The young maiden in her native dress ...'

'Mrs Herndon', Lidiya said abruptly. 'Perhaps you would be so good as to walk with me in the garden?'

'Utterly captivating, if I do say', Mr Herndon continued, quite undeterred.

Lidiya paused. 'Yes, well, you see', she said with practiced patience. 'I am hewn from the rock of Palestine, a native of Jerusalem. The languages and spirit of the Holy Land were mine from a very early age.'

'And the ravishing beauty of the young girl Ruth whom you portrayed?', he asked, leaning toward Lidiya, catching her eye. 'This is as naturally shared as the soul of the Holy Land?'

Lidiya turned her face away, startled. She quickly excused herself. She was accustomed to admirers, male and female, and welcomed their adulation. But she always protected herself from impertinence. This Mr Herndon, this *farmer*, had brought his plowshare too close.

Lidiya strode quickly onto the veranda. Anna followed. The tinkling crystal, glittering candlelight, bursts of laughter and loud conversation, the flattery, the smells of perspiration and over-dressed people powdered in sturdy defiance of the unusually warm January, Mr Herndon's advances—it was all a trifle overwhelming, she admitted to herself. Inhaling the perfume of red, trumpet-like *sandhamalati* blossoms, Lidiya clung to Anna's hand. Anna pressed her cheek to Lidiya's. 'We shall tread carefully, Lidochka.'

'Come, come', shouted Headmaster Hartley, gesturing for Lidiya and Anna to join the other guests. They returned to the parlor. Warily, Lidiya looked around the room. A few of the men were chewing *betel* leaves at the headmaster's insistence, who was saying with the air of imparting fresh military intelligence, that the natives solemnly believe that the red juice 'make good love for sure'. The men laughed dutifully and made way for a servant draped in loose folds of white cotton to pass. He smiled, showing brilliant white teeth against shining mahogany skin, and offered the men toffee and brandy before approaching Lidiya and Anna. 'Very old brandy, *memsahib?*', he said, looking at Lidiya intently before quickly lowering his gaze. Moments later he brought a glass filled with a golden brown liquid. 'Please try, *memsahib.*' He studied her garnet teardrop earrings. 'This is *charayam*, from coconut flowers, made in the South.' Lidiya took the glass and walked away. He followed, ready to offer more. Soon she was circling about the room, avoiding the unnervingly persistent servant with the bottle of spirits, and keeping her distance from Mr Herndon.

A perfect delight it was, Lidiya proclaimed repeatedly, to bring her Orientalisms to the people of Baghalpur, which is far more fascinating than, say, the Cooper Union in New York City—fiery statesmen and literary figures of substance lecture there, yes, she *had* performed there. Overseas travel? Oh yes, it was likely that after departing India, she and Anna would sail for Europe. And, in strict confidence, you understand, the World Industrial Exhibition had approached her about—yes, that's right, the Paris exhibition—there's to be a large model of Jerusalem, and of course, she'd be delighted to present her living Bible dramas. Naturally in French and English.

Past midnight, weariness having taken hold, Lidiya and Anna paid their respects. At Commander Hartley's order, a wrinkle-skinned, emaciated woman and a young girl, lantern held aloft, led them to their living quarters. The thatch-roofed bungalow, a simply furnished one-room structure, was perched on the edge of jungle blackness. The old woman lit two candles—one on a small table, another on the bedside stand between two beds. She added flame to a lantern that hung near the door, and then stood quietly in the corner of the room. The girl wordlessly emptied the bedpans outside and returned each to its place. She then crouched near the doorway, washed in the lantern's oily-orange glow.

Anna supposed the girl to be one of Mrs Hartley's orphans—a handsome creature, brown skin, wide black eyes, straight black hair down to her shoulders, modest demeanor. In need of proper love. She wondered if in America this girl could be hers. A precious child of God to be *really* loved, not indentured to a kindly, talkative taskmaster. Surely these children long ardently for a mother, even if they cannot speak of it.

A lilting voice. 'A pleasant evening, please, *memsahibs*', the old house servant said and left the room. The girl sprang up, bowed, clasping her small

hands together, and backed onto the veranda, where she squatted and began to pull the *punkah* cord in a steady click-click rhythm. Inside, the overhead panels swished softly, gently stirring the dewy night air.

* * *

Lidiya awoke to the buzz-slap of insects against mosquito netting. She tried to snare fragments of a dream—a penned up animal of some kind, a weasel, maybe a dog, banging against the cage, or was it a window? The animal is howling and screeching ... shrouded figures pass by, unseeing. The dream slipped back into the vastness from which it had come, leaving behind—what, a sense of loss? Of anxiety? The *punkah* was still, the atmosphere close. Had the girl slacked off, fallen asleep, maybe abandoned them? Lidiya listened to the sounds of the night—thrashing and scurrying of jungle creatures, a distant roar, then closer in, the steady rise and fall of Anna's breathing, the occasional whistle of her breath. Lidiya felt envy—petty and childish, she knew—but there it was, as always, envy yielding itself to resignation. Anna's talent was for nocturnal amnesia: she always slid, apparently untroubled, into obliviousness. Even out here, shedding memories of harrowing followers lurking behind cravats and crystal glasses.

Suddenly, Lidiya sat upright. A shadowy face hung over her, reddish eyes, dark hair. A hand smelling of ginger and tobacco pressed over her mouth and pushed hard, forcing her back onto the bed. She twisted her head, but could manage only a single muffled cry before the hand clamped down viciously.

Pain radiates into her jaw and neck. Something pulls at her gown, rips fabric; rough fingers find flesh. Weight settles against her, violently thrusts into her. A hand pulls her shoulder from the bed, lifts her up, thrust...thrust...sharp blistering pain. Her head whips back, repeatedly strikes the iron headboard. She gasps for air through her nose, struggles, and then tenses her muscles, making herself rigid against the assault. She's feverishly warm, then cold, shivering and damp with sweat.

Finally awakened by the commotion, aware now of Lidiya's distress, Anna pushes aside the mosquito netting, leaps across the room, beats her fist against the assailant's shoulders, aims blows at the side of his face, scrapes fingernails against stubble-beard. 'Heathen! Remove yourself! Get off her!' She grabs his hair and tugs with all her strength, looking toward the doorway and shrieking hysterically, 'Help! Help! O dear God, *anyone*, please, *help!*' The man throws off a tangle of netting and sleeping gown and, snarling, rises from Lidiya and lunges toward Anna. She leaps aside, seizes a crockery bedpan and, under a cascading flood of urine, slams it against his head. A shock wave of pain rumbles down her forearm, detonates in her elbow. He sputters, roars in a wild growl, and bullheads himself into Anna's face,

throwing her violently to the floor. 'Damn you!', he screams, and is gone, leaving Anna trembling and gasping. Lidiya has rolled onto her side, knees pulled tightly against her chest. Anna takes hold the bed frame and pulls herself up. She sways, stumbles over shards of crockery, and collapses next to Lidiya. She fits her body to Lidiya's, head to head, drawing Lidiya's folded knees to her bosom. Nested together like spoons, breath to breath, they weep, Anna keening, 'Lidochka, oh, Lidi, Lidi'.

1886

Anna stood at the rain-streaked window of Lidiya's room in St Mary's Infant Asylum. High above the lawn that rolled like a wet straw carpet toward the edge of Branch Pond, a great blue heron turned, circled out over the water, and set a course for a clump of bare trees at the shore. It lowered its claw-like feet and, with a panicky burst of flapping, grabbed hold of a slash of pine. Sleek in flight, disheveled on arrival, Anna thought.

Six months ago, in early May, when the lawn had been lush and those same trees covered with shimmering yellow-green, Anna and Lidiya arrived at St Mary's, quite unceremoniously set down in a flurry of dust and snorting horses. The journey over a corduroy road from the Albany depot had been exceedingly discomforting. As the carryall pitched and yawed, its wheels sent tremulous jolts into the passenger compartment. At nearly every half-mile post, the reinsman muttered complaints about fallen females. On arrival, he threw their canvas satchels to the ground and, shouting impatiently, snapped a whip across the horses' backs. The carriage lurched away. Anna smoothed the duster that covered her dress. Lidiya adjusted her travel bonnet.

Trying to regain her composure, Anna contemplated St Mary's, a massive block of dreary stone relieved by ranks of windows, ivy covered turrets, and a battery of chimney flues that soared defiantly toward the sky. A bird twittered nearby, bleakly, it seemed, despite the late spring warmth. Anna pulled the ring. The oaken door swung back and, floating above a stiff collar and capacious folds of black fabric, an inscrutable round face peered at Anna, then Lidiya.

'Ah, yes, Miss Finkelstein, I see', the nun said with a slightly audible sniff, appraising Lidiya from head to toe as though she were a street-walking adventuress. Lidiya nervously touched the bindings that she had wound tightly around her abdomen and drew her duster cloak more tightly to herself. 'Madam Lidiya Mamreov von Finkelstein', she replied.

'Yes, yes of course. I am Sister Lucia. Please come inside.'

Later, sitting at a desk in the cavernous entry hall, the Sister wrote Lidiya's name in a ledger, adding a notation: 'father unknown, likely foreign'. Anna put payment for the first three month's stay on the desk.

'Thank you. We must observe our obligations, mustn't we', Sister Lucia said, putting aside the pen and counting the money. She looked up. 'Of course, not towards the man who has abandoned his—she eyed Lidiya—well, the woman he ravished. But to the innocent child. And to the mother in need of redemption.'

The Sister's voice was kindly enough, but impersonal and flavored with censure. Anna knew that Lidiya would suffer this woman in resolute silence, as she had the reinsman during the journey to St Mary's. She was determined to give birth—taking Pinkham's preventive powders to stay the quickening or permitting a midwife to penetrate her body with needles were equally repulsive alternatives. But she would have as little as possible to do with the baby, and she was determined to abandon—well, Lidiya's word had been 'dedicate'—the child to the Daughters of Charity. The infant would receive instruction in morals and industriousness, Lidiya had declared. And in time be lodged with a family less encumbered than she. Compared to these decisions, which still left Anna disquieted, Sister Lucia's affront hadn't been a circumstance. But the birth of little Cora nearly three weeks ago was most certainly something to speak of. Every day.

Anna turned from Lidiya's window and shivered. The undersized radiator hissed and clanked, struggling to overcome the dank cold that had settled into the room. Over the months of Lidiya's incarceration, Anna had taken the four-mile journey from Mrs Landry's rooming house on Eagle Street almost every day. By now well known and trusted, she came and went without much notice. She could roam corridors unhindered, stopping to peer into rooms and observe women, all unwed she presumed, and sometimes chat while admiring a newborn. Sister Agnes, a large and boisterously cheerful woman, occasionally allowed Anna to assist in the Baby Department where, it was discovered, Anna displayed an unusual gift for calming infants in mild distress. But as the weeks slid into months she had come to abhor her visits to St Mary's. Now, since little Cora's birth, each journey from downtown Albany filled her with dread.

Anna removed her gloves. Lidiya sat in an armless nursing chair, rocking gently, suckling Cora. She avoided Anna's eyes. It was no good pretending to be chirk, Anna decided. Their arguments of late had become severely trying—sores of irreconcilability, as apt to erupt in rage as scab over with sullen resentment. At least seeing the baby gave Anna some comfort. Her wrinkled skin had softened; she'd lost most of the ruddy blotches that marked her at birth. And there was no hint of swarthinness, to Anna's relief. Except perhaps the black hair. Little Cora pressed her perky nose against Lidiya's breast. How untroubled she seems, Anna thought, nestled against her mother, warm, not feeling pushed away, satisfied. That must be the simplest kind of love, not pushing a suckling infant away, and the baby not feeling pushed away, though of course Cora could not yet speak its name.

How could Lidiya bear to push her child away? Sentence her to oblivion, unknown to her or me, *unloved* by me? Abandon her like those poor children in Bhagalpur. No, no. No! It must not be.

'Lidi', said Anna slowly. She had carefully rehearsed what she was going to say, feeling her opportunities to dissuade Lidiya of her course rapidly disappearing. In less than a week, the baby would be gone, and Anna would be expected to put the matter aside, just as, apparently, Lidiya had already done. 'Lidochka. Suppose I admit to the world that I'm Cora's mother, that it was I who endured the horror whose outcome was this innocent child. That you did not push me away, but drew me to yourself and tended my needs during my months of confinement.' Anna detected stiffness in Lidiya. 'That Cora is ... is loved by someone, that she ...'

'Anna', said Lidiya, warily. 'Be sensible. How should the Sisters permit such?'

'They protect unwed mothers. You. Why not me? For the sake of little Cora?'

Lidiya gently separated Cora from her breast and rose from the chair, rocking her gently in the crook of her arm. 'Anna, they accept mother and child in the convent, or send both into domestic service. Or they place children, *this* child, into a family of means', she said sharply. '*That's* for her sake.'

'Can I not be her family?'

'Without a husband?'

'I will endure the shame.'

'And what shall I do? What of my career? Be practical!' Lidiya held up the child. 'She shall be dedicated to ...'

'Be practical', Anna said, trilling the 'r' in mimicry of Lidiya's speech, feeling her rehearsed lines of persuasion slipping away. Anger warmed her cheeks. 'Well, here's something practical. I'm forty-three. My scrapbook page is blank.'

'Anna! You're her aunt!'

'I can fill it with Cora and me, a mother whose blood also flows in your veins! Cora is part me, and I her. I will see that she is loved, that she ...'

'The baby will be given to the Sisters!', Lidiya interrupted.

'...is loved by one who *desires* to be her mother!' Anna stepped toward Lidiya.

'Anna!', Lidiya said irately, drawing Cora back and moving quickly to the bed. She spread a clean towel over her shoulder and lay Cora's head against it, gently rubbing the infant's back. Cora fretted and burped. Anna retreated to the window.

"Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh", said Lidiya. 'You, little one, are my bones. And *his* bones!' She suddenly held Cora up like a talisman. '*His*

quivering, stinking, violent flesh!' Cora began to cry. 'He knifes through me, leaves me bleeding, filled with shame, limp and raging.' Lidiya cradled Cora. 'And yet, sweetest of accusers, you are *me*.'

'But you're about to send her away!', screamed Anna, slapping her hand against the windowsill. 'Why don't you speak her name?' She rushed to a bureau that stood on the far wall. She faced Lidiya, exhilarated, heedless. The question had erupted unbidden from some fiery core within her.

Cora let out a series of sharp cries, twitching her feet. 'You've upset her!', cried Lidiya. She carefully wedged Cora between two pillows on the bed. 'Let me tell you something', she said, speaking deliberately. 'This morning, before you arrived, I walked to the infant department. My baby was sleeping, undisturbed by colicky complaints all around. I went to her, bent down, ran my fingers through her hair, tried to hear her breathing, but could not. I put my fingers under her nose; I had to make sure, to *feel* the breath of life in her. She suddenly sneezed. Her puffy arms jutted out and she drew her legs up and thrust them back violently as though kicking away something that had taken hold of her. I swooped her into my arms. Oh, Anushka, how I flew to her in that twitch of a moment! And you say, I have no *desire* to be her mother?'

'In your resolve, you've put it aside...'

'Hardly. It grows stronger every day. But I cannot allow it ...'

'And I've taken it up', said Anna petulantly. 'Has your bosom ever swelled, even once, with desire to dismiss a giggling governess and take her little charges as your own?'

'That's irrational', said Lidiya.

Yes, Anna thought. But raw and true and life giving. 'I oozed milk several years ago—you didn't know that did you?'

Lidiya sat on the bed, shocked.

'I consulted a Dr Mulhavey in secret—it was during our stay in Washington. I had to show this perfect stranger—a man—the evidence of my complaint. He took one look, examined my tongue, asked me if I had experienced interrupted menstruation—'No', I said. 'You're hysterical, find a husband.'

'The doctor was right', Lidiya said. She walked abruptly to the window and, grasping her elbows, drew her forearms against her abdomen. Absorbed in thought, she stared out the window.

Anna imagined that Lidiya was rehearsing her reasons for abandoning little Cora, adding Anna's 'hysteria' as fresh justification. Marriage to save one's reputation? What suitable gentleman would take her with child, except that he were as in thrall to obsession as Anna? And how should she submit to wifely duty without sinking into the fetid swamp of India? By surrendering to the frenzy of what men seem to want? Yet, to carry her shame in public—that would indeed engrave an epithet of mental instability: 'Here lies Madam

Finkelstein, who abandoned the Christian stage and the solemn mission her father had laid upon her'. Not to mention her talents and her livelihood, and Anna's too, all for a swoon. No, no. It was all quite impossible, quite mad, this thing that Anna is demanding.

A nun entered the room, her starched habit rustling. She paused, fingering the cross that hung around her neck, and quizzically looked to Lidiya and Anna as though she had forgotten her errand. At last, she spoke. 'It's time to take baby ...'

'No!', cried Anna, lunging forward.

'... baby F to the infant room.'

Anna coiled back within herself. Lidiya glared, and lifted Cora from the bed, handing her to the nun. Anna dropped into the nursing rocker, breathless. The Sister hurried away.

'Lidi', Anna said, steadying herself, reaching for a tone of reasonableness. 'It will be I who bears the shame, and you the credit for accepting us into your companionship.'

From beside the bed, Lidiya watched the rain splatter against the window-panes. She gestured to one side as though stroking the head of a child. 'Little girl, age ten, wearing a starched pinafore, black curls bouncing over her eyes, she's just darted from behind the stage curtain, smiling. She curtsies to the audience. I could do it, Anna, speak of a wedding that never was, and of this child who is—maybe I'd even speak the name you've given her. Then tell of a father who never was, how Frederick departed this earth so quickly, suffering the dreadful effects of a tropical illness.' I could invent *any* scene, Anna, make it as convincing and alluring as Ruth was to ...' She paused and sat down on the bed, her face suddenly clouded. '...to Boaz.'

'Then Cora and I will go our separate way', Anna said. She set her jaw. 'You need invent nothing!'

'No!' Lidiya slapped her hands to her side. 'I do not permit it! I have to let her go! Before I cannot. And lose ...'

'And lose what? Your career?'

'Us. Anushka, lose *us*. I need you at my side—that's a sister's love isn't it? Without hindrance, for the sake of Father.'

'You deny Cora because of me or Father? Or because you're afraid of giving yourself to Cora?', Anna said bitterly.

'The Sisters have agreed to my wishes.'

'Then little Cora shall be motherless solely by your decree?', Anna shouted.

Trembling in rage and frustration, she picked up a celluloid box of talcum and threw it against the wall. 'There! She's gone, a puff of powder. Brush her away! Forget her!'

Lidiya stared for a moment at the splash of talcum that clung to the wall. She stood, as though cradling an invisible infant in her arms, then turned

and placed the baby on a pillow, covering its body, except for the head, with a sheet. Lidiya stretched her tall frame alongside the infant, motionless, as though posed for a *memento mori* photograph. Soon her chest heaved. She struggled to speak, fell silent, and tried again. 'Flesh of ... my flesh ... bone ... of my bones', she began, clutching her throat, letting go now, her body shuddering, the tears flowing. 'I commend thee, my child, my sweet accuser, body and soul, to the Daughters of Charity.'

Anna watched, furious, wracked by grief, but outwardly stolid. She refused to weep.

* * *

Anna sat quietly in the nursing rocker, exhausted and tasting gall. Twenty minutes ago, Lidiya had drifted into sleep. Her arm was draped across the sheet that had covered the invisible Cora. Lidiya's breathing was now deep and regular. She snored slightly. It's no good, Anna thought. She's implacable. She can do without Cora, I cannot, I will not. Perhaps—yes, the Sisters wouldn't suspect for a while, long enough for me ... Oh, the thrill of it, the love that's in it. Yes. Mrs Landry will help, wasn't she in apoplexy at the idea that Cora was to be left in the clutches of the Catholics?

Sunlight, suddenly breaking through low scudding clouds, cut a swath of startling light across the floor. The canvas of Lidiya's travel bag glowed orange-gold.

Lidiya had been born on an afternoon, Anna recalled, when the khamsin wind from the eastern desert washed dust and shimmering gold over the domes and towers of Jerusalem. Born at precisely five o'clock, so Lidiya had come to believe, at the moment that the *muezzin* summoned the faithful to evening prayer. 'It's an omen', the Mohammedans say—oh, how Lidiya loves to repeat it. With its first cry, this baby proclaims the greatness of Allah and with that, a duty to submit to God in all things. Well, not in this matter, not to God or to Lidiya. It will not be.

Anna abruptly rose from the chair. Glancing at Lidiya, she stole about the room, collecting her handbag and Lidiya's travel satchel. She quickly stuffed clean towels inside, picked up her hat and umbrella, and hesitated, watching Lidiya's bosom rise and fall with each breath. She reached out toward Lidiya's cheek, then drew it back, allowing her hand to linger on the edge of the bed, thinking, I don't hate you Lidi, I don't. Then she left, carefully closing the door behind her. She walked along the dim corridor, deliberate, expressionless, but feeling mournfully buoyant in the urgent wind that pressed against her—how strange it was to feel the moment as Lidi's passing. A little faster now, side-step carts stacked with linens and soaps and glassware, nodding and smiling to an inmate trudging along the hallway; past open doors, not pausing, speaking to her heart, Cora, blood of my blood, I will love her. Here, the stairs. Sister, headed down—ah, Miss Finkelstein, good

day—and to you, Sister—such storminess today, but a blessing to see the sun this time of year—yes, Sister, such a blessing—must pass on, before they return her to Lidiya—excuse me, Sister, the carryall, it'll depart soon, you see, should go before dark—yes, yes, of course. Saying goodbye to Baby F. are you? Had she noticed the gasping heave in my bosom? Just a little further, now. The bassinets, all wrong. 'Baby Mc.; Baby G.; Baby W.; where is she? Thank heavens, 'Baby F'. Little Cora, here, sh-h, not a sound now, lie inside where it's warm. Milk! She'll need milk. The ice box, yes. There, in the satchel. Steady now, downstairs, sh-h, little Cora, not a sound.

'Oh, Sister Lucia. Is the carryall available? Yes? I'm so glad. Now that the storm has abated, I should like to make Mrs Landry's before dark. Oh, yes, on Wednesday. Yes, yes, faithfully as usual, thank you, Sister. Yes, I see it awaits me in the courtyard. No, no, *no*! There's no need for the reinsman to collect my satchel. Thank you, Sister. Until Wednesday, then.'

Anna walked to the carriage and carefully set Lidiya's travel bag on the seat. 'Mrs Landry's Rooming House, Eagle Street, please', she said to the driver, and stepped inside. The carryall pitched forward and lumbered down the pebble driveway. Anna pulled the satchel to her side and slipped one arm through the looped handles. Breathing more easily, she peeked inside. Cora slept undisturbed. Removing her woolen scarf, Anna spread it over the baby. There, there, *malishka*, little one, sleep. We've done it. Mrs Landry will help us.

* * *

At the edge of St Mary's lawn, in deepening twilight, the carriage plunged into a forested tunnel. The day's storm had thinned trees and under story to thickets of mossy grey-black. On both sides of the roadway, tangled masses seemed to advance toward the fleeing carryall like impenetrable ranks of militiamen. Anna watched the hovering shapes, startled by sudden brooding. What do I actually know of Mrs Landry? Except that she wasn't unkind to Lidiya, that she comforted me, as much as I told her of my misery. But, soon, someone—roundsmen perhaps—will surround her boarding house, jab their fingers into her face, question, threaten to take her away in the black Maria if she doesn't confess ... Will she withstand?

The carryall slowed. Cora stirred inside the satchel but did not cry out. Anna opened her handbag. Her heart raced. Eight Martha Washington certificates, one princess coin, a few two-dollar notes—and the emergency fifty. Seventy-some dollars. It's enough. As far as we can travel this night.

Far indeed. Jerusalem, papá ill and crazed; the steamer, Lidi and I crammed into airless steerage—jabbering and vomiting passengers jammed up against crates and barrels; New York, Castle Gardens, off-the-boaters herded, tagged—'Russki, eh? Hurry up, this side! *Priamaya liniya*, straight line!'—a matron pulling at my tongue, poking my privates, 'Okay, next'.

Pushing me, *Tooda!* Go on! *Idi! Vshi*—go! Delousing! Orchard Street, no windows, no running water, smashing rats on the table. Lidi's bible tableaux. Lidochka, whither thou goest. Little Cora, whither *we* go, *wherever* we go.

The horses turned onto Post Road. 'Reinsman', Anna called. Her voice was strong, commanding. 'I've changed my mind. Take me to the Albany train depot.'¹

1. It is a pleasure to dedicate a short story to my friend and colleague, Cheryl Exum who, by bold example, has encouraged biblical scholars to reach beyond the boundaries of historically oriented scholarship and embrace the arts.

The incidents at the heart of this story are entirely fictional, though some of the color and background features derive from the archival traces of two women who lived in the late nineteenth century. Lydia Mamreov von Finkelstein Mountford was a world famous dramatist of biblical antiquity from about 1884 until her death in 1917. She had a younger sister Anna who died a few years later. Other than their names, any resemblance between the invented characters and their historical forebears is entirely coincidental.

Readers interested in a historical reconstruction of Madame Mountford and her dramatizations of the Bible may consult Burke O. Long, 'American "Orientals" and their Theatrical Bibles', in *Relating to the Text: Interdisciplinary and Form Critical Insights on the Bible* (ed. Timothy J. Sandoval and Carleen Mandolfo; London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), pp. 333-48.

IS GOD MENTIONED IN THE SONG OF SONGS?
FLAME OF YAHWEH, LOVE, AND DEATH IN
SONG OF SONGS 8.6-7A

Martti Nissinen

Song of Songs and God

Is God mentioned in the Song of Songs? Simple as the question sounds, there is no unambiguous answer to it. When browsing through the numerous commentaries on the Song of Songs, it is easy to find scholars claiming that God is *not* mentioned in the Song of Songs, not even once. Other scholars admit that God may be mentioned just once, provided that the enigmatic word vocalized by the Masoretes as *šalhebetyâ* in 8.6 can be understood as a reference to Yah(weh), God of Israel. But even this word yields different translations depending on the reader's text critical and semantic preferences; many modern translations render the word into English as 'mighty flame' or the like, while others prefer to talk about the 'flame of the Lord'. Cheryl Exum, one of the foremost commentators of the Song of Songs, expresses the opinion of the majority of scholars in saying that God is not mentioned in the Song of Songs, 'if the *hapax legomenon* *šalhebetyâ* in 8.6 refers to the 'flame of Yah'—*yah* being a shortened form of the divine name—that no more makes Israel's god the subject of the poem than "strong as death [*māwet*]" or "flames [*rešep*] of fire" makes the Canaanite gods Mot or Resheph its subjects'.¹

Can we get any further than stating that one form of the divine name may well appear in Cant. 8.6, but even if this was the case, the reader should not read it as the divine name? In this essay, I attempt to explore the possibility that Cant. 8.6 actually refers to God, and that the reader is supposed to recognize the mythological and theological potential of words referring to cosmic powers in vv. 6-7.

Finding God in the text of the Song of Songs is, of course, not dependent on the reading of this or any other individual passage of the book. Irrespective of recognizing the divine name in Cant. 8.6, the Song of Songs has been

1. J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005), p. 64.

read as an allegory of divine–human love throughout the history of its interpretation. In the premodern world, with very few exceptions, allegory was the only way to read the text that was actually seen as making sense to its readers.² From the oldest documented cases in Jewish literature beginning with Ben Sira,³ through the Targums,⁴ the Church fathers and the abundance of mediaeval Christian commentaries⁵ until our times,⁶ the male and female protagonists of the love poem have been seen as representing God and his people, or Christ and his Church.

It is only from the late eighteenth century onwards that academic readers of the Song of Songs have regarded the theological allegory as violating the actual message of the text which, in fact, celebrates human (heterosexual) love—and nothing else. Throughout the twentieth century, it has been the mission of a considerable number of biblical scholars—Jewish, Lutheran, catholic, evangelical, and secular alike—to free the Song of Songs of the ecclesiastical captivity of allegorical readings, to teach the reader to enjoy the gift of sexuality, and, eventually, celebrate the fact that all this is part of the Bible: ‘Human sexual fulfilment, fervently sought and consummated in reciprocal love between woman and man: Yes, that is what the Song of Songs is about, in its literal sense and theologically relevant meaning. We may rejoice that Scripture includes such an explicit view among its varied witnesses to divine Providence.’⁷ Originally, so goes the theory, the Song of Songs was not a religious text but was rather used for entertainment in wedding festivals and other contexts. The allegorical reading was invented later on to make the popular text fit the canonical context of the Hebrew Scriptures.

2. Cf. John Barton, ‘The Canonicity of the Song of Songs’, in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung* (ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn; BZAW, 346; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 1–7.

3. I have recently argued for the Song of Songs as an intertext of Sir. 24 and 50.1–24; see Martti Nissinen, ‘Wisdom as Mediatrix in Sirach 24: Ben Sira, Love Lyrics, and Prophecy’, in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola* (ed. Mikko Luukko, Saana Svärd and Raija Mattila; *Studia orientalia*, 106; Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2009), pp. 377–90.

4. See Philip S. Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible, 17A; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003).

5. See Richard A. Norris (ed.), *The Song of Songs Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (The Church’s Bible, 1; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); J. Robert Wright (ed.), *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament, 9; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), pp. 286–368.

6. Cf. the consistently allegorical commentary by Robert W. Jenson, *Song of Songs* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2005).

7. Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., *The Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 103.

Recently, several scholars, including myself, have expressed their unease towards the strict division into sexual and spiritual in the readings of the Song of Songs. David Carr, without believing that the Song of Songs was originally designed as a religious text, pays attention to the gap that has grown between the spiritual reading and '[r]ecent readings of the Song as promoting non-fertility-related erotic love',⁸ recommending a redefinition of sex and spirituality.⁹ Carey Ellen Walsh draws attention to the 'cues for the divine', that is, allusions in the Song of Songs that call God to the reader's mind.¹⁰ Meik Gerhards goes as far as to argue for an original (Hellenistic) religious-allegorical reading of the Song of Songs; like Walsh, he finds features in the Hebrew text designed to invite the reader to look for meanings beyond the plain sense of the words.¹¹

Reading God into the Song of Songs, hence, need not be seen as something alien to the text itself; rather, allowing multiple readings of the Song of Songs is necessary by virtue of its very nature as a characteristic representative of the ancient Near Eastern poetic tradition.¹² I have myself drawn attention to Mesopotamian love lyrics with which the Song of Songs has a close affinity.¹³ Indeed, the Song of Songs can be understood against the background of the divine-human marriage matrix, closely related to that employed in the Mesopotamian sacred marriage rituals and poetry of divine

8. David M. Carr, 'The Song of Songs as Microcosm of the Canonization and Decanonization Processes', in *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden, 9–19 January 1997* (ed. Arie van der Kooij and Karel van der Toorn; SHR, 82; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), pp. 173–89 (185).

9. See also David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 91–151.

10. Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 202–16.

11. Meik Gerhards, *Das Hohelied: Studien zu seiner literarischen Gestalt und theologischen Bedeutung* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte, 35; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010), pp. 441–542.

12. For the polyvalence of Mesopotamian love lyrics, see Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage in the Light of Comparative Evidence* (SAAS, 15; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2004), pp. 241–45; for Gilgameš, Simonetta Ponchia, 'Some Reflections on Metaphor, Ambiguity and Literary Tradition', in Luukko, Svärd and Mattila (eds.), *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars*, pp. 399–407; for Egyptian love poetry, Antonio Loprieno, 'Searching for a Common Background: Egyptian Love Poetry and the Biblical Song of Songs', in Hagedorn (ed.), *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, pp. 105–35.

13. Martti Nissinen, 'Song of Songs and Sacred Marriage', in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine–Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (ed. Martti Nissinen and Risto Uro; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), pp. 173–218; cf. Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage in the Light of Comparative Evidence*, pp. 91–98.

love, that gave the text an interpretative framework that was available to its readers from the very beginning. Therefore, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁴ the idea that the religious reading was invented only as an emergency solution to smuggle the Song of Songs into the Hebrew canon no longer really commends itself.

If sex and love can be considered the highlights of human experience, they also serve as ideal metaphors to feed the readers' imagination of the divine-human relationship, hence religious readings of love poetry easily emerge even without explicit references to divine beings. For the purposes of allegory, obviously, it is not necessary to mention God explicitly.¹⁵ Therefore, the question whether God is mentioned in Cant. 8.6 is not about verifying or falsifying allegorical readings, neither can the answer be used as a key argument for the religious purpose of the text. On the other hand, there is no *a priori* reason why God could or should not be referred to in the text of the Song of Songs—a text full of mythological allusions drawn from the ancient Near Eastern reservoir of images.¹⁶ The answer to the question, hence, should not be based on any default position concerning the text's spiritual qualities or the lack thereof, but, rather, on careful exegesis such as I do my best to provide here, seeing how far it can take us.

How to Translate šalhebetyâ?

After this lengthy introduction, let us now begin with the exegesis of Cant. 8.6-7a by mapping different alternatives of understanding the word vocalized as *šalhebetyâ* by the Masoretes who wrote their manuscripts in the late tenth-early eleventh century CE. The cluster of consonants *šlhbyh* yields more than one vocalization, and this is reflected by the textual tradition. The Septuagint translates it as *phloges autēs* 'its flames', apparently reading the final *h* as a feminine third person suffix, which is perfectly possible. This reading presupposes the vocalization *šalhābôtêhā*, the suffix referring to the feminine word 'ahābā, 'love'. More difficult to explain are the renderings of two other ancient translations available to us. The Peshitta translates the word without any affix (*šalhēbītā*'), as if the Hebrew text had nothing but *šalhebet*. The Vul-

14. Nissinen, 'Song of Songs and Sacred Marriage', pp. 212-15.

15. Origen, for example, presented the Song of Songs as the spirit of the Scripture itself; see J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage-Song* (Oxford Theological Monographs; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

16. See especially Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 7C; New York: Doubleday, 1977); Hans-Peter Müller, 'Die lyrische Reproduktion des Mythischen im Hohenlied', *ZTK* 73 (1976), pp. 23-41; Othmar Keel, *Deine Blicke sind Tauben: Zur Metaphorik des Hohenliedes* (SBS, 114/115; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1984).

gate's *atque flammarum* 'and of flames' possibly also goes back to a Hebrew text without an affix. None of the ancient translations read the text as containing the divine name which, therefore, is absent from the ancient Christian commentaries on Cant. 8.6-7 as well.

Interestingly, the Targum of the Song of Songs (which is a paraphrase of the text rather than a translation) refers at this point to Gehinnom, that is, Gehenna, seemingly reading *šlhbtyh* as an equivalent to a fire mighty as hell. This sounds like anticipating the 'mighty flame' of modern translations, but it is not quite clear whether or not the Targumist has read the divine name in the Hebrew text; since according to the Targum, the fire of Gehenna is prepared by God for idolaters on the second day of the creation,¹⁷ it is indeed a 'flame of the Lord'.¹⁸

All in all, the early versions give the impression that during the course of textual transmission, the text has not remained intact; hence the translations are based on more than one *Vorlage*. Even the Masoretic texts, on which the modern translations are based, do not represent anything that would deserve to be called the 'original' text enjoying a normative status.¹⁹ Among the extant manuscripts from Qumran, Cant. 7.8-8.14 is, unfortunately, not represented at all,²⁰ but the remaining text of the Song of Songs in the Dead Sea scrolls is enough to demonstrate the variety of readings of the Hebrew text of the book by the turn of the Common Era.²¹

Even the Masoretic manuscripts are not entirely unanimous in their readings of the text. According to Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, the Masoretes disputed over whether *šalhebetyâ* actually constitutes one or two words; indeed, the two major Masoretic manuscript groups interpret it differently at this point. The Ben Asher manuscripts (including Codex leningradensis) read it as one word, *šalhebetyâ*, while the Ben Naphtali manuscripts read two words,

17. For this idea, see *Gen. Rab.* 4.4 and cf. Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, pp. 196-97 n. 30.

18. 'The children of Israel will say on that day to their Lord: "We beseech you, set us like the engraving of a signet ring upon Your heart, and like the engraving of a signet ring upon Your arm, so that we shall never be exiled again, for the love of your divinity is as strong as death, and the jealousy which the nations bear us is as harsh as Gehinnom, and the enmity which they harbor against us is like the blazing coals of Gehinnom, which the Lord created on the second day of the creation of the world to burn therein idolaters"' (trans. Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles*, p. 196).

19. Cf., for example, Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 31-33.

20. See the table in Peter W. Flint, 'The Book of Canticles (Song of Songs) in the Dead Sea Scrolls', in Hagedorn (ed.), *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, pp. 96-104 (96).

21. See previous Note, and cf. the edition of Emanuel Tov, 'Canticles', in *Qumran Cave 4/XI: Psalms to Chronicles* (DJD, 16; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 195-219 + pls. xxiv-xxv.

šalhebet and yāh, providing the final *h* with a *mappiq*, thus reading here the abbreviation of the divine name, *Yāh*.²²

While the Ben Naphtali version can only be translated as ‘flame of Yah(weh)’, the Ben Asher version yields more options: not only ‘flame of Yah(weh)’, which remains a possibility, but also ‘mighty flame’, reading the ending -yā as an intensifying particle based on the name Yahweh. This is why the majority of modern translations prefer to translate *šalhebetyā* as ‘mighty flame’ (NIV), ‘most vehement flame’ (KJV), ‘gewaltige Flammen’ (*Einheitsübersetzung*), ‘ljungande låga’ (*Bibeln* 2000), and the like. No more theology is found in this word than in ‘the fire of Yahweh’ (Num. 11.1; etc.) which simply means ‘lightning’, or ‘cedars of God’ (Ps. 80.11), referring to the huge cedars of Lebanon, or ‘wrestlings of God’ (Gen. 30.8), meaning great wrestlings.²³ Michael Fox, for instance, warns us against flirting too much with theology here: ‘We certainly should not try to hang too much theological weight on this very uncertain reference to God’.²⁴

Not all have taken heed of Fox’s warnings, though; as Cheryl Exum notes, ‘[s]ome exegetes see no theological significance in the choice of this expression, while others find in it a basis for linking human love and divine love’.²⁵ Identifying myself rather with the last mentioned group,²⁶ I would now like to explicate why I am inclined to think that the translation ‘flame of Yahweh’ actually makes sense.

Poetic Structure of Canticles 8.6-7

The poetic structure of the passage 8.6-7a is based on parallelism, the most usual poetic device in Hebrew and Northwest Semitic poetry. The passage can be analysed as follows:

22. See S. Baer and Franz Delitzsch, *Textum masoreticum accuratissime expressit e fontibus Masorae varie illustravit*, XI (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1886), p. 83.

23. This is the view of many commentators; see, for example, Othmar Keel, *Das Hohelied* (ZBKAT, 18; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986), p. 250; Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 212-13; Duane Garrett, ‘Song of Songs’, in Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs, Lamentations* (WBC, 23B; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), pp. 1-265 (255); Yair Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), pp. 273-74.

24. Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 171.

25. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 254.

26. Others include, for example, Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Bible and Literature Series, 7; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), pp. 127-28; Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, pp. 204-207; Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2000), pp. 232-34, 296-97; Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), p. 240.

6.1 <i>šîmēnî ka-ḥôtām 'al-libbekā</i>	Place me like a seal <u>on your heart</u> ,
6.2 <i>ka-ḥôtām 'al-ẓērô'ekā</i>	<u>like a seal on your arm</u> .
6.3 <i>kî-'azzâ kam-māwet 'ahābâ</i>	For <u>love</u> is <u>strong</u> as <u>death</u> ,
6.4 <i>qāšâ kî-š'ôl qin'â</i>	<u>jealousy</u> as <u>adamant</u> as <u>Sheol</u> .
6.5 <i>rēšāpêhā rišpê 'ēš</i>	<u>Its darts</u> are <u>darts of fire</u> ,
6.6 < <i>šalhābôtêhā</i> > <i>šalhābôt yāh</i>	< <u>its flames</u> are> <u>flames of Yah(weh)</u> .
7.1 <i>mayim rabbîm lô' yûkēlû<hā></i>	<u>Mighty waters</u> do not < <u>overrun it</u> >
7.2 [<i>lêkabbôt 'et-'ahābâ</i>]	[cannot quench love]
7.3 <i>û-nēhārôt lô' yišṭēpūhā</i>	nor do <u>rivers sweep it away</u> .

The sequence of parallelistic expressions is easy to follow. Lines 6.1 and 6.2 are strictly parallelistic, with the verb *šîmēnî* 'place me' executing a double duty, i.e. serving for both lines. The expression *ka-ḥôtām* 'like a seal' is repeated, and the words for 'your heart' and 'your arm' correspond functionally to each other, both being body parts carrying the seal.

The structure is similar in 6.3 and 6.4, where the adjectives '*azzâ* and *qāšâ* are synonymous expressions for a strong, overwhelming and persistent quality. The comparative particle *kē* functions on both lines signalling a metaphor, 'death' (*māwet*) and 'Underworld' (*š'ôl*) functioning as the vehicle of the metaphor.²⁷ What is being compared to them, that is, the tenor of the metaphor or the actual subject, is, again, expressed with two words: '*ahābâ* 'love', and *qin'â* which covers the meanings of the English words 'jealousy' or 'passion'.²⁸ This parallelism constitutes a synonymous word-pair that appears to have a central position in the whole passage. From now on, love is referred to on every line.

I have ventured an emendation on line 6.6, adding one word to the Masoretic text. This is my interpretation of what I assume to be the (more) original reading behind the variety of the translations and textual witnesses, and what I believe has happened to the text in the early stages of its transmission. I am not the first to suggest this solution; it is to be found in the critical apparatus of the *Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia* prepared by Friedrich Horst, and it can be found in many older commentaries on the Song of Songs.²⁹ Today's commentators are much more reluctant to resort to textual emendations as their predecessors, and rightly so; in this case, however, I think the emendation simply makes sense and explains the problems pro-

27. For the metaphor in the Song of Songs, see Hans-Peter Müller, *Vergleich und Metapher im Hohenlied* (OBO, 56; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

28. For the semantics and use of *qin'â* in the Hebrew Bible, see, for example, Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 251-52.

29. For example, Wilhelm Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth, Das Hohe Lied, Die Klagelieder* (KAT, 17/1-3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962), p. 180.

vided by the textual tradition. What has happened here can be expressed with a single word: haplography. The two words have identical consonants, *šlhbyh*, and it is very easy to imagine a scribe who either considered one of the two words as superfluous or left it out by accident. If this happened in an early phase of the transmission of the text, the haplographic reading served as the basis of all subsequent copies. Later on, the ancient translators and the Masoretes could only try to do their the best to make sense of the text.

The reason why I prefer this explanation is the poetic structure. Standing alone, the word *šlhbyh* breaks the chain of parallelisms and is syntactically awkward, as reflected by the translations of the Septuagint and the Vulgate.³⁰ With the assumption of the haplography, lines 6.5 and 6.6. can be reconstructed as a parallelistic bicolon similar to the preceding lines with a double parallelism: *rešāpêhā // šalhābôtêhā* and *rišpê 'ēš // šalhābôt yāh*.

If this reconstruction is correct, the parallelism is formally perfect.³¹ Furthermore, the parallelistic structure requires the consonants *šlhbyh* to be divided in two words in the second cluster: the word for 'fire' ('ēš) simply needs a counterpart provided by *yāh*. Maybe this—perhaps along with a need for a theological interpretation³²—gave the Ben Naphtali Masoretes enough reason to read the cluster of consonants as two words.

But what kind of parallelism are 'darts of fire' (*rišpê 'ēš*) and 'flames of Yah(weh)' (*šalhābôt yāh*) supposed to form? The meaning of the Hebrew word *rešep* is somewhat unclear; in different contexts, it is associated with flashes of lightning, sparks or flames (Ps. 76.4; Job 5.7?), or even pestilence (Deut. 32.24; Hab. 3.5).³³ I have translated it as 'darts' mainly to avoid repetition with the 'flames' on the following line, but the semantic field of *rešep* clearly overlaps that of *šalhebet*.

At first sight, Yahweh and fire may not seem to form a perfect parallelism; however, in fact, the God of Israel is associated with fire many times from the burning bush (Exod. 3.2-4) to the theophany on Mount Sinai (Exod.

30. Septuagint: *periptera autēs periptera pyros phloges autēs*, 'its sparks are sparks of fire, its flames'; Vulgate: *lampades eius lampades ignis atque flammarum* 'its lamps are lamps of fire, and of flames'.

31. Oswald Loretz, 'Ägyptisierende, mesopotamisierende und ugaritisierende Interpretationen der Götter Môt und Eros in Canticum 8, 6-7: "Die Liebe ist so stark wie Môt"', *UF* 36 (2004), pp. 235-82 (249-50), makes a similar observation, assuming that the word originally preceding *šlhbyh* has disappeared.

32. The Ben Naphtali reading has been interpreted as a 'scribal midrash' adding the divine name into the text; thus Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, pp. 170-71; Loretz, 'Ägyptisierende, mesopotamisierende und ugaritisierende Interpretationen', pp. 250-51.

33. For the biblical word *rešep*, see John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup, 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 199-208; Eduard Lipiński, *Resheph: A Syro-Canaanite Deity* (OLA, 181; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), pp. 239-48.

19.16-20; Deut. 4.11-12; cf., e.g., Isa. 31.9; Zech. 2.5); indeed, '[f]ire betrays God's presence throughout the Bible'.³⁴ The most important intertext for our passage can probably be found in Deut. 4.24: 'For the Lord, your God, is a consuming fire, a jealous God' (*kî yhw' 'ēlōhēkā 'ēš 'ōkēlā hū' 'ēl qannā*). The attribute of God as 'jealous', *qannā*, is derived from the same root as *qin'ā* we just encountered on line 6.4, and I would not be surprised if the author of these lines in the Song of Songs actually intended to use this very verse of Deuteronomy in order to pile up a repository of divine attributes, all utilized within the framework of love and death. If this is the case, then the words 'jealousy' and 'fire' are framed by the words 'love' and 'Yah(weh)', which probably is meant not to go unnoticed by the reader.

The structure of lines 7.1–7.3 is less transparent than was the case with the preceding lines, and even here, I assume that something has happened to the text in an early phase of its transmission. This assumption is based on the sole observation that the parallelistic elements are still there, but the entirely prosaic infinive construction in line 7.2 intrudes into the bicolon, breaking the otherwise regular parallelistic pace of the passage. Therefore I suppose with Oswald Loretz that the words *lēkabbôt 'et-'ahābā* 'cannot quench love' have replaced an original text which probably only had *yūkelūhā* 'prevail against it'³⁵ as a parallel to *yīšēpūhā* 'sweep it away'.³⁶ Be that as it may, there is a highly significant synonymous parallelism even in this verse, namely that between 'mighty waters' (*mayim rabbīm*) and 'rivers' (*nēhārôt*).

Love/God and the Destructive Powers

According to the above analysis, it seems as if love, jealousy, and fire are built into the poetic structure of the passage as alluding to Yahweh. On the other hand, as has been noted by many commentators, the words referring to death, the Underworld, sparks and waters denote cosmic powers which in this text are juxtaposed with love.³⁷ 'Mighty waters' and 'rivers' provide a cosmic allusion to the waters of chaos that only Yahweh can subdue (cf. Ps. 24.2; 77.20; 93.4; Isa. 51.10; etc.). The waters share the realm of chaos with death and Sheol mentioned earlier in the poem, and the rivers can be associated with the rivers of the Underworld familiar from other parts of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Ezek. 31.15; Hab. 3.9; Ps. 24.2; 93.3).

34. Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, p. 127; cf. Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, p. 204.

35. For the use of *ykl* in this meaning with a direct object, see DCH, IV (1998), p. 213.

36. Loretz, 'Ägyptisierende, mesopotamisierende und ugaritisierende Interpretationen', p. 244.

37. For example, Keel, *Hohelied*, p. 248; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, pp. 196-97; Hess, *Song of Songs*, p. 239; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 253.

The Hebrew Bible is permeated with such allusions to cosmic elements, which, in view of the West Semitic religious environment, are not just anonymous powers but, rather, divine beings.³⁸ It is significant indeed that names of West Semitic deities or demons are mentioned on almost every line in Cant. 8.6-7a. On the other hand, it has been a matter of debate to what extent ancient readers were supposed to associate these words with the deities of their religious environment.

- *Mot* (Heb. *māwet*) is the name of the god or a demon well known from Ugaritic mythological literature (14th–12th centuries BCE), the personification of death who devours gods and humans and lives in the Underworld (Heb. *šə'ōl*).³⁹ He is the arch-enemy of the life-giving god Baal, whom he overcomes and forces to descend into his Underworld domain, but never really wins his battle with Baal. In a Ugaritic text describing the wrestling of the two deities, they appear as equally strong: 'Mot was strong, Baal was strong (*mt 'z b'l 'z*)'.⁴⁰
- *Sheol* (*Šuwala*) is known as a goddess of the Underworld in the texts of Emar (13th–12th centuries BCE),⁴¹ where she is associated with the Mesopotamian god of the Underworld, Nergal. The same association is to be found in the ninth-century BCE Aramaic inscription from Tell Fekheriye.⁴²
- The name of the god *Resheph* seems to be alluded to with the *rešāpīm* on line 6.5.⁴³ Resheph was likewise a Syro-Canaanite god, a chthonic deity associated with death and war (but not originally with the Underworld, as some commentators maintain); he may also appear as a benevolent and healing god. He is a carrier of weapons such as bows and arrows; hence the translation 'darts of fire' of the Hebrew plural expression *rišpê 'ēš*, which may reflect the use of the name Resheph

38. For West Semitic ('Canaanite') deities and their relation to the Hebrew Bible and Israelite religion, see, for example, Oswald Loretz, *Ugarit und die Bibel: Kanaanäische Götter und Religion im Alten Testament* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990); Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 27-80.

39. See John F. Healey, 'Mot', *DDD*² (1999), pp. 598-603; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, pp. 185-97.

40. KTU 1.6 vi 16-22; see Loretz, 'Ägyptisierende, mesopotamisierende und ugaritisierende Interpretationen', pp. 263-64.

41. Emar 6 328.2; 385.23; 388.6, 57; see Daniel Arnaud, *Emar VI. III. Texte* (Recherches au pays d'Aštata; Paris, Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1986), *ad loc.*

42. Line 18; see Eduard Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics* (OLA, 57; Leuven: Peeters, 1994), pp. 31-33, 50.

43. For this deity, see the thorough analysis of Lipiński, *Resheph, passim*; cf. Paolo Xella, 'Resheph', *DDD*² (1999), pp. 700-703.

in the plural known from elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The 'Reshephs' in the plural are dissociated from the god Resheph but linked with Mot and the Underworld.⁴⁴

- The 'mighty waters' (*mayim rabbîm*) find their West Semitic divine counterpart in the god *Yam* who, like Mot, was the enemy of Baal.⁴⁵ The name means 'sea', but *Yam* is not only the god of the sea, but also of the rivers, as is indicated by his designation 'prince Sea, ruler River' (*zbl ym tpt nhr*) and the parallelity of the divine names *ym* and *nhr* in Ugaritic poetry.⁴⁶ He reflects the chaotic and destructive aspect of the sea, competing with the life-giving aspects of Baal, and he is sometimes associated with the primeval monster.⁴⁷
- 'Rivers' are not only associated with *Yam* in ancient Near Eastern mythology, but many rivers tend to have deities of their own, or are themselves (like Euphrates and Tigris) regarded as divine beings. Rivers have a cosmological quality which is not necessarily negative. Rivers are dangerous to cross and may cause floods, but they are also sources of life and blessing.⁴⁸ In our context, however, the parallelity with *mayim rabbîm* and the juxtaposition with love makes the rivers appear rather as a destructive power.

Such a concentration of West Semitic deities and mythological powers in a text, in which we just have detected a cluster of designations of Yahweh, is certainly no coincidence, and it is entirely plausible to read the text as quoting or echoing the tradition of pre-Yahwistic West Semitic love poetry reused in the present composition.⁴⁹

44. See Lipiński, *Resheph*, p. 246.

45. See already Herbert G. May, 'Some Cosmic Connotations of *mayim rabbîm*, "Many Waters"', *JBL* 74 (1955), pp. 9-21 and Otto Kaiser, *Die mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Ägypten, Ugarit und Israel* (BZAW, 78; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2nd edn, 1962); cf. John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Fritz Stolz, 'Sea', *DDD*² (1999), pp. 737-42.

46. For example, KTU 1.3 iii 39: 'Did I not slay Yam, El's beloved? // Did I not destroy River, the god of the Mighty Ones?' (*l mḥšt mdd il ym // l klt nhr il rbm*). Cf. Ps. 89.26 (NRSV): 'I will set his hand on the Sea, // and his right hand on the Rivers' (*wē-šamtī bay-yām yādō // ū-ban-nēhārôt yēmînō*).

47. See Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, 'Le combat de Ba'lu avec Yammu après les textes ougaritiques', *MARI* 7 (1993), pp. 63-70; cf. Jean-Marie Durand, 'Le mythologème du combat entre le dieu de l'orage et la mer en Mésopotamie', *MARI* 7 (1993), pp. 41-61.

48. See Fritz Stolz, 'River', *DDD*² (1999), pp. 707-709.

49. According to Loretz, 'Ägyptisierende, mesopotamisierende und ugaritisierende Interpretationen', p. 252, Cant. 8.6-7a preserves quotations from ancient Syro-Canaanite poetry; cf. Loretz, 'Nachklänge des ugaritischen Baal-Mythos in Hld 8,6-7', *Studi storico-religiosi* 5 (1981), pp. 197-207.

We may wonder, of course, to what extent the authors or compilers of the Song of Songs, who most probably lived in the Hellenistic era,⁵⁰ were aware of the ancient Syro-Canaanite pantheon. Many scholars, while recognizing the affinities of the text with ancient Near Eastern mythology, maintain that the text does not consciously refer to foreign deities, but the divine names and epithets are demythologized, serving a primarily poetic function.⁵¹

However, the mythological elements in the Song of Songs as a whole are too many to be dismissed as atavistic reminiscences of a long-forgotten pagan religion. Even the monotheistic Jews had a religious environment of which they could not possibly be unaware, and which maintained its West Semitic elements still in the Roman period.⁵² The authors of the Song of Songs, while demonstrably drawing from an intercultural Eastern Mediterranean reservoir of metaphors and symbols, were very clever in utilizing these mythological elements in a way that does not violate monotheistic theology—on the contrary, they may be used here discreetly to awaken the idea of Yahweh's supremacy in the reader's mind.

The compound *'el qannâ* is always used in polemics against foreign deities (Exod. 20.5; 34.14; Deut. 4.24; 6.15),⁵³ and the idea of a hidden antagonism between Yahweh and other gods suggests itself if Deut. 4.24 is looming behind Cant. 8.6, as I suggested above. Presumably, the Targum of the Song of Songs has Deut. 4.24-28⁵⁴ in mind when, in its wake, it speaks of saving

50. Thus most recently, and convincingly, Gerhards, *Hohelied*, pp. 28-86.

51. Cf. Hans-Peter Müller, 'Das Hohelied', in Hans-Peter Müller, Otto Kaiser and James A. Loader, *Das Hohelied, Klagelieder, Das Buch Ester* (ATD, 16/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), pp. 1-90 (84): 'längst überwundene mythische Einzelvorstellungen können immer wieder einmal auftauchen, um einem poetischen Gedanken Anschaulichkeit und Leben anzugeben'.

52. Cf., for example, the description of the religion of the Phoenicians in Philo of Byblos's *Phoenician History*; see Harold W. Attridge and Robert A. Oden (eds.), *Philo of Byblos, the Phoenician History: Introduction, Critical Text, Translation, Notes* (CBQMS, 9; Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981). Of the above mentioned deities, Philo mentions Mot (36.14, 21; 56.8).

53. See Timo Veijola, *Das fünfte Buch Mose, Deuteronomium: Kapitel 1,1-16,17* (ATD, 8/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), p. 107.

54. Deut 4.24-28 (NRSV): 'For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God. When you have had children and children's children, and become complacent in the land, if you act corruptly by making an idol in the form of anything, thus doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, and provoking him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to occupy; you will not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples; only a few of you will be left among the nations where the Lord will lead you. There you will serve other gods made by human hands, objects of wood and stone that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.'

the people from being exiled again and making an association with the fire of Gehenna designed to burn idolaters.

It was probably part of the textual strategy of the Song of Songs not to use overtly religious language, much less to present the lovers as divine beings.⁵⁵ Cant. 8.6-7a goes just about as far as it can in mentioning God's name, even though in an abbreviated and quasi-suggestive way.⁵⁶ But the whole scenario of the passage, involving the destructive powers easily identifiable with deities of the religious environment, gives the reader enough elements to link human love with divine love and reflect upon the confrontation of love and death. The expression 'flame of Yah(weh)' indicates clearly enough where the source of love is to be looked for, even though the love described by the poem is love between humans.

For it is love that the Song of Songs is all about, not the battle between love and death, or Yahweh and other gods. But the text gives us enough 'cues to the divine' to assume that love in the implied reader's mind had both human and divine aspects; hence the ancient readers of the Song of Songs did not need to make an interpretative choice between them, as modern scholarship has done. I agree with Ellen Davis, according to whom 'these lines [8.6-7] function equally well as a theological statement and a declaration about human love'.⁵⁷ For the Song of Songs is about humans and invites its readers to identify with the lovers.⁵⁸ It is the woman who talks to the man here, first asking the man to carry her like a seal—which can be understood as a marker of intimacy and identity as well as an amulet protecting against evil forces—and then reflecting beautifully on the matter of love and death. This is the first and only passage in the Song of Songs that talks about generic love, not just the mutual love of the protagonists. Indeed, as Katharine Dell notes, '[t]his passage clearly puts the language of love onto a more cosmological level as it portrays personified forces of love over against chaos and death'.⁵⁹ The reflection of love is located in the woman's mouth

55. Gerhards, *Das Hohelied*, pp. 513-14: 'Es bleibt aber auffällig, dass Gott im Hohelied nur andeutungsweise erwähnt ist [sc. in *šalhebetyâ*]. Daraus einen "Atheismus" des Buches zu schließen, ginge zu weit. Im Zusammenhang mit der Frage der allegorischen Deutung lässt sich der Befund auch dahingehend auswerten, dass die allegorische Deutung des Liebhabers auf Gott überhaupt erst ermöglicht wird, weil Gott sonst nicht erwähnt ist.'

56. Cf. Hess, *Song of Songs*, p. 240: 'It may well be that at the climactic point of the whole Song, the poet chooses to mention the name of God, a name otherwise hidden and reflective of his operation behind the scenes'.

57. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, p. 296.

58. See J. Cheryl Exum, 'The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs', in Hagedorn (ed.), *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, pp. 78-95 (83).

59. Katharine J. Dell, 'Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?', in Hagedorn (ed.), *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, pp. 8-26 (14); cf. Loretz, 'Ägyptisierende, mesopotamisierende und ugaritisierende Interpretationen', p. 274: 'Die in den drei Bikola des Zitats V. 6b-7a vorgetragene Sicht der Liebe als einer übermenschlichen,

and imagination, and the text strongly suggests that the love reflected is both her love to her beloved and God's love to both of them.

But is love strong *as* death, or, implicitly and ultimately, *stronger* as death, according to our text? This problem is not part of my initial question, but since it emerges from the text to many readers, let us, by way of a conclusion, contemplate it briefly. First of all, the text is primarily about love, not about death: 'Love in this text is not in a *battle* with death but it is *compared to* death'.⁶⁰ Death and destructive powers are mentioned to give the reader an idea of how gigantic, how formidable, how unrelenting a thing love is. Death is strong, so is love. Sheol is adamant, so is passion. Love and death certainly are rivals (every lover has to die some day), but in this text, they are not presented as forces competing with each other. The point is rather that love 'is just as unyielding, just as adamant in its refusal to let go of the object of its desire, as its rival, death'.⁶¹ In this sense, the comparison concerns the intensity of love—it can only be compared to death, there are no stronger powers that would deserve to be juxtaposed with love.

Nevertheless, there may be more to the issue of love and death than mere comparison. That mighty waters and rivers cannot sweep love away, may, of course, be understood in a way that makes love equally strong as destructive powers. There is no allusion here to a *Chaoskampf*, no description of divine intervention against the destructive forces; God does not appear as the Lord of the Underworld but, rather, as the source of love and, as the seal imagery in Cant. 8.6a suggests, as a protective power.⁶² But if love resists the overwhelming powers of chaos, is love, then, not actually stronger? In view of the comparison of the epithets for God with the designations of the deities of chaos and destruction, should we not think that, in the final analysis, it is actually God who wins? Consequently, are we not to read that love, in fact, prevails over death?

Conclusion

So is God mentioned in the Song of Songs? In my assessment, a positive answer can be argued for, if:

mythisch-göttlichen Macht und Kraft sprengt den Rahmen der vorher im Canticum beschriebenen Liebe zwischen einem Mädchen und einem jungen Mann'.

60. Garrett, 'Song of Songs', p. 255.

61. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 253.

62. This role of God in relation to the Underworld is uncharacteristic of the Hebrew Bible. Gönke Eberhardt, *JHWH und die Unterwelt: Spuren einer Kompetenzerweiterung JHWHs im Alten Testament* (FAT, 2/23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. 366-87, identifies the protective role of God against the Underworld in the Hebrew inscriptions of Khirbet el-Qom and Ketef Hinnom, while the texts of the Hebrew Bible rather describe Yahweh's exceptional activities in the Underworld, his theophany, and his role as judge and saviour.

1. the problems of textual transmission in *šlhbyh* are due to a haplography, the original text reading *šalhābôtēhā šalhābôt yāh* 'its flames are flames of Yah(weh)';
2. the word 'ēš 'fire' needs a poetic parallel, which can be found in the abbreviated divine name *yāh*, irrespective of whether the text has suffered haplography;
3. the proximity of *qin'ā* 'jealousy' and 'ēš 'fire' can be derived from Deut. 4.24 where God is described as 'a consuming fire, a jealous God' ('ēš 'ōkēlā hū' 'ēl qannā);
4. the comparison between love and death consciously alludes to destructive powers associated with West Semitic deities and demons as the counterpart of death, while God represents the counterpart of love.

All these 'ifs are due to the fact that the textual tradition does not answer the question unambiguously. As in many other passages in the Song of Songs, much is left to the reader's choice. 'Readers set the interpretive agenda by the kinds of questions they pose of a text—this set of questions rather than that set of questions. The questions thus determine, to large extent, the answers that will emerge in any particular reading.'⁶³ This statement of Cheryl Exum does full justice to the vast variety of interpretations of the Song of Songs through the ages, including modern scholarship. It is my pleasure to congratulate Cheryl with this piece of scholarship as another enthusiastic reader of the Song of Songs, whose deliberations certainly remain contestable and open to discussion.⁶⁴

63. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 82. Cf. Ruben Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis: Traditionsgeschichte und Theologie eines Bildfelds in Urchristentum und antiker Umwelt* (WUNT, 2/122; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), pp. 17-18: 'Die Analyse metaphorischer Rede kann dazu führen, bestimmte Interpretationszusammenhänge wahrscheinlicher zu machen, andere vielleicht sogar auszuschließen. Eine letzte Deutung, die Einordnung ins Bildfeld oder einzelne Assoziationszusammenhänge müssen damals wie heute dem einzelnen Rezipienten des Bildes überlassen bleiben. So ist auch in der Interpretation der geschlechtlichen Bildersprache ein gewisser Rest an Offenheit unhintergebar. Statt der einlinigen Festlegung eines "Wirklichkeitssinns" geht es darum, "Möglichkeitssinn" zu entfalten.'

64. A draft of this essay was presented at the Helsinki–Heidelberg colloquium 'Love and Death, Dying and Empathy' at the University of Heidelberg, 12 June, 2010. I want to thank the audience, especially Professors Risto Saarinen and Manfred Oeming, and Drs Gönke Eberhardt, Rebekka Klein and Jenni Spännäri, for their stimulating insights.

THE BIBLE IN ORIENTALIST ART

Martin O'Kane

Introduction

In 1996, when Cheryl Exum published *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*,¹ she asked several significant questions relating to how women in the Bible have been represented and, in particular, viewed, in a number of major works of European art. Her biblical women included Bathsheba, Michal, Ruth and Delilah and it is clear that her analysis of these characters and their afterlives was the fruit of painstaking research, personal reflection and critical discussion with her students and colleagues. Particularly engaging were two chapters of her book, and for different reasons: in 'Bathsheba Plotted, Shot and Painted' she draws attention to the crucial importance of the viewer's role in assessing how female biblical characters has been mediated through centuries of Western tradition and culture, while in 'Is This Naomi?' she uses a Victorian painting, Philip Hermogenes Calderon's *Ruth and Naomi* (Fig. 1), and the ambiguities she perceives in the depiction of its subject, to explore gendered readings of the book of Ruth. Some fifteen years on, the valuable insights presented in Exum's volume are clearly still relevant to feminist interpretation but, as I will argue here, they can be usefully extended to question and challenge other areas of Western cultural appropriation of biblical themes that have received far less attention than biblical women, about whom, in any case, much has now been written since 1996. One important but much overlooked area of research in this regard has been the whole question of the cultural representation of Islam in European biblical art and the role of artists in creating and constructing an imagined visual world of the Bible in the Middle East to match the cultural expectations of their Western viewers. In this short essay, I hope to offer an overview of some of the critical issues surrounding this subject.

1. J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (JSOTSup, 215; Gender, Culture, Theory, 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).



Fig. 1. Philip Hermogenes Calderon, *Ruth and Naomi*
Mid-nineteenth century. The Board of Trustees of the National
Museums & Galleries on Merseyside (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool)

The starting point for this topic is Calderon's painting, *Ruth and Naomi*, and, more specifically, the way Exum uses it. It appears quite dramatically on the front cover of the paperback edition of *Plotted, Shot and Painted*, and is used again at the start of the chapter on Ruth, 'Is This Naomi?', where Exum comments that it took her some time to make the connection between the painting and the biblical story, not quite certain as to the identification of the figure whom Ruth is embracing. She tells us that she showed the painting to 'friends, colleagues and students in class' and asked them to identify the figures and the scene from the book of Ruth: were the figures embracing each other Ruth and Boaz, or were they Ruth and Naomi? The answers given were evenly divided—some suggested it was Boaz and others Naomi. Following Mieke Bal's methodology, she then uses the perceived ambiguities within the painting to explore alternative interpretations, focussing on how relationships (same-sex and opposite-sex) in the book of Ruth are commented upon, or transformed, through the narrative's cultural appropriations.

Following Exum's lead, I, too, recently asked my colleagues and students, several of whom come from a Middle Eastern and Islamic background, what they made of this same painting. For them, the identity of the figure did not particularly concern them nor were they curious to find out the precise scene

from the story of Ruth that the painting seeks to depict. The first thing they did note, however, was that the male figure is wearing an Arab kaffiyeh, that the minor figure to the right is also clearly wearing Arab Bedouin dress and that the scene is set within a desert landscape, complete with cactus plant and desiccated palm trees. They also made several observations about the characters, similar to Exum's (but for different reasons): for example, they commented on the pose of the woman who, in contrast to the fully clothed male figure she embraces, reveals her bare arms, neck and hair, and how improbable it was that such an intimate embrace could ever have taken place in this very public and exposed Middle Eastern setting. Exum, too, draws attention to 'the erotic element in the painting' and 'the implicit sexual character of the scene', noting that in the biblical account, Ruth never openly embraces Boaz; her one intimate scene with Boaz is on the threshing floor at night, not in the desert in broad daylight—and not with someone watching. But my students had further questions to ask of the painting, beyond Exum's: why were these figures, supposed to be biblical and Israelite, dressed in contemporary Arab costumes and headgear? What was the significance and symbolism of the desert background setting which is clearly accentuated? And, given such a setting, why did the artist depict the pious Ruth in such an incongruous manner in the first place that bore little relationship either to the biblical text or to a contemporary Middle Eastern context? Exum's emphasis on the importance of popular culture, particularly visual culture, on our understanding of the Bible is just as important in addressing these questions as it was in underlining the cultural assumptions made about biblical women that she challenged so powerfully in *Plotted, Shot and Painted*.

In Western culture, there can be few visual representations of biblical figures and scenes more familiar than those that have been mediated to us through the depiction of picturesque Middle Eastern settings, biblical characters in Arab dress, and quaint Oriental practices—all the accoutrements deemed necessary to conjure up in our imagination a 'realistic' picture of the Bible in its ancient and original setting. We are constantly exposed to such images: in biblical textbooks, commentaries, guide-books, travelogues, documentaries, Christmas cribs, not to mention the great biblical epics of Hollywood, and, most importantly, those romantic and exotic images of the 'biblical' East that were disseminated far and wide in their hundreds of thousands throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. So when Exum speaks about the importance of critiquing 'cultural' appropriations of the Bible, the cultural perspectives represented in Orientalist paintings of the Bible must surely be among the first that need to be examined. She includes several European paintings (particularly Bathsheba, Delilah and Ruth) to explore issues of female–male power relationships but, in effect, many of her images can also be used to explore relationships of power and

control between East and West.² It seems timely, therefore, to extend Exum's focus beyond the cultural representation of biblical women to include other important cultural assumptions implicit in biblical paintings, particularly those found in Orientalist images.

Orientalism and the Bible

For the purposes of this essay, the terms 'Orientalist' and 'Orientalism' are taken from Edward Said's *Orientalism*,³ a concept he defined 'as a mode for defining the presumed cultural inferiority of the Islamic Orient', the term Orient, of course, referring largely to the Arab Middle East. However, throughout his seminal work and in subsequent discourse, Said remained focussed on the political and imperialist ramifications of his argument and, to my knowledge, only two art historians have extended his perspective to include visual culture to any significant degree. The best known of these is Linda Nochlin's 'The Imaginary Orient'⁴ where she argues that, in Orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century, it is the Western white man's controlling gaze that really brings the Oriental world into being, the gaze for which most of the paintings in this genre were ultimately intended. The second is Frederick Bohrer who has used Saidian discourse to good effect in exploring the assumptions and perceptions evident in the way the European Orientalist visual tradition viewed Mesopotamia, 'the West's first great Other'.⁵ Nochlin, unfortunately, did not include biblical topics in her discussion and Bohrer only to a very limited degree. The anthropologist Ivan Kalmar, however, in work still largely in progress,⁶ has usefully extended the notion of Orientalism beyond its usual imperialist postcolonial associations

2. In Cheryl Exum's discussion on Hagar in art, most of the images she uses depict Abraham as a turbaned Turk, following the Dutch iconographical description. See J. Cheryl Exum, 'The Accusing Look: The Abjection of Hagar in Art', *Religion and the Arts* 11 (2007), pp. 143-71. Exum's study of Hagar could be developed to include the depiction of Hagar in Orientalist art, given her particular importance in Islamic tradition. See Riffat Hassan, 'Islamic Hagar and her Family', in Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell (eds.), *Hagar, Sarah and their Children: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006), pp. 149-70.

3. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

4. Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient', in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 33-59.

5. Frederick M. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

6. Ivan Davidson Kalmar, 'Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban: Orientalism, the Jews and Christian Art', in Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (eds.), *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005), pp. 3-31. See especially his major forthcoming work, *Early Orientalism: Imagined Islam and the Notion of Sublime Power* (London: Routledge, 2011).

and added two further terms to the discourse: 'Bible' (by which he means the Judaic-Christian tradition) and 'Harem' (by which he means sexual fantasy).

Kalmar is particularly concerned with how biblical Israelites and Jews have been so frequently represented in Christian art as Muslims.⁷ Although we generally think of Orientalism in art as a nineteenth-century phenomenon, he argues that Muslims and Islamic symbols in Christian biblical art can be documented much earlier, the Ottoman turban being an important visual marker until the nineteenth century when it was replaced by the Arab kaffiyeh. Kalmar demonstrates how, after the Ottoman military successes of the East, crowned by their conquest of Constantinople in 1453, it became common and possible to picture the biblical narrative in an exotic setting modelled on the contemporary Muslim, and specifically Ottoman, East. The biblical lands, now in the hands of the Ottoman (in effect Muslim) lands, came to be exoticized in the Western imagination as part of the Orient. Renaissance Europeans visualized the biblical narrative as unfolding in Islamic territory and the ancient biblical Israelites were considered little different from the Turks who ruled it.⁸ Christian artists began to use what they knew about the Turks as their model for their biblical characters and, towards the end of the fifteenth century, turbans and other orientaling features became entirely commonplace in Christian biblical art. Kalmar gives two examples: Ghiberti on the doors of the Baptistery in Florence depicts several of the Israelite prophets wearing turbans, while Verrocchio on his sculpture of David carves pseudo-Arabic script on the armour of David to enhance the oriental nature of the figure.⁹

With its strong links to the Ottoman empire, Kalmar suggests that artists and patrons in Venice were especially drawn to including Turkish headgear and other features and argues that the anonymous *The Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus* (1511, Louvre) was a seminal work in this regard; it depicts Venetian ambassadors being received in Damascus in the late fifteenth century. He suggests that this work greatly influenced Albert Dürer (1471–1528) who applied the example of the Venetian orientalist artists to biblical narrative. From the period of the High Renaissance onwards, imaging the biblical Israelite as a Muslim Turk became a matter of course throughout Western Christendom, the best known examples in this regard being the magnificent turbans with which Rembrandt paints his male biblical characters.¹⁰ To Kalmar's examples of *David and Uriah*, where the two men's Ottoman-style turbans play a dominant part in the composition, could be added many other Rembrandt paintings, particularly *Belshazzar's Feast* which

7. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, p. 5.

8. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, pp. 9–10.

9. Verocchio's *David* is in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

10. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, p. 14.

depicts Belshazzar as a turbaned leader and as wearing a crescent-moon earring, the symbol of Islam. His turban glitters with dazzling gemstones—onyx, rubies, and crystals, with an especially large gem at the head of the turban tassel. Kalmar argues that the iconographical tradition of 'Islamicizing' biblical characters continued in the eighteenth century, exemplified in Fragonard's depiction of King Solomon as a Pasha surveying his harem, and in his *Jeroboam Offering Idols*. The latter depicts the story narrated in 1 Kings 12 where a prophet confronts the evil Jeroboam; the prophet is elegantly attired in Turkish dress and wears a turban while the evil Jeroboam's is much less flamboyant and colourful. Kalmar proposes that this was deliberate on the part of the artist: he used the conventions of dress to distinguish between the prophet who is faithful to God and the evil king Jeroboam.¹¹

With easier European access to the biblical lands of the Middle East in the nineteenth century, Kalmar argues that orientalist biblical painting took not so much the turbaned Turk as the Arab, especially the Bedouin, to evoke the ancient biblical figures; the distinguishing characteristic of the male Israelite figure now became the Arabic kaffiyeh. The Bedouin, in particular, represented the values of the ancient Israelites as an article entitled 'The Arab of the Desert' in the London illustrated magazine, *The Quiver*, in 1865, demonstrates:

Who has not heard of the Arabs, that wonderful people who alone, perhaps, of all the races of the earth, are today the same in almost every respect as they were in the very earliest times of which even Scripture history, the oldest of records, gives us any account? As his fathers lived, countless ages ago, so the Arab lives today, and so he will continue to live, it is probable, if not in all future time, at least for many a generation to come.¹²

Around the same time, Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863), which sought to present Jesus realistically against his Palestinian background, had as its main premise that the Orient today would reveal what the Orient always had been, that 'at least some Arabs carried the fossilised Semitic spirit that infused the contemporaries of Jesus'.¹³ Indeed, earlier biblical critics looked for populations in the Orient that would have preserved unadulterated the lifestyle of the ancient Israelites; among such critics was the Orientalist and biblical scholar Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791):

One will hardly find a people that has kept its customs the same for so long as the Arabs: which is a result of their never having been brought under the yoke of other peoples. Everything we know about these customs coincide so exactly with the most ancient customs of the Israelites and thus gives the richest and most beautiful elucidations to the Bible. In contrast, the customs

11. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, p. 16.

12. Cited in Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, p. 17.

13. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, p. 20.

of the Jews themselves among the Persians, Greeks and Romans, and since their European diaspora, have changed so much that one can no longer see in them the descendants of the people of whom the Bible speaks.¹⁴

In his work, Kalmar illustrates how Gustav Doré's *Sainte Bible* published two years after Renan's *Life of Jesus* in 1865, popularized the image of the kaffiyed Bedouin as a standard representation of the ancient Israelite. Indeed, the mid-nineteenth century was awash with paintings and prints of what we might call 'the biblical Bedouin'; take for example Horace Vernet's *Tamar and Judah* (Fig. 2). To these theological influences, pre-Raphaelites added a pre-occupation of their own—namely the romanticizing of Islamic worship as a metaphor for the simple and unquestioning Christianity of the Middle Ages for which many nineteenth-century Christians longed.¹⁵



Fig. 2. Horace Vernet, *Tamar and Judah*, 1840, Private Collection

14. Letter from Michaelis to Baron von Bernstorff, 1756, cited in Ivan Davidson Kalmar, *Preliminaries* (for exclusive use of author's students, 2005).

15. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, pp. 16-19.

Kalmar's important anthropological survey of Orientalist themes in biblical art is the first important contribution in this area, but his substantial and far-reaching conclusions require much more investigation and analysis than this present essay allows. For example, he argues, from his research that, while most Israelites in Orientalist Christian art are depicted as Muslim, Jesus never is, and, Kalmar asserts that indeed he never wears a turban. His reason for asserting this is as follows: in the code of Christian Orientalist art, encrypted in the form of dress and headwear, Judaism is generally presented as oriental, and Christianity as occidental. The Arabic and Islamic Middle East was seen, much like the Old Testament, as completely superseded by the civilization of the Christian West; by implication, the Christian West had risen above its spiritual origins in the Jewish East. Thus, in general, the orientalizing of biblical subjects had a clear focus: to depict Old Testament Judaism as a precursor to Christianity and to assert that the highest degree of spiritual fulfilment was in Christ. This is why in Christian art, Kalmar concludes, Jesus never wears a turban.¹⁶ He represents the passing of the old order, Judaism.

Orientalist Biblical Paintings and their Settings

Given the antipathy towards figurative art in general within Islam, it is highly ironic that so much of nineteenth-century Orientalist art features erotic images of nude Muslim women, set within the most private of locations such as the harem¹⁷ and the bath-house, places where Western artists were highly unlikely to gain admission, and so were free to superimpose their own image at will. Indeed many Orientalist artists had never set foot in the Middle East and, as Linda Nochlin points out, the images of harems, bath houses and slave markets bore no resemblance to historical and social reality, even though the style of many of these were deliberately presented as having 'photograph-like' quality to convey an idea of realism. Part of the strategy of an Orientalist painter, she argues, was to make his viewers forget that there was any 'bringing into being', to convince them that works like these were simply 'reflections', scientific in their exactitude, of a pre-existing Oriental reality.¹⁸ The Near East existed as a natural place to be mystified with effects of realness. It existed as a project of the imagination, a fantasy space or screen onto which strong desires—erotic, sadistic or both—could be projected with impunity. Nochlin shares many of the same concerns as Exum in this regard. In the case of Bathsheba, Exum explores how Bathsheba, in her

16. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, pp. 24-25.

17. A further irony is that *harem* comes from the Arabic word 'sacred, forbidden, enclosed'.

18. Nochlin, *The Imaginary Orient*, p. 38.

cultural representations, is often the object of the male gaze; she invites the reader to 'look at our own gaze—at our collusion, or complicity, or resistance when faced with the exposure of female flesh for our literary or visual consumption'.¹⁹ Nochlin approaches the subject of the female nude in Orientalist paintings in the same way, pointing out that when western men viewed images of the harem, they were learning as they were being entertained; they were learning to 'imagine' the Orient as an erotic land of sexual excess. It is not surprising that Jean-Léon Gérôme, the French Orientalist artist most celebrated for his Oriental bath scenes, should have featured in his repertoire the scene of Bathsheba at her bath (Fig. 3).²⁰



Fig. 3. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Bathsheba*, 1889, Private Collection

Gérôme sets the scene on a rooftop in full view of the entire city of Jerusalem. There are three figures on the rooftop: David who watches from a distance, the naked Bathsheba, a figure Gérôme simply transfers from one of his hamam bath scenes, massaging herself erotically before David, and, in contrast, a fully clothed female servant who looks up at Bathsheba. So, in effect, the naked Bathsheba reveals herself to the servant, to David, to all Jerusalem and, of

19. Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted*, p. 19.

20. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 13, notes, in relation to Ingres's influential Orientalist painting, *The Turkish Bath*, that the 'subject was hardly the transcript of a woman's experience, but rather the stimulus to an unbounded and perverse erotic imagination of a male artist, who had never set foot in the land depicted'.

course, to the viewer. Of all the Bathsheba images that Exum discusses, none is as erotic as Gérôme's. But this image is unsettling for another reason as well. The fully clothed servant is clearly presented as an Arab Muslim and the clothes from which Bathsheba has just disrobed would suggest that she too is Muslim. In this depiction, the biblical story of David and Bathsheba is used to convey an erotic and decadent Orient—King David views Bathsheba as the Pasha might view his harem and Bathsheba obligingly reveals herself to him and, of course, to the viewer.²¹ Even more erotic is the French artist Edouard Nebat-Ponsan's depiction of the daughter of Jephthah with her female companions on the mountains bewailing her virginity (Judg. 11. 38) where the scene is presented as a harem scene, and hardly recognizable at all as a biblical story, apart from its caption (Fig. 4). Nochlin suggests that in such scenes the East is presented as a place where Europeans (both artist and viewer) can safely play out their fantasies and that such Orientalist paintings managed to body forth two ideological assumptions about white men's superiority: one about men's power over women and the other about white men's superiority and justifiable control over inferior and darker races. The white male viewer, Nochlin argues, was expected to engage sexually with such images, and yet morally, to distance himself from them.



Fig. 4. Edouard Debat-Ponsan, *The Daughter of Jephthah*, 1876, Private Collection

21. Kalmar, *Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban*, p. 16, draws attention to a picture by Fragonard, known as either *The Pasha* or *King Solomon*, which depicts a ruler inspecting some young women presented to him. He notes that the alternative names for the picture are very telling.

The negative image of the contemporary inhabitants of the biblical lands (which, for the Orientalist, stretched from Egypt to Mesopotamia, the far flung Eastern flank of the Ottoman Empire) is best seen in representations of Mesopotamia and its two ancient capitals of Nineveh and Babylon. Mesopotamia was rarely part of the itinerary of the Grand Tour, which preferred the more impressive and accessible monuments to be found in Egypt, Palestine, Greece and the Turkish lands among others and so, as Bohrer amply demonstrates, it became a construction of the European artist, conjectured through biblical and classical accounts, since the names of both were known in the West through stories from Graeco-Roman literature as well as, of course, biblical sources. Through these accounts Mesopotamia was taken as 'a cautionary tale, a site of sloth, sin, violence and transgression: the West's first great "Other"'.²² Mesopotamia's current state of disarray was seen as a lasting trace of the divine punishments said to have rained upon its ancient rulers, Sardanapalus of Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The dominant visual images of Mesopotamia in the nineteenth century were, therefore, ones of its ancient demise and consistently invoked events reputed to have led to the wasted state of the region.²³

With reference to two large canvases depicting Mesopotamia by the mid-nineteenth-century artist John Martin, Bohrer explains how Martin prepared detailed brochures to accompany the paintings. In *Belshazzar's Feast*, the brochure's narrative emphasized how the painting could be interpreted through textual exegesis, especially the Book of Daniel (even though the book of Daniel makes it clear that the event was situated in Babylon, and not Assyria, Martin places it in Assyria):

Among the venerable records in holy scriptures, or among the true as well as fabulous reports of profane antiquity, no event was ever so striking, so momentous, or attended by circumstances so awful, as the overthrow of the Assyrian Empire.²⁴

The second of his canvases, *The Fall of Nineveh*, presented a vast spectacle of destruction, a panorama of violent disorder in an elaborately detailed setting. At the centre of this image is Sardanapalus, the legendary final king of Assyria who was said to have 'exceeded all his predecessors in sloth and luxury'.²⁵ Martin prepared a second brochure to explain this painting against its textual sources. However, even though there is no biblical description of this particular scene, the brochure he prepared is full of detailed references to a range of texts, especially from the Book of Nahum and a range of classical

22. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 49.

23. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 49.

24. Cited in Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 51.

25. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 53.

sources. In so doing, Martin constructed an image that exemplified the judgmental tone that dominated the popular conception of Assyria in the nineteenth century. But the most famous representation of Mesopotamia in that entire century, argues Bohrer, was Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), which sets the scene inside the king's palace, in a locale controlled by his gaze.²⁶ The smoke of the conflagration already has begun to fill the chamber and the room is littered with the concubines, servants, animals and other treasures being destroyed as the king watches. Delacroix's conception of the subject evokes violence, sexuality and cruelty.

Bohrer notes that Martin's and Delacroix's paintings float on a vast sea of textual references, both biblical and classical, without being precisely tied to any particular one; such references were necessary to give the paintings an air of authenticity and realism. Martin and Delacroix clearly reinforce the concept of ancient Assyria as a moralizing and cautionary tale and counter example to western progress: a place that is picturesque, violent, sensual, and most of all, doomed. The viewer is intimately present in the room with Sardanapalus and is in a position to validate the description of Sardanapalus as a 'prince whose name has become synonymous with debauchery and passivity of the most degraded and notorious sort'.²⁷

In general, Orientalist depictions of Jerusalem and the Holy Land were spared the excesses of violence and eroticism so readily seen in those from North Africa or Mesopotamia: such images tend to be more controlled, more measured and less extreme. There was good reason for this. Jerusalem and the Holy Land, for Christians, was really the only area in the whole Near East that had sacred Christian sites, and therefore the depiction of scenes of sexual excess, so evident in the ubiquitous hamam and harem scenes that typify so much of Orientalist art, would have been considered inappropriate and not generally tolerated by, or acceptable to, the buying market in Europe. But Jerusalem raised another fundamental question for nineteenth-century European travellers and painters, one that centred on the custodianship of biblical sites. It was a question that was addressed in a variety of ways in Orientalist art, but at the same conclusion was generally arrived at. The response of the well-known Scottish artist and lithographer David Roberts to this question is a good case in point.

The art historian Kenneth Bendiner, in his unpublished PhD thesis of 1979,²⁸ notes how, in Roberts's depictions of Egypt and the Holy Land, the foreground figures frequently indicate the significance of a particular landscape or building, in front of which they are situated. Often these figures

26. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 55.

27. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 57.

28. Kenneth Bendiner, *The Portrayal of the Middle East in British Painting 1835–1860* (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1979).

come between the viewer of the painting and the background architecture or building, and so must be considered as mediating figures in some way, perhaps even the key to the painting's interpretation. Bendiner argues that a consistent technique of Roberts is to insert small groups of Arabs in front of neglected, ill-repaired architecture as a standard way of commenting on the corruption of contemporary Islamic society. His depiction of the *Entrance to the Temple of Amun* (Fig. 5) in Egypt is a notable example of this iconographic method.



Fig. 5. David Roberts, *Entrance to the Temple of Amun*, Late 1830s

William Brockedon, who wrote the commentary for Roberts's volume *Egypt and Nubia*, reveals the meaning of this figural group:

The central figure is an officer of the Pasha, making a visit to collect tribute, or to listen to complaints of mal-administration. He is visited by the Sheik of the village, who stands near him, behind whom is an attendant: the officer is ready to decide, not so much upon the justice of a case submitted to him, as to the arguments accompanied by bribes.²⁹

This officer of justice is shown by Roberts with eyes half-closed, half-asleep in the performance of his duty, in a picture of judicial corruption and maladministration. Behind the figures, we see the temple of Amun, one lintel of which is in such a decayed state that it seems to be in the act of breaking in

29. Bendiner, *The Portrayal of the Middle East in British Painting 1835–1860*, p. 110.

two. The crumbling fall of the great temple and the image of a corrupt society are juxtaposed. Here, Roberts did not merely depict Islam's dominance of the East, he presented the destructive effects of Islam's rule. It is apparent from Roberts's journals and letters that he saw the ruins of Egypt as evidence and a symbol of a loathsome religion, society and government. He wrote to his daughter Christine from Cairo in 1838:

These splendid cities once teeming with a busy population, and embellished with temples and edifices, the wonder of the world, now deserted and lonely, or reduced by mismanagement and the barbarism of the Moslem creed, to a state as savage as the wild animals by which they are surrounded. Often I gazed on them till my heart actually sank within me.³⁰

The vice of idleness is also apparent in Roberts's languid portrait of the judicial officer in the Temple of Amun, and the complaint of Moslem indolence was a common cry among English travellers; Bendiner argues that this would account for the lack of any scenes of work or industry among the groups that Roberts depicts.³¹ Roberts uses the word 'mismanagement' several times, suggesting that those entrusted with looking after the monuments and heritage of Egypt are not fulfilling their responsibilities. When it comes to the sacred sites of Jerusalem, Roberts's theme of the mismanagement of sacred sites, in my opinion, becomes much more pronounced.

With regard to the mosque of Omar in Jerusalem, Roberts comments in his diary that 'it is much defaced and like many of the mohamedan structures in Palestine, sinking into decay'³² and with regard to the Golden Gate, referring to the tradition that the Messiah will enter through this gate at the end of time, he states that 'by the Muslim, the gate is kept closed up from a singular dread that through it a king shall enter who is to make himself master not only of Jerusalem but of the globe'.³³ Concerning the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Roberts notes, 'On entering the church, a Turk, the keeper, of the porch is seen sitting, frequently with a group of Turks on his richly covered divan smoking and with coffee before him'.³⁴ The small groups of Arab Muslims that feature in many of Roberts's paintings of Jerusalem, and of Christian sites in particular, convey his sentiments of mismanagement. For example in Fig. 6, the group is juxtaposed with a fallen column and with a stagnant Gihon spring that has clearly fallen into disrepair.

30. Bendiner, *The Portrayal of the Middle East in British Painting 1835–1860*, p. 111.

31. Bendiner, *The Portrayal of the Middle East in British Painting 1835–1860*, p. 111.

32. Nachman Ran, *The Holy Land: David Roberts R.A.* (Jerusalem: Terra Sancta Publications, 1982), p. 30.

33. Ran, *The Holy Land: David Roberts R.A.*, p. 30.

34. Ran, *The Holy Land: David Roberts R.A.*, p. 63.



Fig. 6. David Roberts, *Jerusalem with the Spring of Gihon*, 1839

In Fig. 7 three different groups of figures are positioned and depicted in such a way as to convey an atmosphere of inaction, unconcern and utter detachment from the collapsed state of the monuments around them. Both in his diaries and in his paintings, Roberts implies that the indigenous people, represented by his small groups of inert figures are unworthy and inept custodians of these biblical and sacred sites.

Three further aspects of Roberts's paintings can be commented upon in this regard: the 'picturesqueness' of the figures, the complete absence of Westerners in his images and indeed the absence of any sense of history—the monuments and their foreground figures all seem to have a distinct atemporal feel about them. One of the characteristics of Roberts's paintings that ensured the saleability of his work—and what many find the most endearing quality even to this day—was the colourful and picturesque way in which he painted his figures. However, Linda Nochlin views the function of the 'picturesque' in Orientalist art quite negatively:

The function of the picturesque in depicting the natives of the Middle East is to create a sleek harmonious vision of the Islamic world as traditional, pious and unthreatening, in direct contradiction to the grim realities of history and, to mask conflict with the appearance of tranquillity. It makes the point that those who are painted as picturesque are more backward than those who consume the culture.³⁵

35. Nochlin, *The Imaginary Orient*, p. 49.



Fig. 7. David Roberts, *Jerusalem with detail of foregrounded figures*, 1839

The picturesque ensures that this oriental world is a world without change, a world of timeless customs and rituals untouched by any of the historical processes that were drastically altering Western societies in the mid-nineteenth century. Europe may be changing and advancing, but history by-passes the Orient. As well as the absence of history in these paintings, Westerners are also noticeably absent from Roberts's paintings—their role is primarily one of viewing, looking into this timeless and exotic world.³⁶

36. Nochlin discusses how Orientalist paintings depend for their existence on a

Around the same time that Roberts's sketches and drawings appeared, the lavish four-volume *Picturesque Palestine* was published in London (around the 1860s).³⁷ The work attempted to offer the reader accurate and reliable information about the history of the biblical sites and the monuments that were to be found there. The work contained hundreds of original engravings, specially commissioned to illustrate the four volumes. The function of the images is explained in the introduction:

There is no country in the world so especially interesting as that in which the momentous events of Bible History were enacted. At the same time there is no country which so urgently requires illustration, to enable us rightly to understand the incidental references to it in the Scripture narrative. All the original drawings [in this volume] were sketched on the spot to enrich the work by two eminent draughtsmen...³⁸

Inserted into practically every sketch of a biblical site is a small group of Arab Muslims. Clearly they do not add anything to our understanding of the topic, so why are they there? In what sense do these figures 'enrich' the book? They are never referred to in the commentary or in the book's introduction. They add nothing to the information provided and so we must assume that they are meant to evoke for the reader, as the title of the book suggests, the 'picturesqueness' of the Holy Land—a land that time has forgotten, in the words of Michel Thevoz, used in another Orientalist context, 'a land without history, where the ancients can still be met, a natural reserve of unchangingness'.³⁹

Images such as Roberts's or those found in *Picturesque Palestine* appear as illustrations in almost all late-nineteenth-century travel diaries and commentaries, frequently acting as visual accompaniments to comments about the unsuitability of Arab Muslims as custodians of the holy sites. A quotation from a travel book from the early 1880s illustrate this point, where the author is alarmed by the fact that local people have never heard of some of the biblical stories:

presence (a Western presence) that is always absent from the subject of the painting—and, of course, the nineteenth century saw a major expansion of European schools and hospitals in Jerusalem as well as a rapid increase in pilgrimage tourism, so there must have been a substantial visual presence of westerners in the city. They would have reflected a very different religious and social reality, one that Orientalist artists decided to omit.

37. Sir Charles Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine* (London: J.S. Virtue & Co, c. 1865).

38. Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine*, p. viii.

39. Michel Thevoz, *L'académisme et ses fantasmes: le réalisme imaginaire de Charles Gleyre* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980), p. 76, quoted in Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, p. 20.

The best feelings of our nature prompt us to preserve and protect from desecration such sites as the Holy Sepulchre. [Indigenous people say] 'Strangers like you from a distance come to us with stories [from the Bible] but neither we nor our fathers have ever heard of them, nor is there any locality in our vicinity that now or ever had any such connections with it.'⁴⁰

For British Orientalist painters, including Roberts, not only were the Muslims poor custodians of the biblical sites but so indeed were the Eastern Christian denominations (they, too, regularly feature in Roberts's work). As Nicholas Tromans points out, British Orientalists (especially Wilkie and Roberts) eagerly sought the locales of New Testament narratives and Old Testament events but were disappointed and even came to despise the Eastern Christian denominations who, they felt, preserved 'the false geographies of the Bible'.⁴¹ As for the Muslims, William Brockedon who compiled the texts that accompanied Roberts sketches, felt that 'although it was amazing that God had allowed Islam to take over the Holy Land, nevertheless, to us the history of her various caliphs hold little interest'.⁴² And so, Tromans concludes, the best part of two thousand years of history had to be eliminated in order to access, and visualize, the 'biblical' truth of Palestine.⁴³

Such Orientalist perspectives clearly were sympathetic to the ideals of nascent Zionism. The travel writer J.A. Wylie could state in his commentary:

As regard the restoration of Palestine, our general finding is this: Palestine is a desolate land, but its desolation is not of a kind that is irremediable. Its desolation is owing to neglect and it is a house fallen into frightful disrepair and needs to be put in order. The almost empty land must be stocked with a new race and the country must be placed under new government. Let this be done and Palestine which slumbers but is not dead, would burst out anew, and the country would become again what it once was, and even healthier, livelier and more fruitful.⁴⁴

Tromans documents how one of the most prominent of the pre-Raphaelite artists, Holman Hunt, who painted several scenes of Jerusalem and the Holy

40. W.M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1880), p. 673.

41. Nicholas Tromans, 'The Holy City', in Nicholas Tromans (ed.), *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (London: Tate, 2008), pp. 162-72 (165).

42. Cited in Nicholas Tromans, 'Introduction: British Orientalist Painting', in Tromans (ed.), *The Lure of the East*, pp. 10-21 (18). Tromans also describes how the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Hegel had noted some years earlier in 1820 that 'Islam has long vanished from the stages of history and has retreated into oriental ease and repose'. Islamic history and culture was thus placed in a kind of chronological limbo from which it might sporadically emerge, sometimes in hopelessly outdated, mediaeval guise.

43. Tromans, 'Introduction', p. 18.

44. J.A. Wylie, *Over the Holy Land* (London: James Nisbet, 1883), p. 381.

Land, was in later life a prominent and active supporter of Zionism, and actively championed the cause of a Jewish homeland. Many British Orientalist artists shared Hunt's views on the custodianship of the biblical sites:

When the British felt compelled to choose between Jews and Muslims, as they often did at Jerusalem, then in the nineteenth century there rarely seemed to them any question where allegiance was due. Elsewhere, things could, however, be different. In places where Islamic culture was perceived by the British to be naturally at home, such as Cairo, then theological controversy did not intrude so directly and British travellers were more likely to accept on its own terms the society they found there.⁴⁵

Indeed, several early Zionist artists situated themselves very consciously within this European Orientalist tradition. The Bezalel School,⁴⁶ which was set up in 1921, and which worked throughout that decade in Jerusalem, had, as its mission, to produce all kinds of oriental art, but now, produced in the land itself. The idea was that Orientalist biblical art would now be carried out with greater authenticity since it could accurately represent both the biblical land and its people. It was a founding principle of the Bezalel School that the iconographical tradition most appropriate to imitate was European Orientalist art rather than, say, art of the Renaissance. One early Zionist art critic commented: 'In biblical paintings executed on the soil of the land of Israel, there is no place for the absurd notion of populating the Bible with Scandinavians'.⁴⁷ In other words, the dark-skinned models of the Orient were more appropriate than the fair skins of the Renaissance to represent the characters of the Bible, and so models were sought in the biblical land itself. The most famous artist from this period is the French Zionist artist, Abel Pann (1883–1963), who was commissioned to do an illustrated Bible and who painted his biblical figures as eastern characters, in eastern dress and against an eastern background. For this approach he won widespread approval from Zionist commentators who noted that Pann 'grasped the essence of Zionism as the Jewish people's restoration in its eastern regions'.⁴⁸ Abel Pann thus consciously continued the tradition of European orientalist art and its variegated perceptions of the east. Now, as one commentator noted,

Jewish art could only flourish on Jewish soil. Pann's biblical paintings could therefore only be done in Palestine where biblical figures could only be convincingly painted ... especially those early stories from Genesis relating to the patriarchs to whom was promised the land.⁴⁹

45. Tromans, 'The Holy City', p. 170.

46. Bezalel was the name of the architect of the Tabernacle in Exod. 31.1-6.

47. Cited in Yigal Zalmona, 'Abel Pann', in *Abel Pann, 1883–1963* (Jerusalem: Catalogue of Mayanot Gallery, 1987), no page numbers.

48. Cited in Yigal Zalmona, 'Abel Pann', no page number.

49. Cited in Yigal Zalmona, 'Abel Pann', no page number.

Other early Zionist artists, too, followed the Orientalist tradition in several different ways. For example, the works of Reuven Rubin (1893–1974), described as ‘the idealized self-image that the Zionist movement wished to view and display’,⁵⁰ are dominated by images of a land of brightly lit landscapes and of intense cultivation. But, unlike nineteenth-century Orientalist art, no longer do we see inert Arab groups symbolically juxtaposed with decaying monuments, nor the swarthy dark-skinned models of Pann’s paintings, but rather, in much of Rubin’s work, we see a pristine land presented as orderly, cared for and re-built; Rubin’s restored Holy Land is frequently an empty land, devoid of any figures, one that extends to the viewer an invitation to inhabit it.

Conclusion

Although little work has been done on biblical subjects in Orientalist art and specifically on how Islam and Muslims, both male and female, are represented in Christian biblical art, this short survey of studies carried out in other academic disciplines, in art history and anthropology, indicates that there is an abundance of unexplored material available in this area to those interested in cultural appropriations of the Bible. Ivan Kalmar has demonstrated clearly that, at least from earliest periods of the Italian Renaissance, and especially in Venetian art that had close links with the Ottoman empire, the depiction of biblical characters as Turks and Muslim was relatively common. In seventeenth-century Holland, the turban became a ‘visual cliché’ for the Israelite, especially the patriarchs of Genesis, as is evident from the paintings of Rembrandt, his pupils, and in subsequent Dutch art. But it was in the nineteenth century that depictions of the biblical lands and their inhabitants as exotic, picturesque and timeless really gathered momentum, as the studies of Linda Nochlin and Frederick Bohrer show. They raise challenging questions not only about the agenda of the Orientalist artists but also about the expectations of their viewing public in Europe.

Calderon’s *Ruth and Naomi*, therefore, as representative of Orientalist painting, provides not only an opportunity to offer alternative readings of the Book of Ruth, as Cheryl Exum has used it, but it is also a good example of how this artist, and others from the same period, wanted to make specific associations between the contemporary inhabitants of Palestine and the biblical characters of old. It raises questions, not just of this painting but of others in the same genre, about viewers’ assumptions, and about how the Bible could be used as an authoritative medium to reinforce existing per-

50. Amitai Mendelsohn, *Prophets and Visionaries: Reuven Rubin’s Early Years, 1914–23* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum), p. 9.

ceptions of a largely Muslim Middle East held by a largely Christian Europe. Cheryl Exum in *Plotted, Shot and Painted*, in highlighting the importance of visual culture in assessing how tradition has treated biblical women, has also inadvertently drawn our attention, through her choice of paintings, to another important cultural issue in biblical interpretation, namely how Christian biblical art, either explicitly or implicitly, has represented Islam and the values it holds—a topic that requires much further analysis.

OTHER MOTHERS: MATERNITY AND MASCULINITY IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

Hugh S. Pyper

In 'Is this Naomi?', the fifth chapter of her *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, Cheryl Exum raises the question of the stability of gender categories in the Book of Ruth.¹ The chapter includes a penetrating study of a painting by Philip Calderon. Exum discusses what it is that leads to disagreement between viewers over the identity of the ambiguous figure who is shown embracing Ruth in this picture. Is this Naomi, at the point where Ruth clings to her rather than leaving her (1.14), or is Ruth's partner Boaz, who becomes her husband?

Exum explores how assumptions about the boundaries of allowable expressions of affection between women condition such interpretative decisions. The passionate nature of the embrace leads some to decide that this figure must be Boaz, even although the book contains no such explicit scene of an embrace between him and Ruth. Others, perhaps more aware that normative assumptions of heterosexuality may lie behind the first reading, interpret this figure as Naomi. The picture then becomes a celebration of the bond between Naomi and Ruth.

The ambiguity in this painting draws attention to the ambiguities in the biblical text as to the roles of the named characters. Specifically, Exum points out how Naomi occupies a number of roles that transgress traditional gender barriers. She is Elimelech's wife and Mahlon's mother, but in relation to Ruth's child Obed she is spoken of in terms that are elsewhere only used of fathers and indeed she acts like a surrogate husband to Ruth. Exum argues that there is a consistent destabilization of gender roles in Ruth that invites its readers to examine the gender distinctions with which they operate.

This illuminating study led me to examine a similar confusion of characters that occurs in pictures of David and Jonathan.² Again, viewers have

1. J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 129-74.

2. See H.S. Pyper 'Love beyond Limits: The Debatable Body in Depictions of David and Jonathan', in L.M. Nutu and J.C. Exum (eds.), *From the Text to the Canvas* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), pp. 38-59.

often had difficulty in distinguishing which of the two characters is which in any particular case. I argued that this reflected the painters' response to the ambiguities of a text confronted with the fundamental paradox of any system of hereditary patriarchy. The need to found this in pure masculinity impels the writers of the books of Samuel towards the impossible myth of androgenesis, i.e. the reproduction of males without the intervention of women. In painterly terms, this paradox leads to a breakdown in the conventions used to identify the characters in paintings and the queer penetration of one male body by another.

The present study returns to the book of Ruth, this time to examine the instability of masculinity in the text as exemplified in the figure of Boaz. Here I risk taking issue with Exum and other feminist commentators. Exum states categorically that the kind of sexual ambiguity that she sees manifested in the female characters in the book does not apply to the males: 'Unlike the women, who take a man's symbolic position, the man never symbolically takes a woman's position, though he does take on a woman's point of view...'³ In support of this, she quotes approvingly Mieke Bal's observation in her reading of Ruth that Boaz 'accepts being reflected in a female role'.⁴ Bal goes further in saying that 'if Boaz is a hero, it is because he dares to assume the point of view of the woman'. Both writers do acknowledge that there is something feminine about Boaz. However, both argue that his ability to acknowledge this is only possible because of the stability of the masculine position and indeed that it serves to reinforce this position.

Alice Bach makes a similar point when she concedes that the book of Ruth contains a scene in 2.14 that seems to be the reverse of the normal biblical pattern of seduction where a woman offers a man food.⁵ Instead of interpreting this as a feminization of Boaz, she sees this as Boaz retaining control of the narrative rather than leaving himself open to the seductive wiles of the likes of Judith, Esther and Abigail. 'At this point in the narrative at least', she writes, 'Boaz continues to control the gaze; he is not afraid that it will control him.'⁶

I want to question these assertions. My contention will be that although the text may wish to present Boaz as the fixed point around which the women regroup themselves (and for many readers apparently it succeeds in so doing) this is an illusion. Far from being the stable fixed point in the

3. Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, p. 171 n. 119.

4. Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, p. 172 n. 121; Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 87.

5. In actual fact, Boaz twice offers Ruth food, in this verse and in 3.15, as will be discussed below.

6. Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 203.

system, the patriarch's role is the one that needs the most elaborate shoring up and the one that is most vulnerable to collapse; hence the anxiety of patriarchy.

This, I will argue, accounts for the surprising fact that, in a book so ostensibly concerned with parenthood and genealogy and so unusually focussed on female characters, mothers and fathers are missing. Ruth is never called 'mother', not even in the scenes of conception and childbirth, let alone anywhere else in the book. Neither, for that matter, is Naomi ever given this title. On the two occasions the word 'mother' appears in the text (1.8; 2.11), it refers to mothers abandoned in Moab, of which more later.⁷

Boaz, for his part, is never called 'father'. The word only appears three times, once again in 2.11 when Boaz himself refers to Ruth's father, a character who is never otherwise mentioned.⁸ The other two occasions occur at the naming of Ruth and Boaz's son, Obed, who is immediately introduced in 4.17 as 'the father of Jesse, the father of David'. The text has no problem calling a newborn child a 'father'. The 'man of worth', Boaz, however, is never accorded that title, again surely unexpectedly in the light of the book's genealogical concerns.

The only mothers in this text remain behind in Moab. No one in Bethlehem is called mother. Motherhood is excluded from the narrative once it reaches Israel. In the case of the word 'father', it is only after the birth of Obed that the term is used of anyone outside Moab.

This seems to be a clear example of what Julia Kristeva calls 'abjection' in her study *Powers of Horror*, which includes a reading of the dietary prohibitions in Leviticus.

She draws attention to the equivalence between the language of abomination in the dietary laws of Leviticus and the language used in its strictures about the woman in childbirth, menstruation and incest: 'Dietary abomination has thus a parallel—unless it be a foundation—in the abomination provoked by the fertilizable or fertile feminine body (menses, childbirth)', she writes.⁹ She sees an even more radical foundation for this association in Judaism's insistence on the separation of the son from the mother as a

7. The fact that Naomi sends Ruth and Orpah back to 'the house of your mother' raises several interesting points. Does this reflect a matriarchal or matrilineal society in Moab, or may it imply that their fathers are dead? That latter observation raises another question. Do Ruth and Orpah share a mother (and presumably father), or are they from different families? Either is a possible construal of the Hebrew.

8. Rabbinic tradition does name Ruth (and Orpah's) father (see *Ruth* R. 2.9): he is Eglon, the king of Moab who is killed by Ehud in Judges 3. Ehud also subdues the whole of Moab, killing around ten thousand men in the process.

9. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 100. The chapter section in which this sentence occurs is headed 'Food and the Feminine'.

necessity for the development of the speaking being who can address his God. This she relates to the need to separate from the phantasmagoric figure of the Mother Goddess as Judaism differentiates itself from its polytheistic cultural context, although it is surely debatable as to which is cause or effect here. May not it rather be that the abjection of the maternal then has theological consequences? Be that as it may, her analysis leads us to be aware of the way in which discourse about food and feeding may be a guise for the reappearance of the maternal in Ruth.

The association between maternity and food is not confined to this psychoanalytic realm, however, significant though that is. At the most basic level, a mother not only gives birth to the child but feeds it. Within the patriarchal system, women retain a crucial role in the preparation and serving of food for men thereafter. The association goes further than this, however. For the survival of the patriarchal community, food and children are both essential. If there is no food for the children, they will not survive. However, without children to become the future hunters, farmers, gatherers and cooks, the parental generation as it ages will starve, unable to provide for itself. The link is quite explicit in Hebrew. The word זרע (seed) can be translated as both 'child' and 'edible grain'. Children not only provide the future generation but also the possibility of producing food in the future as they take on the tasks of hunting, farming and food preparation. Yet, in the short term, especially when they are young, children are net consumers of food. In times of famine, their need for food may threaten the future of the family rather than ensuring it. *In extremis*, as in the shocking case of 2 Kings 6, children themselves can become food, but at the risk of the community's future. At several levels, then, a text which finds the word 'mother' hard to utter may deal with this anxiety in discourse about food, hunger and harvest.

The lack of the mother as character in the text, I suggest, acts as a sort of narrative 'black hole', exerting a gravitational pull which draws other characters out of their ostensible roles to fill the maternal vacuum and leaving lacunae which are the narratological symptoms of the mother's absence. This has profound effects on the characters of Ruth and Naomi; indeed, Ruth finally disappears into this void. In line with Exum's argument, Naomi survives by her adoption of masculine positions and through her occupation of the very particular role of the 'mother-in-law' (חמורה), which, I will argue, turns out to be pivotal in the maintenance of the patriarchal system.

Importantly, however, the lack of the mother affects the character of Boaz just as profoundly. The irony of the book of Ruth is that the very anxiety that seeks to suppress the maternal ends up by destabilizing the patriarch to the point that he is drawn into the maternal role. In the absence of the mother, he becomes that nightmare of the patriarchal society, the feminized man, to the extent that he functions as a male mother. Boaz is the object of

desire and the provider of food and nurture, linked into the network of women's lives and ultimately silenced in the text.

This possibility for Boaz is something that the text cannot articulate but which it cannot in the end successfully repress. The symptoms of its struggle are, I will argue, to be seen in the way that the coherence of the flow of information in the story is sacrificed. The text silences the mother's voice, but cannot entirely cover over the silences themselves. These then allow the mother to reappear. She is effectively 'channelled' by Boaz who is thereby displaced from his role as father and indeed reveals the constructedness of the model of masculinity that the text seeks to assert as the foundation norm.

Unfortunately for patriarchy, this breach of all the oppositions it seeks to preserve is the logical counterpart to its dream of procreation in the absence of women.

Moab and Motherhood

The opening verses of Ruth already begin to demonstrate how the association between food and women, hunger and sexual desire, childbirth and death is a major theme. It is famine that originally makes the family of Elimelech move to Moab, just as famine causes Jacob and his family to move to Egypt. Ironically, they leave Bethlehem ('the house of bread') to find food in Moab. It is also significant that the book makes a point of describing the family as Ephrathites. If the book of Chronicles is to be believed, Ephrath, their eponymous ancestor is, unusually, a woman, setting the whole of their family group in a feminine frame.¹⁰ Food, women and their association are subtly evoked at the outset by the juxtaposition of Bethlehem and Ephrath.

That it should be Moab they make for carries not a few intertextual ironies. Food and women are closely implicated in the Hebrew Bible's hostility to Moab. In the first place, one reason given for the exclusion of Moab from the assembly is their refusal to give bread and water to the Israelites as they journeyed out of Egypt (Deut. 23.3-4). This would not suggest that the Moabites would be the first port of call for Israelites in a famine. The irony is heightened by the explanation in Num. 22.1-3 as to why the Moabites react with fear to Israel camping on their plains. The Moabites are concerned both by the fertility of Israel, represented by their sheer numbers, and their need for food.¹¹ What worries them is that the Israelites will overrun the land and

10. See 1 Chron. 2.50 where Caleb marries Ephrath who gives birth to Hur. In 1 Chron. 4.4, Hur is described as 'the firstborn of Ephrathah [here given in a feminine form] and father of Bethlehem'. This would point to an unusual use of the mother's name to form the gentile of a lineage based around Bethlehem.

11. The solution the Moabites find in Numbers is to call for Balaam to curse Israel,

'lick up all that is around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field' (22.4). Moab's reason for rejecting Israel in this verse is in case they bring about a famine. Again, the irony in the light of this of famine-stricken Israelites migrating to Moab to take up residence in its fields at the beginning of Ruth is clear.

On the other hand, despite all this apparent hostility between the two peoples, in Numbers 25 the result of the proximity between them is that the men of Israel begin to have sex with women from Moab. We may note that the biblical story ignores the reaction of the Moabite men to this situation, but surely it cannot be supposed to have improved relations. From the Moabite point of view, the predatory fertility of Israel is amply confirmed. The whole scenario so incenses Moses that he announces a general death sentence against anyone who has been led astray in this way to worship the Baal of Peor which is made manifest in the outbreak of a plague among the people.

Moabite women thus become identified as dangerous seductresses, fulfilling the stereotype of the foreign woman who represents a kind of hyper-femininity. This displacement of the excesses of female sexuality outside the community is one way in which the biblical texts seek contain their anxiety over motherhood. These texts also make the connection between female sexuality and death quite explicit. Have sex with the wrong woman and death ensues.

Such an association between Moab, food and predatory women goes back to, or perhaps generates, Israel's story of the origin of the Moabite people from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters in Genesis 15. They use wine to seduce their own father in order to give birth to sons who are also their brothers. Yet this is a solution to a problem caused by the absence of their mother, who has been turned into a pillar of salt. At the heart of Israel's story of Moab is a story of deception by young women in order to acquire sons from a reluctant patriarch in the absence of the mother. Lot is the paterfamilias, but he is also the victim of something not far from rape. His position as patriarch is only confirmed by the actions of his daughters in which he is the object, not the subject, of the sexual verbs.

The very name 'Moab', which Lot's first daughter gave to her son by her father, can be linked, by folk etymology at least, to the notion of being 'from the father' (Gen. 19.37). What more appropriate nation, then, to be in-

another injury that Deuteronomy does not forget (Deut. 23.4). Of course, his intervention has the opposite effect. Balaam prophesies the coming of a future leader, a 'star out of Jacob' who will crush Moab, a prophecy that can be taken to apply to the Davidic king who, so the book of Ruth asserts, descends from just this family of Ephrathites who make the journey back to Moab. In this wider narrative sweep, there seems to be a fated link between Elimelech's family and Moab.

volved in a story that deals with the fantasy of androgenesis, birth 'from the father'? The verse continues in a way that makes this all the clearer: 'Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day'.

In the light of this background, for Elimelech and his sons to go to Moab to seek relief from famine was bad enough. We are not told how the other inhabitants of Bethlehem react to the disaster.¹² By the way that Elimelech's decision is framed, we infer that his reaction was distinctive and that the rest of the population of Bethlehem did not take the same course of action. We can speculate why that might be. Did he have better information, or better links with Moab? Or was he particularly badly affected by the famine because of his economic status or the position of his land?

However, for the sons to go further than this after their father's death and take Moabite wives can hardly fail to cause problems. It is thus perhaps significant that the verb used in connection with their marriages is itself unusual. They literally 'lifted' women. In other contexts, this expression may carry negative overtones. It is the expression used in Ezra 9.2 and 10.44 and Neh. 13.25 for the people taking wives from foreign nations, not something Ezra condones. In 2 Chron. 13.21 it is used when Abijah 'takes' 14 wives in a context where his strength is being shown by the conquest and capture of cities. It also appears in the slightly odd context of 1 Chron. 23.22 where the daughters of Eleazar are 'taken' by their cousins the sons of Kish. While this may not have the kind of negative association of the Ezra or Nehemiah usage, there is something in this arrangement worthy of remark in the Chronicler's opinion, as are the marital arrangements of Rehoboam in 1 Chronicles 11. In any event, this may suggest some irregularity in the transaction in Ruth.

The rabbinic tradition had no doubt that the marriages with Moabite women were quite irregular and is forthright in declaring that their rapid deaths are punishment for their desertion of Israel and their folly in marrying outside the community. Be that as it may, within a few verses the family that went to Moab to preserve its life is now reduced to Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, with no men in sight. Naomi left Israel with her sons and her husband and is now a childless widow and a mother-in-law in Moab, with Moabite daughters-in-law to boot.

Note however, that no mention has been made of her motherhood in Moab. Naomi is, as we said, never described as a mother herself and there is

12. In 1 Chron. 4.22 there is some circumstantial evidence of a possible memory of a familial link between Bethlehem and Moab. It tells of Saraph, one of the sons of Judah's son Shelah, 'who married into Moab, but returned to Lehem'. If this Lehem is assimilated to Bethlehem, then, at least in the Chronicler's sources, there is a link to Moab which precedes Elimelech's journey and which might explain Elimelech's decision to make for Moab rather than anywhere else.

every reason to suppose that neither Orpah or Ruth have children. What these three women share is the death of their husbands and their failure as mothers. Orpah and Ruth have no children; Naomi has had children, but has lost them.

In this context, what are the options for the three women? Who has any obligation to look after Naomi? How likely is it that the two younger women will find new husbands given that they are widows, childless and have been married to foreign men? After all, not only have they been married before, but in ten years of marriage they have not given birth, something that might give prospective husbands pause for thought. Given the implications of the levirate system, are they obliged to restrict their search for any prospective husband to those relatives who could bring up sons in their husband's name? Is the obligation the same for both of them, or is it only Ruth, the wife of Mahlon, who we assume is the older brother from the order in which the names are given to us, who is caught up in this system? If this is the case, does Ruth have any real option but to seek out one of Mahlon's relatives as a husband, given that the alternative is very likely a lifetime as an unmarried daughter in her mother's household?

What then are Naomi's responsibilities as mother-in-law in this situation? What kind of relationship might we expect between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law? Naomi sets out clearly the impossibility that she will provide them with the prospect of new husbands herself.

In 1.8, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to return to 'the house of your mother', but in doing so underlines the fact that in marrying her sons they have left their mothers. Indeed, Orpah's decision to return to her mother's house draws attention to the fact that Ruth's decision to follow Naomi is also a reaffirmation of her decision to abandon her mother.¹³

13. This link between motherhood and abandonment is reinforced by the fact that the second and final use of the word 'mother' in the book is in Boaz's speech to Ruth where he praises her precisely for this decision to leave her home and family, while acknowledging the distress that this has caused her (2.11). Boaz, in the same speech, is also the only character to use the word 'father' in a reference to Ruth's father, whom she has left behind as well. Boaz's mention of Ruth's father also raises questions. Given that neither the narrator nor the characters have mentioned her father before this, Boaz is either privy to information we do not have, presumably reported to him by the only sources of information we can envisage, Naomi and Ruth's recounting of their adventures as relayed through the information networks of Bethlehem, or else Boaz is extrapolating, correctly or not. It may be, as we have said, that the implication of the fact that Naomi speaks of the 'mother's house' in 1.8 raises a question as to whether Ruth's father is still alive. In that case, Boaz may be making an assumption in referring to Ruth's father rather than speaking from knowledge of Ruth's situation. Whatever the case, it is surely significant that it is the leading male figure in the story who alludes to the father and may, indeed, invent him while never being called 'father' himself.

Naomi as Mother-in-law

The banishment of the mother may be somewhat less obvious in English versions because of the frequency with which Naomi is referred to as Ruth's (and Orpah's) 'mother-in-law'; ten of the twelve uses of the expression occur in Ruth. The immediate maternal connotations of the English word are not shared by the equivalent Hebrew word חַמּוּת. This is the feminine form of חָם (father-in-law) and only appears with feminine suffixes, which may well mean that it specifically designates the husband's mother, not the wife's. Rather sinisterly, however, the word in Hebrew does carry its own, no doubt fortuitous, connotations. It contains the word for death (מוֹת).

There is no etymological connection here and it can only be a matter of speculation how this assonance would have struck the ear of a Hebrew speaker. Nevertheless, the rabbinic tradition was fascinated by such wordplay and the texts of the Hebrew Bible seem to attest to the same phenomenon. This association is of the same order as the accidental pairing in English between 'mother' and 'smother'. There is no etymological link here either, but the idea of the mother as smothering comes more readily to mind because of the assonance.

Surely a Hebrew reader would be struck by the echo in a phrase like the following from 2.11:

...all you did for your mother-in-law (חַמּוּת) after the death (מוֹת) of your husband.

'Mother-in-law' and 'death' resonated with each other in these few words.

In Naomi's case, she is associated with three deaths, those of the men closest to her for whom she had responsibility as wife or mother. In her first dismissal of Ruth and Orpah she praises them for their faithfulness to the 'dead and to me'. This can just as readily be read as including her in the category of the dead as differentiating her from it; it would not be impossible to translate the phrase as 'the dead including me'. In Hebrew, of course, there is at least a virtual assonance between 'the dead' (הַמֵּתִים) and Naomi as mother-in-law (חַמּוּת).¹⁴

What this association reminds us, however, is that the designation of a woman as 'mother-in-law' in such a society carries with it an implication

14. An interesting case to juxtapose with this is the Japanese word for widow: *mibojin*. This is written in Chinese characters which, literally transcribed, mean 'the one who is not yet dead' (see Orie Endo, 'Aspects of Sexism in Language', in Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda [eds.], *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future* [New York: The Feminist Press, 1995], pp. 29-42 [34]). This starkly brings out a perception which resonates far beyond Japan that the woman who survives her husband has lost her main justification for existence.

that she is a widow, now defined by her relationship to her son. Otherwise, she would be known, as Naomi originally is, of course, as the wife of her husband. The title 'mother-in-law' applied to a woman carries with it the implication of the death of a man.

It is also a vulnerable position. This vulnerability is implied in the fact that male head of the household is commanded to honour his mother and father. While it is notable that the mother is included specifically in this injunction, this should not obscure a significant structural difference in the status of the two parents. While the father is still alive, he remains the father of the family, even if infirm. The death of his wife, though sad, does not affect his status or that of his son who remains his son, even if he is now performing all the functions of the patriarch.

If the father dies, however, the mother moves into in a new relationship to her son. He is now the father of the family. She is redefined as the mother, not the wife, of the patriarch. The aspect of her status that depended on her role as bearer and nurturer of sons who will become the future patriarchs is now fulfilled. What is she to do now?

The answer must be, 'Ensure that her son has sons in his turn'. In the biblical texts, it is women who seem to have most invested in the production of sons for the patriarch and none more so than the mother-in-law. For men, the birth of a son is a reminder of their own mortality and the fostering of an heir verges on being a necessary evil. If it were not for death, there would be no need for the son. There is at least potentially an understandable hesitancy about producing a successor who is also potentially a rival. It is a *memento mori*, in some ways rather like writing a will. For the mother, however, the son, and in turn his son, is the key to her status and survival. If the patriarch dies, she is in a perilous position if she is without a son. If, however, the son were to die childless himself, her position would be even more vulnerable. Just as in postcolonial theory it turns out that those with most invested in the continuance of colonial rule are not necessarily the colonial power, but the comprador class of assimilated members of the colonized society, so here it is the mother-in-law who is most motivated to ensure the continuity and stability of the patriarchal system.

Naomi's laments over the end of her possibilities of motherhood have to be seen in this light. She is in the worst possible situation. She has lost her husband and her sons and has no prospect of bearing sons to replace them. Is it then an asset or an additional burden that she has two Moabite daughters-in-law? The fact that her future and the future of the family has to be entrusted to the womb of a Moabite simply heightens the inescapable tension over the role of women in reproduction. As we have seen, Moabite women, with their sexual licentiousness and fertility, are the epitome of those dimensions of the feminine that are both decried by the text and yet inextricably linked to the role of women as mothers.

The implications of this for interpreting the relationship between Naomi and Ruth may be suggested by the following story. At an SBL meeting in the 1990s, Rosemary Radford Ruether recounted her experience with the book of Ruth when she was asked to lead a series of Bible study workshops with women in the Philippines. She immediately thought of using Ruth as the starting point for empowering discussions on women's solidarity. To her surprise, the suggestion was met with a good deal of hostility. 'We hate that book', she was told; 'It's the one our mothers-in-law make us read'. On further consideration, she began to see the point. In a later book, describing the cycle of violence that can arise within Hindu families, she writes:

Incorporated young into the husband's family, young brides have traditionally suffered abuse by mothers-in-law, husbands and even sisters of the husband, and enjoyed little status until they could produce sons that grew old enough to protect them. This family system tends to produce a cycle of violence in which the formerly abused bride becomes the abusing mother-in-law to her new daughter-in-law.¹⁵

The role of the mother-in-law in a range of patriarchal societies around the world such as China, India and the Middle East bears many similarities to the situation in the Philippines and arguably provides us with material for reflection on ancient Israel.

David Ghanim, in his study *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*, points out that the power structure between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is constructed on the same assumptions of hierarchy and dominance as the patriarchal context in which it arises. He reminds us, 'It is important to emphasize that even though the mother-in-law represents female power, authority and status in a patriarchal system, she is also the pinnacle form of their weakness and surrender to the system'.¹⁶ Although he presents these two aspects of the position of the mother-in-law as contrasted, one could argue that the two are in fact the two sides of one coin. It is the most vulnerable who fear they have most to lose by the collapse of the system, even if that system is built on their oppression.

The power of the mother-in-law is, after all, the compensation the system offers to the woman for her earlier humiliation. Having submitted to the menial status of being a daughter-in-law and performed the duties required of them, women can at least look forward to some leisure and status as their own daughters-in-law take over the running of the household. A son who does not marry leaves his mother carrying on with the work as she becomes increasingly less able. The mother can see her contemporaries moving into

15. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religions* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 50.

16. David Ghanim, *Gender and Violence in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), p. 162.

a more relaxed and comfortable lifestyle and no doubt casting pitying glances in her direction, especially if they have grandchildren to carry on the household.

All this means that women have more than a theoretical interest in their sons' choice of wives. Not only are these women going to mother their grandchildren, but they are the support system for their mothers-in-law. Foreign daughters-in-law are a problem because they are an unknown quantity and will need instruction in the customs of the household over matters that a daughter-in-law from within the family would naturally understand.

A case in point is Rebekah who finds that her son Esau's Hittite wives are a source of such trouble to her that she is 'weary of her life' (Gen. 27.46). Here is one mother-in-law who has an unhappy experience with foreign daughters-in-law. That is the very reason Jacob is sent away to marry into the family of Rebekah's brother. It is also the last we hear of Rebekah until the note about her burial in Gen. 49.31. Ironically, she is laid to rest in a tomb bought from the Hittites (49.32).

This may put a possible alternative complexion on Ruth's famous declaration of her undying loyalty to Naomi. It is one thing for a free and equal woman with many options to declare her loyalty to another; it is quite different if that woman is a subordinate with few options. Indeed, the whole transaction takes on a very different colour if we imagine a subordinate who is liable to be a burden announcing that they will follow you anywhere, live with you and not leave you until death. That would not be a happy prospect for the one so burdened. By the same token, Ruth's rhetorical ploy of stating that Naomi's god will be her god may represent a conversion, but could also be read as just the kind of syncretism that the biblical texts most abhor. Yahweh is not to be equated with any other god.

The Missing Mother-in-law

Carol Meyers has pointed out that both the biblical writers and the majority of commentators have played down or ignored the role of informal women's networks in the life of rural communities. Ideologies that promote or assume the relegation of women to the domestic sphere have underestimated the public consequences of the flow of information and decision-making among the women of a society, especially in matters of marriage and family.¹⁷

The Book of Ruth is one exception to this. It is made explicit that it is the women of Bethlehem who react to Naomi's homecoming in the description

17. Carol Meyers, "Women of the Neighborhood" (Ruth 4.17): Informal Female Networks in Ancient Israel', in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 110-27.

of the 'buzz' that runs around the city, and it is they who together congratulate Naomi on the birth of her son and give him a name. Women act in concert, discussing the happenings in their town, passing judgement and adding their own contributions.

However, the points at which there is explicit mention of these female networks by no means exhausts their possible ramifications in the text. Information flows through the text and a crucial element in plot development is who knows what. One way in which those with less ostensible power in a situation may be able to have an influence is through the control of the flow of knowledge.

If we examine the flow of information in this text, we will discover that Naomi seems to know things that, on reflection, raise a question over the possible sources of her information. How, for instance, does she know in Ruth 3.2 that Boaz will be alone on the threshing-floor at night? Would this be normal behaviour for a man of his status or is it an idiosyncratic habit of Boaz's? Whatever the case, Naomi does seem to be in a position to be quite specific about Boaz's intentions on this particular night. Has she found this information out by speaking to Boaz? This suggestion raises its own problems about the flow of information as there is no record of such a meeting.

Furthermore, nothing Boaz says indicates that he had any suspicion, even after the event, of Naomi's involvement in this meeting. A direct conversation between them would surely have given him a clue to this. Has she found out his plans through the informal networks of gossip? In that case, the question has to be how secure such information would be. In addition, so much of her scheme depends on this meeting that it seems too risky to leave it to chance. Is there anyone who not only would know Boaz's movements but might even be in a position to influence them and who would have an interest in bringing about the meeting of Boaz and Ruth?

There is one unmentioned but plausible character that has both the motive and opportunity not only to pass on this information but also to contribute to the success of the plan: Boaz's mother.¹⁸ Granted she is never

18. Although she is never mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, Boaz's mother does appear in the New Testament, in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Mt. 1.5). She turns out to be Rahab, usually identified with the harlot in Jericho who sheltered Israel's spies in return for the safety of her household. The process by which Rahab becomes identified with Boaz's mother is obscure, to say the least. In a characteristically thorough investigation, Richard Bauckham suggests a plausible answer from the conflation of the two characters named Salmah/Salmon in Chronicles and the associated name Rechab in 1 Chron. 2.54-55 (see his 'Tamar's Ancestry and Rahab's Marriage: Two Problems in the Matthean Genealogy', *Novum Testamentum* 37 [1995], pp. 313-29). It is tempting to read characteristics of Rahab back into the character of Boaz's mother, although the suggestion by a former student of mine that Rahab, now ensconced in Bethlehem, had gone back to her old trade and that the scenes in Ruth 3 were all engineered to recruit Ruth to her bordello is probably taking this a bit far.

mentioned, but he must have had a mother. Of course, she may be dead or missing, but let us suppose she is still alive.

If so, she and Naomi share many features and share a common conundrum. Whatever the details of the relationship, the two women are in fact related through marriage at least, given that Elimelech and Boaz are kinsmen. Like Naomi, Boaz's mother is a widow, or so we can infer given that Boaz operates as the head of the household and no mention is ever made of his father. Both are dependent on marriageable but problematic members of the next generation with no descendants themselves. From the point of view of these women, both Ruth and Boaz need to marry and produce sons, but in both cases there are apparently obstacles. Ruth is handicapped as a childless widow and a foreigner; Boaz is unmarried, despite all the cultural pressures for marriage that would seem to accrue to his social position.¹⁹

In addition, we can suppose that both Naomi and Boaz's mother will know that the property of Elimelech will pass after Naomi's death to a redeemer. Boaz meets the requirements but more than one contender for that role is around. There is a relative who clearly frequents the city, so that Boaz can be fairly sure that he will pass by the gate when he is required. As such, he is hardly likely to be unknown to Boaz's mother.

What would be more likely than that the two mothers should come up with a scheme that preserves both property and progeny within the family and that will provide them with the grandchildren that ensures the preservation of the line and the livelihoods of the two older women? This would then explain not only the fact that Boaz knows all about Ruth, but also the emphatic reduplicated verbal idiom (רָחֵם רָחֵם) that he uses when he reveals that he has been told about her (2.11). The rabbis interpret this by saying that he has heard the story in the house and in the field. He has not only heard the story; it has been told in such a way as to awaken his sympathy and respect for Ruth. He has been made abundantly aware of her faithfulness and loyalty.

Could it be that he has been the target of an orchestrated campaign as his mother, in cahoots with Naomi, loses no opportunity to sing the praises of this marriageable relative, emphasizing her care for her elderly female relative and her qualifications as a daughter-in-law? After all, if Ruth marries Boaz she will be in the unusual position of having two mothers-in-law to look after, but she has proven her worth in this regard. From his mother's point of view, she could do much worse than to share the kind of support Naomi has had, whatever the motives behind it. If Boaz, as we are conjectur-

19. Boaz's unmarried status was something that the rabbis felt the need to explain by asserting that his wife died on the day that Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem. There is no biblical support for this, but the fact that such an explanation was offered shows that the absence of a wife was something that had to be accounted for.

ing, is living with his mother with no wife to perform the necessary female roles, the best argument for overcoming his reluctance to marry may be to play on the fact that he will no longer have sole responsibility for her care.

It is clear, too, that Boaz is well versed in the legal implications of the situation. The way that he so quickly comes up with the plan to ensure that the nearer relative assents to the transfer of the property, and then to the marriage, suggests that he has the complexities clear in his mind. Has his mother, again with Naomi's connivance, made sure that the facts of the case and the relevant legal obligations have come to his attention?

It is tempting, then, to imagine that the two women have wracked their brains as to how to get the reluctant Boaz to notice Ruth. What plausible scenario can they invent to ensure that Boaz is on his own and unobserved in a place where Ruth can be sent to meet him? Perhaps Boaz does have a habit of going down to winnow the grain or perhaps the idea has to be put in his head. Whatever the truth of this, how much better if both parties can be co-ordinated without Boaz becoming suspicious.

Once the possibility of Boaz's mother being involved is raised, this may cause us to look again at the places where the voices of women in Bethlehem come to the surface. It is a narrative convention that has them all speak with one voice at the two points in the story where they intervene. In any plausible reconstruction, we might suspect that there is some co-ordinating voice behind this chorus.

The first time the women's voices are heard is when they collectively wonder, 'Is this Naomi?' This implies at the least that there is a memory of Naomi that the women have kept for over ten years, despite the famine and other events that have happened in the meantime. Secondly, they intervene to name the child born to Ruth and ascribe it to Naomi, praising Ruth as being more precious than seven sons to her. There are many strange features to this moment. Nowhere else does a group of women name a child. That is the business of the child's mother or father, or perhaps grandfather. By what right do the women act? The implication would seem to be that they have come to a common mind on the name and act as a unity, a most unlikely state of affairs without someone to take the initiative at the least.

If, however, we regard the chorus of women as masking the voice of the one woman who might have both the knowledge and the status to utter both these speeches, things become clearer. Boaz's mother would in any case be counted among the chorus. She certainly would have known Naomi and have reason to remember her. She also, as the maternal grandmother, would carry the familial authority to announce the name of Boaz's child given that the text disqualifies both Ruth and Boaz from doing so. It is hard to see on what grounds unrelated women could do this. Again, if we follow this line, the text's anxiety to suppress the implications of parenthood means that it is

the mother-in-law, once more, who is left to fill the space of the patriarch. Boaz's mother names the child in the stead of her dead husband.

All arguments from silence are speculative, of course. All that is being claimed here is that (a) there are a number of oddities in the book of Ruth where the flow of information and authority in the texts is hard to explain; (b) that an economical hypothesis to account for this would be to postulate a role for Boaz's mother, and (c) that the suppression of this maternal figure is consistent with a general suppression of mothers within the text. The lengths this story of motherhood goes to in order to efface the word and role of the mother may be reason enough why the other mother in the story, Boaz's mother, remains a silent and unidentified character but one with a vital role in the story. This suppression is of a piece with the wider tactics of the book. It is also why Boaz willy-nilly takes on aspects of the maternal role to fill the void in the book created by this suppression.

Boaz as Mother

What, then, justifies the verdict that Boaz is feminized and indeed takes on maternal characteristics in the text? There are, I submit, a number of lines of evidence. First, to adopt an expression of my own mother's from the rich dialect tradition of Scotland, there is something about Boaz that puts him in the category of the 'auld sweetie-wife'. Literally, of course, a sweetie-wife is a female purveyor of sweetmeats, but the word has a secondary meaning. The *Concise Scots Dictionary* sums this up as follows: '*freq of a(n effeminate) man; a gossipy, garrulous person*'.²⁰ The use of parentheses is interesting; a man can be gossipy, but that is a characteristic that draws him into the orbit of the feminine, to the extent of suggesting or confirming the label 'effeminate'. One root for this is that the sweetie-wife is precisely a man who participates to an unusual degree in women's informal networks.

I would add that it may also imply a certain prim social conformity and fastidiousness—perhaps preciousness. Boaz's odd speech patterns may suggest this too, although the linguistic evidence is too slight to bear much weight. Nevertheless, the heavy use of paragogic *nuns* in his speech, his wordiness, his fondness for what I suspect may have been the rather irritating rhetorical tic of making statements in the form of negative questions, all suggest a kind of fussy pomposity.²¹ Much of this disappears in most translations.

20. Mairi Robinson (ed.), *The Concise Scots Dictionary* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), p. 691.

21. For British readers, there is an echo of Captain Mainwaring in *Dad's Army* here, though Boaz shows a dignity and capacity for empathy that are not in the Captain's reach.

Gossip may be subversive in some contexts, but it is also a cruel instrument that can police social conformity and ensure the exclusion of those who do not fit the community's norms.²² It makes all the difference as to whether you are being gossiped with or gossiped about. Boaz's speech to Ruth shows both his pomposity and his unusual empathy for a young woman and the hardships she faces as a woman. He is hardly a proto-feminist, but he is able to appreciate and express what Ruth has gone through and the difficulty and delicacy of her current situation.

Boaz is not just seemingly well aware of the information that moves through women's networks, as we have seen above. He is the character in the story who explicitly manipulates the communal circulation of information. He makes sure that Ruth leaves the threshing floor before 'one could recognize another': 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor', he muses (3.14). In narratological terms, this is an interesting sentence. It presumably represents inner speech, as otherwise it is hard to find an audience for it. The only people present are Ruth and Boaz and surely it would have been more natural for Boaz to address her directly: 'Let it not be known that *you* came to the threshing floor'.

The further questions this prompts are: who does Boaz not want to know about this and what would be the consequences if they did? The most obvious possibility may well be the unknown redeemer. If word gets out that Ruth and Boaz have already had some kind of liaison, his rights have been breached and the possibility that Boaz can persuade him to concede both Ruth and Elimelech's land will surely be damaged. The impact on the reputation of both Ruth and Boaz is also a consideration, of course.

The fear is not that the redeemer will find Ruth on the threshing floor or even meet her on the way back. The fear is that, whoever sees Ruth, it is through informal networks, and especially the women's networks, that the news would likely spread. The irony is, of course, that we would not now be reading the book of Ruth if this story had not got out, no matter whether as reportage or fiction. We see Boaz trying to repress what has become the incident by which he is known to posterity.²³ His remark emphasizes the importance of controlling informal networks but also his awareness of them.

Besides this implication in the women's networks, Boaz also takes on the nurturing role of the mother. On two occasions he supplies Ruth with food,

22. Saul knew the power of women's conversation when he reacts so badly to the news of the song praising David at his expense, as he reads it.

23. There is some parallel here to Abimelech in Judg. 9.54 who orders his attendant to kill him after he has been mortally wounded by a woman throwing a millstone from the tower in Thebez 'lest men say of me, "A woman killed him"'. This story is not only recorded for all to read in Judges; Joab uses it as a byword for the rashness of approaching a city wall in 2 Sam. 11.21 in his prediction of David's response to the news of Uriah's death.

once in the field and once on the threshing floor. On the first occasion, not only does he go out of his way to lighten the burden of her gleaning, so ensuring that she has enough food, drink and rest, but he also personally feeds her parched grain. The point here is that this is not a matter of passing on the untreated grain that she can pick up for herself in the field. The parched grain is prepared and must have been brought by Boaz or his attendants to the field for their own sustenance. Boaz gives Ruth some of this private, prepared store.

Ruth Tsoffar comments:

Boaz' gift of roasted grains enables Ruth to return to her mother-in-law, Naomi, not as the impoverished gleaner who shares her grains, but as a satiated provider of bread. From a psychological perspective, it can be argued that Ruth is thereby transformed into a 'mother' who can begin to heal the symbolic wound in Naomi's family, but especially in Moab.²⁴

I would argue, however, that, if this scene introduces a mother into the text, that mother is Boaz. Ruth simply passes on to Naomi what she has received from Boaz. If this makes her a mother to Naomi in Tsoffar's eyes, why should we not say the same of Boaz in relation to Ruth?

Subsequently, Ruth threshes what she has gathered, in a foreshadowing of Boaz's winnowing of the grain at night. Does the fact that they share this common task make Ruth more masculine, or Boaz more feminine? When Ruth returns to Naomi, Naomi is able to appraise the amount she has gleaned. The pronouns of the next verse make it difficult to decide whether Ruth doles out her leftovers to Naomi once she is satisfied, or whether it is the other way around. Does Naomi take what she needs, and leave the rest for Ruth? After all, Ruth has already been fed by Boaz. She is merely passing on to Naomi what she has received.

The same could be said of the incident on the threshing floor which certainly reverses a number of conventions in biblical scenes of courting. Typically, it is the man, or his proxy, who seeks out the woman.²⁵ In the classic type-scene of 'the woman at the well', not only does the man wait for the woman at a meeting place where he is sure that women will gather, but the woman offers to draw water for him. Here it is Ruth that travels alone at night to await Boaz and Boaz who offers her food again, filling her apron with corn, this time explicitly mentioning that it for her mother-in-law. It is

24. Ruth Tsoffar, 'The Trauma of Otherness and Hunger: Ruth and Lot's Daughters', *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 5 (2007); accessible online at http://wjudaism.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/wjudaism/article/viewArticle/3178/1341#LinkTarget_116.

25. One exception to this is Abigail who seeks out David, but that is an unusual situation for several reasons.

easy to miss that the explicit interest of the text in these situations is that Naomi should be well fed and cared for.

Other aspects of this scene are also clear contraventions of the usual roles. In all the sexual legislation in Leviticus 18 and 20 that discusses the taboos over 'uncovering the nakedness' of partners, the act is always undertaken by a man. Ruth is the exception in that she 'uncovers' Boaz's feet. She is the only woman who is the subject of this verb in the Hebrew Bible. Boaz is one of very few men who are the object of the verb and, as one can easily infer, the only man who is the object of a woman's uncovering.²⁶ Once more, conventional gender roles are reversed.²⁷

Boaz is also feminized in his role in the manipulation of communication in the text. Not only is he part of the informal networks, as we have seen, but in chap. 4 he takes on something of the 'trickster' role than more often is taken by women in the Hebrew Bible. He uses mild subterfuge to make sure that both land and wife remain within the family. He makes sure Ruth's night on the threshing floor remains a secret and opens the discussion with the anonymous kinsman by a discussion of the land. He cunningly establishes agreement that the land and Ruth are linked, so that when the kinsman realizes he cannot marry Ruth, he has already implicitly conceded that this means that he must renounce his claim to the land. If, however, the kinsman had been able to show that Ruth had a prior liaison with Boaz, he might have argued that he could now hardly be expected to marry her but that this did not affect his claim to the land.

The upshot of all this is that Boaz does gain Ruth as his wife. The people at the gate congratulate him and evoke two previous stories from Boaz's ancestry: the stories of Rachel and Leah and of Tamar. These are both stories of women who had to get around the problem of what we might term 'the reluctant patriarch'. Leah and her father overcome the obstacle of Jacob's preference for her younger sister by the trick of substituting Leah for Rachel

26. Most of the references to men's nakedness being uncovered are in contexts where a man who sleeps with another man's wife or daughter is deemed to uncover the nakedness of their husband or father. The one direct reference to the uncovering of a man's nakedness is to Noah, naked in his tent in Gen. 9.21 and there the verb is in the *hithpael* form, implying that he uncovered himself. Interestingly, in the light of the unusual situation in Ruth where the woman takes the initiative in uncovering Boaz and then invites him to 'cover her with his cloak (כִּנְיָ)', the idiom for revealing the father's nakedness in Deut. 23.1 (see also 27.20) is 'to uncover his [the father's] cloak'. This is three verses before the pronouncement that no Moabite shall be admitted into the Lord's congregation (23.4-7), which is clearly at odds with the situation in Ruth, at least on the face of it.

27. Lot's daughters are the seducers of their fathers and Potiphar's wife removes Joseph's cloak. One scene where a naked man is asleep in the presence of a woman is at the creation of Eve in Gen. 2.21-22.

in the dark so that he sleeps with her and thereby is obliged to accept her for his wife. Rachel in her turn has to resort to the use of substitute mothers and mandrakes before she finally gives birth to Joseph. Leah's deception is finally responsible for the birth of Judah, who, in his turn, has to be tricked by Tamar into fathering Perez, the son who will be Boaz's ancestor. Twice in the history of Judah's line, then, only the determined intervention of women in order to overcome patriarchal reluctance has ensured its survival. Jacob was seemingly prepared to wait fourteen years for Rachel, revealing little sense of urgency about fathering a son by her, and Judah was more concerned to save the life of his son Shelah than to ensure the continuity of his own family line.

Implicitly, then, Boaz in turn is enrolled as another reluctant patriarch. This may lie behind the somewhat tactless way in which he lets slip the verdict that if his rival, the nearer kinsman, is willing to marry Ruth, that will be טוב ('good', 3.13). This could carry various nuances—from a stoic wish to put a brave face on this bad potential outcome to an inadvertent expression of a hope for rescue from an inevitable and unsought marriage—, but even on the best construction it is hardly the expression of an all-conquering commitment to Ruth by her prospective husband and a love that will brook no obstacles.

One might think that any tendency for Boaz to be displaced from the role of the patriarch is now at an end. He takes Ruth as his wife, and 'goes in to her' (4.13). Yet it is at this climactic moment that Boaz is most decisively unmanned. He is, so to speak, shouldered aside by Yhwh who is the one who gives Ruth conception. This, be it noted, is the one time that Yhwh takes an active role in the story. His name appears elsewhere, it is true, but nowhere else does the narrator clearly attribute an action to him. It is Yahweh who makes Ruth pregnant, not Boaz.

Thereafter, it is Ruth, not Boaz, who becomes the subject of the verb ילד in this verse and in the women's acclamation in 4.15, a verb more often applied to the male begetting of children than to women bearing them.

Naomi then takes up the child and it is the women who name him. Boaz apparently has no role in these verses, or, rather, his role is being fulfilled by the women. Once again, a reversal occurs whereby he is forced into the position that women throughout the genealogical accounts of the Bible have to occupy: he is ignored. Yet so too is Ruth. The moment she becomes a mother in the text, her name disappears from the text. It is Naomi who is praised for having a child and who becomes its nurse, in line with the text's inability to speak of the mother. As we have argued, it is Naomi, and Boaz's mother, hidden within the chorus of the neighbourhood women, who have most invested in the production of this child. Ruth is praised, but not as a mother. She is the faithful daughter-in-law, 'better than seven sons'. At this moment of her life, she is accepted, but in avowedly masculine terms, for her

role in relation to her mother-in-law. She has done what Naomi's sons failed to do. She has provided the next generation of her care. Pointedly, Boaz gets no mention at all in these verses.

These reversals continue. Even the terms in which the newborn boy is praised are oddly maternal. He is to become the one who restores Naomi's life and nourishes her in her old age, almost as if he were to become her mother. Again, how much more clearly could the text make the point that it is not the future of Boaz's house that is the main concern here? The boy's function appears in his name: Obed, the servant. After all these vicissitudes, it is Naomi as mother-in-law whose position is now ensured. Her needs for care and for food are now provided for. So too is Boaz's mother, now a mother-in-law in her own right. Far from the patriarch being the concern of this whole patriarchal system, what is celebrated is the way that it has worked to the benefit of those who are most dependent on it: the mothers-in-law. Ruth has worked with Boaz to provide both women not only with abundant food but with the son who will continue to provide for her. This inevitably means that she has to become a mother, but this fact the text glosses over in the most remarkable manner, erasing both Ruth and her husband and replacing them with the voices of the mothers-in-law, the true champions of patriarchal succession.

'The faithful devour the foreigner'

In this study, the attempt has been made to show that Kristeva's notion of the abjection of the maternal can be demonstrated in the book of Ruth, perhaps surprisingly. However, as Roland Boer points out, Kristeva's own reading of Ruth, which appears both in *Strangers to Ourselves* and in the resumé in her exchange of letters with Catherine Clément entitled *The Feminine and the Sacred*, is disappointingly uncritical.²⁸ She seemingly ignores how her own insights into the operation of Leviticus are, in many ways, borne out in the text of Ruth. Indeed, she seems to go along with the text's enterprise of abjecting the maternal.

Ruth becomes the example of the hospitality to the foreigner that Kristeva sees as the implication of the text. The infiltration of foreignness into the Davidic line means, so Kristeva argues, that there is no ultimate stability in the monarchy. 'If David is *also* Ruth, if the sovereign is *also* a Moabite, peace of mind will then never be his lot, but a constant quest for welcoming and going beyond the other in oneself.' That seems to me insightful in its pointing to the inherent instability of the monarchy, though it is the monarch as the epitome of the dilemmas of masculinity that is in focus

28. Roland Boer, 'The Search for Redemption: Julia Kristeva and Slavoj Žižek on Marx, Psychoanalysis and Religion', *Filozofija i društvo* 1 (2007), p. 164.

here. However, the assumption that this instability leads to 'welcoming and going beyond the other in oneself' seems to consider only one rather optimistic outcome, which the subsequent history of the monarchy, of the biblical narrative and of that narrative's cultural legacy hardly bears out.

Surely, in Kristeva's own terms, the instability at the core of the psychic identity of the Davidic king and of the biblical construction of masculinity is due to a constant battle to expunge the ineradicable fact of being generated through the abject female body. The only way to deal with this positively may be to cease striving and learn to welcome the foreign as she suggests. However, the alternative, however self-destructive, is surely just as likely; the failure to expel the foreign simply leads to more violent and determined efforts to succeed the next time.

As I read the story of David and his dynasty, it is not told as a story of a line that succeeds by welcoming the other. Throughout *Samuel and Kings*, any move by the monarch to assimilate to the surrounding kingdoms, especially by marrying foreign wives, is condemned and seen as leading to a disaster. Repetition of the disaster can only be avoided by a complete and if necessary violent repudiation of the other as epitomized by the foreign wife. It is possible in this light to read *Ruth* as a cautionary tale. No wonder things went wrong: David was already flawed in his ancestry, no matter how agreeable and tractable his mother was, and that element of the foreign woman in the dynasty poisons the whole system that had sought to absorb it. Do not let us fall for the delusion that this depends on the personal qualities of the foreign wife. Whether she is a *Ruth* or a *Jezebel*, no good can come of her.

Indeed, the books of *Samuel and Kings* show little interest in mothers. David's own mother is only mentioned once. It is striking but, on reflection, not surprising that the books of *Samuel* contain so little genealogical material about him. David's parents are, in some ways, an embarrassment to the story. He inaugurates the hereditary kingship, but this is not because of his biological descent. On the contrary, throughout the books of *Samuel* the epithet 'son of Jesse' is applied to David in contexts where his claims to the throne are being questioned.

If his father hardly appears, his mother is even less prominent. The one time that she is mentioned is when, in one of his first acts when he finally breaks with *Saul*, David hands over his mother and father for safe-keeping to, of all people, the king of *Moab*. Why does David feel this is the most appropriate place for them? We can invent some plausible answers. His father, if the stories are consistent, might well be supposed to have known his grandmother *Ruth* and perhaps even to have had contact with her relatives. David's action may be evidence of the protective instinct of a good son. On the other, David's parents may be an obstacle to his ambitions. They remind everyone of his humble and ethnically diverse origins.

At a more profound textual level, however, this incident enacts the text's ambivalence over maternity. The one time David's mother is mentioned, it is in order for her to be banished into the intertextual ghetto of Moab, the byword for rampant but dangerous female sexuality that is to be kept firmly at bay from Israel. Motherhood in David's story, so the book of Ruth would tell us, came out of Moab, although the title 'mother' has remained there and never leaves. In this story, the embarrassment of motherhood is consigned to Moab once more.

At the end of her chapter on Ruth, Kristeva sums up the message of the book as follows:

The faithful devour the foreigner, assimilate him and integrate him under the protection of their religion's moral code, which both integrator and integrated support. Covered by such religious ideals, devouring fantasies are not expressed and the guilt they might give rise to is avoided.²⁹

For her, this is a positive outcome, introducing a constant questioning by the foreigner right into the heart of the Israelite monarchy. This is in marked contrast to the readings of Ruth by postcolonial feminists such as Laura Donaldson and Musa Dube. For them, the way in which the book both effaces and emphasizes Ruth's status as a Moabite is deeply problematic. Ruth gains value only by abandoning her Moabite family, customs and faith, but is never fully accepted into Bethlehem's community. Her son becomes Naomi's and she is either referred to as the Moabite or passed over in silence. The text ultimately can find no place for her except as she is swept up in the genealogical stream that leads to the Davidic monarchy.

Donaldson, as a native American commentator, regards Ruth as an ancient Pocahontas, the model of the native woman who, out of love, saves the conqueror's life and thus contributes to the colonial suppression of her own culture. The sign of hope for her is Orpah, who makes the courageous decision to return to her mother's house, in defiance of the Israelite father.

In contrast to this, Kristeva uses an arresting phrase: 'The faithful devour the foreigner (*Les fidèles dévorent l'étranger*)'.³⁰ Given her own work on the links between women and food, it is surprising again that she does not consider the possible negative implications of such a description. Does the foreigner enjoy being devoured and assimilated? What taboos do the faithful transgress by consuming such foreign fare? The morsel that is devoured may, in the end, not prove to be entirely digestible.

I submit that that is exactly what has happened here. The text devours Ruth in order to feed the mothers-in-law. As Kristeva goes on to make clear

29. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

30. Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 110.

in the passage quoted above, the ideology of the text operates to cover up this act of cannibalism and seeks to present it under the guise of an idyll of female friendship and of marriage. In the process, however, the impossible fantasy of androgenesis is shown in all its instability. Far from shoring up or stabilizing the role of the male protagonist in the story, the complex and fragile interconnections of roles that construct and maintain the ideology of patriarchy become visible in the silences of the text. Those most disadvantaged by the system, the childless widows, prove to be the ones with most to gain by its perpetuation. Mothers-in-law rule.

‘A BREEDER OR TWO FOR EACH LEADER’: ON MOTHERS IN JUDGES 4 AND 5

Jack M. Sasson

In opening one of her many perceptive contributions on Judges, Cheryl Exum notes that it ‘exhibits an enigmatic complexity; so much transpires on different levels that multiple interpretations are inevitable, as the plurality of views in current scholarship illustrates’.¹ Elsewhere, Cheryl had discussed the theme of motherhood (in its comforting as well as sinister facets) in Judges 4–5, where are crowded Deborah, Jael, and Sisera’s mother. In offering this study with affection and respect to Cheryl, I want to develop some of her insights and add one more interpretation for her to consider.²

A Mother in America

Not long ago, as the election for a new American president was heating up, internet sites with Christian evangelical perspectives were proclaiming the renewal of God’s plan. In their reading of history, the biblical Deborah had morphed into Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, then the Vice-Presidential candidate for the Republican Party.³ For these evangelicals, Sarah Palin was,

1. ‘The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1989), pp. 410-31 (410).

2. ‘Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?’, in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. Gale Yee; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 65-90 (71-75).

3. ‘Sometimes it takes a true mother to rally the troops. I hope that Palin, a woman who believes in prayer and is filled with the Holy Ghost, will take her hockey stick and smash the glass ceiling in American politics once and for all’ (J. Lee Grady, ‘Sarah Palin and the Deborah Anointing’, n.p. [cited 11 January 2010] Online: <http://juliapalermo.wordpress.com/2008/09/12/sarah-palin-and-the-deborah-anointing-by-j-lee-grady/>). See Brian Abshire, ‘Is Sarah Palin the New Deborah?’, n.p. [cited 11 January 2010] Online: <http://christian-civilization.org/articles/is-sarah-palin-the-new-deborah/>).

In the war for independence from England, the Song of Deborah (and especially the curse of Meroz) was cited more than any other scriptural passage as sermonizers thundered against perfidious England. (Information courtesy of my colleague James Byrd, who is writing a book on biblical citations in late eighteenth-century North America.)

like Deborah, a true mother in God's latest Zion. Like her, she did not shy from calling on the God of Israel. She would rally America against the latest Canaanites: homosexuals, abortionists, humanists, liberals, and, most pernicious, Francophiles. Like Barak (read Barack Obama?), Republicans had lost their moral bearings, and like Deborah, Sarah would put steel into their spine. Alas, as we all know, unlike Deborah, Sarah fell short on her mission; but I cannot say that the evangelizing vision crafting the equation has strayed too far from roles modern scholarship has assigned Deborah and Barak.

I focus on chaps. 4 and 5, chapters that cover a somewhat similar subject: a battle that pitted Hebrews against Canaanites sometime after Israel conquered the land its God had promised and before it matured into a monarchy. For convenience I shall call the account in chap. 4 'Prose' and the second one either 'Poem' or 'Song'. The antagonists in both are the same, although, they are not as fully deployed in the Poem. On Israel's side is Barak, inspired by the prophet Deborah. Representing Canaan is Jabin of Hazor, whose forces are managed by his commander Sisera. In both versions, the Canaanites, though superior in armament, are defeated and in both Sisera is murdered by a woman, Jael.

The two accounts, however, differ on details, among them the participation of tribes, the staging of the battle, and the elaboration of Sisera's death. Above all, they differ in their language: chap. 4 delivers a narrative in prose that, albeit somewhat choppy, nevertheless follows a trajectory well rehearsed in earlier chapters of Judges. The language, indeed the grammar, for the event changes in chap. 5. There we find a poetic reflection on the same events, but with radically different idioms and a structure that is fragmented, kaleidoscopic, and cubist. The confrontation moves from the human to cosmic and the tension is no longer between Hebrews and Canaanites but among the Hebrew tribes. There is little apparent continuity from one verse to another, except in two scenes that focus simultaneously on Sisera: as he is being killed by Jael, his mother anxiously awaits his triumphant return home. The Hebrew itself is not always intelligible and we have difficulty following one sentiment to the next. The problem is compounded by the text's manipulation over time and by the fact that the inherited Hebrew consonants received their vowels much later, guided by Mishnaic rather than Classical Hebrew grammar. The vocabulary is esoteric, with hardly any extra-biblical equivalents. Even in antiquity, comprehension was difficult and this is reflected in ancient translations, such as Greek and Aramaic.

Historicity and Primacy

These observations lead me to briefly review two recurring issues raised about Judges 4 and 5. The first has to do with how much history there is in either

or both versions. The second is about the primacy of one version of events over the other. The two matters are inter-related and they plunge us into a series of hotly debated issues about Israel and its origins. I need not note here that, as yet, we have no victory stela at Tabor or Taanach, no bas-relief honoring the deeds of Barak or of Jael, no shrine dedicated to Deborah, and no tombstone for Sisera. We do have Mari documents with a Hazor king named Ibni-Addu and since the elements *ibnu* and *yābîn* could be related, it may confirm that the name Jabin was a traditional element in Hazor royal names. If so, it might explain why Joshua can kill Jabin (Josh. 11.10-11) and then Barak could do the same presumably to a succeeding king.⁴ Still, it is not easy to explain how he could hold in the Prose the otherwise unknown title, 'King of Canaan', how neither Jabin nor Hazor is mentioned in the Poem, and how Jabin could have ruled Hazor which, according to archeology, was not viable from the days of Seti I to the Monarchic period. But that is where the study of biblical poetry sought to affect the discussion.

The Date of the Poem

From the early days of biblical scholarship, there were opposite perspectives on the Poem. Maurice Vernes was not the first to judge it '...une œuvre éminemment artificielle, dont quelques tirades éloquentes ou brillantes ne peuvent pas dissimuler le vide'.⁵ In view of the alleged Aramaisms, the Poem was set a half century after the Prose, so late in the fifth century. More commonly, however, the Poem was granted an immediacy of inspiration that was born from the heat of the moment. The reasons for this accord was not because scholars found biblical memory to be reliable or were blind to the artificial nature of biblical chronology;⁶ rather, since the days of German Romanticism it was accepted that the poetry crafted by the people was spontaneous, primitive, and naïve; but it was also truer to what was being observed and likely to be relayed unchanged for generations.⁷ The recovery

4. Père Roland de Vaux thought this idea 'not worthy of consideration'. He gravitated toward the theory that Jabin was first defeated by Barak and then by Joshua, reversing tradition (*The Early History of Israel* [trans. David Smith; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978], pp. 657-58 (= *Histoire ancienne d'Israël* (2 vols.; Paris: Lecoffre, 1971, 1973), I, p. 601).

5. Cited from George Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), pp. 130-31.

6. Biblical chronology too often relied on multiples of forties. 480 years were fixed from the Exodus to the First Temple and an equal amount from the First to the Second Temple. The judges were set midway between the first of these intervals.

7. Gillis Gerleman writes ('The Song of Deborah in the Light of Stylistics', VT 1 [1951], pp. 168-80 [189]): 'The impressionism of the Deborah Song is of a primitive, unconscious type, a naïve, spontaneous art. The prose narrative might rather be called an elaborate, carefully worked out literary product just because of its syntactically dis-

of Ugaritic literature from Ras Shamra in the mid-twentieth century provided fresh ammunition with which to confirm the antiquity of the poem. Clusters of linguistic forms occurring in alphabetic Ugaritic were detected in a few Hebrew poems, such as the Song at the Sea (in Exodus 15) and the Song of Deborah. The insight gave William Albright and his school cause to treat the Song of Deborah as archaeological artifact and when the theories of Milman Parry and Albert Lord on the persistence of oral composition reached biblical studies, the combined effect turned Deborah's Song into a repository of historical data that continues to be exploited deep into our own days. The approach relies on reciprocal verisimilitude, with history and poetry buttressing each other. One scholar can date the conflict to precisely 30 September, 1131 BCE.⁸ Another can plot troop movements on topographical maps.⁹ Theories abound within this camp on causes for a conflict, with many suggestions why the Canaanites needed to be defeated or why the tribes splintered in their support of Israel.¹⁰ The search for pre-Hebrew Hebrews continues apace, using Amarna and Ramesside documents, with archaeological and anthropological evidence accommodatingly supporting the arguments.¹¹

ciplined, logical form. The great puzzle of the history of literature is not poetic form, but smooth prose. It is in the prose that we have the more advanced, or artificial, production, whereas the poetry stands for the spontaneous, unconscious and natural mode of expression. In the poetry the very speech is music, formed according to laws which the poet, as well as his listeners, knew by instinct, without recourse to theories.'

8. John F.A. Sawyer, "From heaven fought the stars" (Judges v 20)', VT 31 (1981), pp. 87-89.

9. Anson Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), pp. 136-37.

10. See Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 80, and Yairah Amit, 'Judges', in *The Jewish Study Bible* (ed. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 508-57 (520-21). Gregory Wong offers a sustained (if philosophically uninvolved) argument for the Poem's polemics against tribes reluctant to join the cause of Yahweh ('Song of Deborah as Polemic', *Biblica* 88 [2007], pp. 1-22). Lawrence Stager gives an economic reason for their reluctance ('The Song of Deborah: Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not', BAR 15.1 [1989], pp. 50-64). Weaving a full story out of the troubles in the days of Shamgar (v. 6), J. David Schloen has them rising against profiteers because of tolls on caravans ('Caravans, Kenites, and Casus Belli: Enmity and Alliance in the Song of Deborah', CBQ 55 [1993], pp. 18-38).

11. Anson Rainey is the latest to adapt this opinion in 'Shasu or Habiru: Who Were the Early Israelites?', BAR 34.6 (2008), pp. 51-55. Cited 14 January 2010. Online: <http://www.bib-arch.org/bar/article.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=34&Issue=06&ArticleID=09&Page=0&UserID=0&>.

Still, despite the century of impressive discoveries and recoveries, the above reasoning has not shifted appreciably; neither have the stakes, which always had to do with how far into the past can a verifiable history of Israel be driven. On the one hand, the linguistic edifice Albrightians deployed in identifying early Hebrew poetry has not gone unchallenged, and with it came other strategies to confirm an early context for the Poem. On the other, differentiating between Iron Age Aramaic and Hebrew in recently recovered inscriptions has proven tricky, and with it came hesitation about dating the Poem late on this merit.¹² Likewise unconvincing are the many suggestions that diverse episodes in the poem were inspired by incidents in the later historical books, some as late as the Hellenistic period.¹³ As a result of this steadfast attachment to unbridgeable opinions, a standoff as solid as any generated by religious conviction, the historical value of Deborah's Song remains undeciphered.

An Issue of Precedence

Predictably, those who treat the Poem as a Victory Song, hence a witness to the event, argue that the prose is a version of its (imperfectly understood) verses.¹⁴ This is largely an American posture; but even Caquot could

12. The issue is debated between Michael Waltisberg, 'Zum Alter der Sprache des Deboraliedes Ri 5', *ZAH* 12 (1999), pp. 218-32, and Gary A. Rendsburg, 'Hurvitz Redux: On the Continued Scholarly Inattention to a Simple Principle of Hebrew Philology', in *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology* (ed. Ian Young; JSOTSup, 369; London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), pp. 104-28.

13. The scholars who prefer a first-millennium composition for both chapters draw their comparison from biblical incidents, prompting them to date our composition, often linking it to the Ark narrative of 1 Samuel 4 when there was an alliance between Philistines and Canaanites. Philippe Guillaume ('Deborah and the Seven Tribes', *Biblisches Notizen* 101 [2000], pp. 18-21) and Hermann Michael Niemann ('Taanach und Megiddo: Überlegungen zur strukturell-historischen Situation zwischen Saul und Salomo', *VT* 52 [2002], pp. 93-102) would rather see a link with the story of Saul and Ishbaal. Giovanni Garbini finds in the Poem an echo of an early monarchic theomachy between Yhwh and Sisera ('Il Cantico di Debora', *La parola del passato* 33 [1978], pp. 5-31).

14. K. Lawson Younger, Jr, 'Heads! Tails! Or the Whole Coin?! Contextual Method and Intertextual Analysis—Judges 4 and 5', in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective: Scripture in Context*, IV (ed. K. Lawson Younger, Jr, William W. Hallo and Bernard F. Batto; ANETS, 11; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991), pp. 109-46; Graham S. Ogden, 'Poetry, Prose, and their Relationship: Some Reflections Based on Judges 4 and 5', in *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Scriptures* (ed. Ernest R. Wendland; New York: United Bible Societies, 2004), pp. 111-30; Walter J. Houston, 'Misunderstanding or Midrash: The Prose Appropriation of Poetic Material in the Hebrew Bible (Part II)', *ZAW* 109 (1997), pp. 534-48; Heinz-Dieter Neef, 'Deboraaerzählung und Deboraliad: Beobachtungen zum Verhältnis von Jdc. iv und v', *VT* 44 (1994), pp. 47-59.

be disdainful of it without fully rejecting it.¹⁵ However, those who do not consider the Poem a Victory Song, so likely a later pastiche, maintain that it has no sense or context without the prose.¹⁶ With better knowledge of ancient Near Eastern literature, we might recognize that neither biblical poetry nor prose cultivates *verismo* attachment to events; at least not to the extent that one would find it useful to seek inspiration from the other. This is generally true for Near Eastern royal panegyrics as well. Thus, when we have both historical documentation as well as a royal epic from the reign of a single monarch, say Zimri-Lim of Mari or Tukulti-Ninurta of Assyria, it would be tough, if not also risky, to match what they have to say.¹⁷ Moreover, I am not sure that applying a date to the creation of either the prose or poetic version is a particularly useful enterprise as far as biblical studies are concerned. Normally, to set a composition within a specific interval is to promote reciprocal functions: the composition illumines the times and the contexts in which it was crafted while the milieu in which it originated explains the composition's allusions and concerns. In Mesopotamian literature, for example, it will matter a lot whether a composition comes from the Old Babylonian or Neo-Babylonian period, because we can integrate the knowledge we extract from it into distinct cultures. With biblical works, at best we can assign it before or after the Exile. All other subdivisions or allocations and the glimpses they offer of their cultural contexts are hardly undisputed.

Still, there are other interesting side issues as well, among them these:

1. Because prose and poetry have different goals, could the versions have followed parallel but independent paths? In the literature, the answers are *Yes* and *No*; but hardly ever simply that, as in the oft-cited opinion that the Prose version is 'Male', for its accent on militarism, while the Poem's is 'Female', for its stress on gender and sexuality.¹⁸

15. André Caquot, 'Les tribus d'Israël dans le Cantique de Débora (Juges 5, 13-17)', *Semitica* 36 (1986), pp. 47-70.

16. See Wolfgang Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch* (BBB, 18; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1963); de Vaux, *Histoire ancienne d'Israël*, pp. 789-90.

17. Good comments on the issues in Michael H. Floyd, 'Oral Tradition as a Problematic Factor in the Historical Interpretation of Poems in the Law and the Prophets' (PhD dissertation; Claremont Graduate School, 1980), pp. 233-35, 263-66. Not surprisingly an Arabist (Morris S. Seale, 'Deborah's Ode and the Ancient Arabian *Qasida*', *JBL* 81 [1962], pp. 343-47) thinks that the comparison is best made with the *qasida*, both displaying the 'manly virtue of the desert' (what desert?). Seale, however, says that in contrast to the Prose our Poem is 'shot through with genuine religious fervor' ('Deborah's Ode', p. 343).

18. Mieke Bal, 'Tricky Thematics', *Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 133-55, followed by A. van

2. Were the two versions independently crafted? Were they penned by the same author? Or did they both depend on a common source?¹⁹ The answer for all three is a resounding *Maybe*.
3. Once juxtaposed, were they meant to complement or supplement each other?²⁰ The answer is *Probably*.
4. Were the differences between them as obvious to us as they were to the Hebrew editors of Judges? The answer is *Not Very Likely*.
5. Were the two versions kept side by side to enhance the gravity of narrated events or simply to avoid making choices between them?²¹ The answer to each is *Possibly*.

What is interesting about all this give and take, and what also makes biblical scholarship occasionally exasperating, are the many side issues that are raised, debated, and promoted in the literature; for, as it is generally true about this discipline—as it is not as much in other studies of antiquity—each generation of researchers invests into the interpretation of Sacred Scripture concerns that are vital to its own time. These particular chapters, more so than any others in Judges, raise issues that have contemporary applications, among them appeals for freedom, territorial squabble, political exploitation, gender empowerment, and sexual politics. We must therefore not be surprised about the breadth and depth of passion that has surrounded their discussion, especially so in recent years with its increased focus on personalities rather than history and on literary strategies rather than identification of source.

To illustrate this observation, let me select two subjects for brief presentations. The first deals with the contrast in structuring the material; the second in the contrast of composing the shared episode about the death of Sisera. To give these matters focus, here is a table that provides comparison between the information in the Prose and Poem:

der Kooij, 'On Male and Female Views in Judges 4–5', in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes* (ed. Bob Becking and Meindert Dijkstra; BibInterp, 18; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 135–52.

19. Same author: P.D. Guest, 'Can Judges Survive without Sources? Challenging the Consensus', *JSOT* 78 (1998), pp. 43–61; Pamela Tamarkin Reis, 'Uncovering Jael and Sisera: A New Reading', *SJOT* 19 (2005), pp. 24–47; common source: A. Malamat, 'The Period of the Judges', in *Judges* (ed. Benjamin Mazar; The World History of the Jewish People, 3; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971), pp. 129–63 (137–40).

20. Younger, 'Heads! Tails!'; Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999).

21. Nadav Na'aman, 'The "Conquest of Canaan" in the Book of Joshua and in History', in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman; Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994), pp. 218–81.

Table A: Information in the Prose and the Poem

	PROSE (Judges 4)	POEM (Judges 5)
<i>Deborah</i>	—prophet: wielder of flames; judge (4.4) —‘She would sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim’ (4.5)	—a ‘Mother in Israel’ (5.7).
<i>Barak</i>	—from Naphtali (4.6) —hesitant and argumentative —loses glory when Jael kills Sisera	—From Issachar’ (5.15) —no hesitation reported —activities hardly mentioned
<i>Jabin</i>	—rules Canaan from Hazor (4.2) —Elohim humbles Jabin (4.23)	
<i>Jael</i>	—wife of Heber the Kenite (4.17)	—wife of Heber the Kenite (5.24)
<i>Sisera</i>	—commander for Jabin of Hazor (4.2) —killed in his sleep (4.21), a mallet driving a peg into his temple (4.20-21)	—no attribution (5.26; head of the Canaanite coalition, 5.19) —killed in standing’ position (5.25-27)
<i>Sisera’s mother</i>		—anxiously waiting (5.28-30)
<i>Circumstances</i>	—terror via Sisera’s chariotry (4.2-3)	—deteriorating security (5.6-7)
<i>Antagonists</i>	—Jabin, ‘king of Canaan, ruling from Hazor’ (4.2) —Sisera, his army commander (4.2)	—‘kings of Canaan’ (5.19) —mention of Sisera (5.20)
<i>Tribes</i>	—two: Naphtali and Zebulun (4.6) —10,000 strong (4.10)	—at least 10, some without fervor —numbers presumably high
<i>War</i>	—local —army mustered at Kedesh, attacks from Mt Tabor (4.9ff.)	—national (Israel vs. Canaan) —battle by the Kishon, its waters swollen by storms (5.21)
<i>Victory</i>	—Yhwh flusters the enemy (4.15)	—stars of Heaven battle Sisera (5.20) —the torrent Kishon carries them (5.21)

The Prose and Poetic Accounts

The Deuteronomistic formula for shaping narratives in Judges follows a cycle: God is angry with Israel because it had forgotten its vows. In the Prose, God sends Jabin and his henchman Sisera as punishment. With their vast array of chariots, they lord over the Hebrews who beg God for mercy. As usual, God relents, selecting Deborah, a judge, prophet, and mantic, to put backbone into Barak from the Naphtali tribe. After hesitation, he

accepts the charge. War breaks out near Mt Tabor; but God panics the Canaanites who are destroyed to a man. Sisera escapes on foot and finds shelter with Jael, wife of an ally of Jabin. She murders Sisera. Israel subdues Jabin and is in control for 40 years.

Here, all the elements of effective Hebrew story-telling are in display. The plot is centered on a conflict that is pre-charted and its resolution seeds future episodes. Characters are shaped through dialogue rather than description, so that nothing at all is said about age or their physical attributes. It is a mystery to me how some colleagues know that Deborah is past menstruation while Jael is in full sexual bloom.²² The settings themselves are vague, encouraging speculation on where and how the confrontation developed, and the vocabulary has multiple edges. As always in Hebrew prose, a major player is the Hebrew God who, in fact, personally battles for Israel against the Canaanites, as he had done against the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Also as usual, there is a narrator who, albeit omniscient, does not always share God's point of view.

The structure of the prose account is transparent, moving through a number of self-contained episodes with the necessary connectives. Unity for the whole is achieved through a framing that opens and closes on references to Jabin as well as to his title 'king of Canaan'. As noted above, the title 'king of Canaan' is scarcely 'historical'—that is, we do not find it in ancient sources.²³ Yet, unlike the concocted name of Cushan-rishatayim of Aram-naharayim (Judg. 3.8, 10), Jabin's name does not trigger doubt about his historicity, even if his role is minimal in the prose story and totally absent from the Poem. For a Hebrew audience, there cannot be a more paradigmatic confrontation than between Israel and Canaan, more or less reprising the conflict in Joshua's days. The narrator ends on a nice pun, with God subduing (*kāna* 'Jabin of *kēna'an*).

Sisera is Jabin's enforcer and the possessor of an awesome *force de frappe*; but in the Prose he is a pawn for God. Sisera has defeated historicizing scholars, not just because his name is a stumbling block to linguists, but because he is also designed to evade history, for his power-base, Haroshet-haggoyim, is as mysterious as its master.²⁴

22. Victor Harold Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 64, for the first opinion; many others for the second.

23. The Amarna texts and just once in the Bible (Judges 5:19) can speak of many 'kings of Canaan', *šarrāni ša kinahhi* (EA 30 and 109).

24. There is a tendency to explain Sisera's name via hardly controlled languages (once Hurrian, now mostly Luwian, Lycian, Illyrian), with the aim of vaguely attaching him to one of the Philistine tribes that had settled in the region; see J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 63. For a Cretan (Linear A no less!) derivation, see Garbini, 'Il Cantico di Debora', pp. 20-21. For a Sardinian link, see Adam Zertal, 'Philistine Kin Found in Early Israel', *BAR* 28.3 (2002), pp. 18-31, 60-

Deborah controls the pulse of the Prose. She is a *šōfētâ*, 'judge' before we ever learn how she earned the title. She is prophet, *nēbī'â*; but perhaps more important, an *'ēšet lappîdôt*, a 'wielder of torches', so a pyromancer, expert at interpreting the flickers of flames. This cluster of titles tells us not to doubt her authority. Still, although as a prophet she might motivate Barak, she probably impressed him even more as a diviner; for unlike prophets who must wait for inspiration, diviners can force destiny to be revealed. In Mesopotamia this is done though inspection of a sheep's innards or the movements of celestial orbs, but in Israel by casting the lots, the Urim and Thummim.

Here the plot thickens. There will hardly be any battle for Barak to win, for God will do it all and there is no captive enemy commander to seal the triumph for, as Deborah predicts, Sisera will be dispatched by a woman. The narrator may expect us to assume Deborah as that woman; but with all the attention Jael will soon have, no one will be kept in the dark for long, for the riddle is solved long before Jael invites Barak to view Sisera's corpse. The narrator had, at any rate, given God credit for shattering Sisera's power, and although Barak will soon join Deborah in singing the Poem, it is Deborah's voice and Jael's deed that will dominate it.

Sisera and his Mothers

We do not know much about Jael. We are told that she was *'ēšet hever*, the wife of Heber the Kenite. In the Prose, Heber is connected with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (4.11); but even that point is disputed, with some scholars pronouncing Jael as tradeswoman or a priestess by erroneously equating Heber with a Mari kinship term *hibrum* that, in any case, should be read *hiprum*. Since antiquity, however, Jael has endured several transfigurations, among them as a seducer or a sexual object. For first-century Pseudo-Philo (Book 31) Jael pre-figures Judith to Sisera's Holofernes, an association that continues to be exploited today.²⁵ Sisera thinks beautiful Jael is worthy

61. It is telling that those who make such proposals are not always specialists in those languages. There are some fictional histories that ply similar routes, for example Joanne Williamson's *Hittite Warrior* (Warsaw, ND: Bethlehem Books, 1999). Whether Haroshet-haggoyim is a specific place or a garrison area is widely discussed in the literature.

25. A woman bringing death to an important man is by no means unique to Hebraic lore. Beyond the biblical examples of Jael and Sisera, Delilah and Samson, Judith and Holofernes, and less directly Esther and Haman, we meet with the motif in a number of literatures, among them Hittite and Ugaritic (see Cristiano Grottanelli, *Kings and Prophets: Monarchic Power, Inspired Leadership, and Sacred Text in Biblical Narrative* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 78-84).

Often brought into comparison is the Ugaritic poem Aqhat, in which the title character is murdered for insulting (among other offences) the goddess Anat. The deed is done by Yatpan, a henchman, and we are told about his potential murder (the text

of him, but she has only revenge and the glory of God in her heart. In the Talmud, Jael's seductive voice sharpens Sisera's desire (*b. Meg.* 15a). Their encounter is brief, but he drinks the milk of her breasts (*b. Nid.* 55b) and rises to the occasion seven times. Jael, however, derives no pleasure from any of them (*Yev.* 103a; *Naz.* 23b), which might explain her resolve to murder him. This accent on physical attraction is veiled in the texts themselves, but is nevertheless heavily featured in modern treatment of the narratives, sometimes edging on the pornographic.²⁶ Until we get the movie version, however, I suggest hearing the delicious opera by Ildebrando Pizzetti, *Dèbora e Jaèle* of 1922. Jael and Sisera become lovers. She adores his elevated soul but must kill him during deep intimacy to prevent his capture by a fanatic Deborah and her Hebrew mob.²⁷

Luckily, the biblical account is more interesting. In a handful of verses, Sisera moves from being a frightened, albeit proud, commander to a child seeking his mother's shelter. From the outset, Jael has him figured out. Terrified when he reaches her tent, he accepts wordlessly the cover for concealment. When his voice is heard for the first time, it is to beg for water. She gives him milk, in ancient times a drink hardly for adults, as it induces slumber and intensifies halitosis. She tucks him in once more and his last words to her (and to us all) are to ask for more protection. At this point, Sisera gives up the *qui vive* that is drilled into the soldier and leaves it to Jael

breaks here) by Pughat, Aqhat's sister. Margalit goes the farthest in connecting the whole with Judges 4–5, finding such parallels as (alleged) setting by the Sea of Galilee, shared characteristics between Heber and Yatpan as well as murder by trickery ('Observations on the Jael–Sisera Story [Judges 4–5]', in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* [ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995], pp. 629–41). Peter C. Craigie links Deborah and Anat by depending on their shared attributes: both are warriors, lead warriors, have an assistant, dominate battlefields, command the stars, and the like ('Deborah and Anat: A Study of Poetic Imagery [Judges 5]', *ZA* 90 [1978], pp. 374–81). J. Glen Taylor shifts the connection to Jael and Athtart: they are warlike; crush skulls; are paired with another woman; hunt or are hunted, and the like ('The Song of Deborah and Two Canaanite Goddesses', *JSOT* 23 [1982], pp. 99–108). Aside from connections that are impressionistic (they are gathered hither and yon with little interest in how they function in their respective narratives), elastic (Deborah and Jael are paired only by contexts), and too easily accommodating (Jael is associated with hunting because 'wild goats' are hunted), these comparisons hardly address what is at stake when Canaanite tales migrate into Hebrew contexts.

26. Reis is by far the least restrained ('Jael and Sisera').

27. See 'Debora e Jaele', Accessed 14 January 2010. Online: http://delteatro.it/dizionario_dell_opera/d/debora_e_jaele.php. See now Helen Leneman, 'Re-visioning a Biblical Story through Libretto and Music: *Debora e Jaele* by Ildebrando Pizzetti', *BiblInt* 15 (2007), pp. 428–63.

to mother him. He falls asleep, never to awaken again. The scene is remarkable for its dense exposure of human senses—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching—and for its fair display of emotions, from pride to contempt, from fear to hope, from anxiety to confidence.

The motif of a woman mothering an adult who is not her own son is also featured in the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic, from the first half of the second millennium. Enkidu, a Tarzan character, mates with Šamkatu, a harlot, who is charged with changing him. Afterwards, holding Enkidu by the hand, the woman leads him, child-like, to other human beings where he learns to eat, drink, groom, and dress. By acting as an adult human being, Enkidu becomes one and is now ready to meet Gilgamesh. In this version, Enkidu's transfiguration is, more than anything else, anthropological, accompanied by the humor that one finds in watching awkward behavior.

This focus on Enkidu's move into the human world is the earliest of four we have. While two others from later in the second millennium have equivalent emphasis on the pedagogy of a woman (*harimtu*), one from the first millennium (SB), has a sharply different texture.²⁸ On seeing the woman, Enkidu, mates with her; 'for six days and seven nights', the text says. There are no cigarette breaks or small chats; in fact hardly any human interaction beyond the sexual. Imagining himself unchanged, Enkidu wants to resume his frolics; but sensing him different, his animals dart away. Enkidu tries to join them but his body betrays him. Their rejection tells him what he is no longer. Silently, he sits at the woman's feet and waits to learn what he has become. His journey is solitary, private, intuitive, and psychologically astute.

Likewise, the Poem gives us different insights into Sisera and his fate. The scene is abruptly set, as if plucked from the ether. There is no direct dialogue, inviting us to exploit the psychology of the moment. The poet concentrates on just two crystallizing moments: Jael's hospitality and her murderous act. Here, Sisera's fate is not at all disgraceful. Yes; he had lost his battle; not to mortals but to stars in heaven and floods on earth.²⁹ There is no flight, whether on chariot or on foot, and certainly nothing about panic. Rather, we find him accepting Jael's offer of curds in a princely bowl, as befit his dignity. He does not cower; he does not hide; he does not lie down and

28. Well discussed in Andrew George, 'The Civilizing of Ea-Enkidu: An Unusual Tablet of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic', *RA* 101 (2007), pp. 59-80.

29. Perhaps this is why the rabbis rewarded him by making him an ancestor of the great Rabbi Akiva: 'The Rabbis taught in a Baraita: Naaman was a resident convert. Nebuzaradan was a righteous convert. Descendants of Sisera learned Torah in Jerusalem [i.e., R. Akiva]. Descendants of Sancheriv taught Torah to the masses. And who were they? Shemaya and Avtalyon. Descendants of Haman studied Torah in B'nei B'rak, and there were even descendants of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar whom the Holy One, blessed be He, tried to bring under the wings of the Shechinah...' (*b. Sanh.* 96b).

he does not sleep. And when the mortal blow strikes, he takes it standing up. The language used here is reminiscent not of human combat, but of the savage battles at the end of time, when Leviathan is dispatched. Sisera is struck, apparently frontally, and falls. His collapse is conveyed cinematically, with paired verbs of motion (*kāra*‘, ‘to break at the knee’ and *nāfal*, ‘to fall’) that repeat as if from diverse perspectives. His body lands between Jael’s legs, *bēn raglēhā*. In recent writing, this notice is exploited sensationally: Sisera dies as Jael is servicing him sexually, either professionally or as a victim of rape. This is far-fetched. With Sisera standing and Jael in a position to crush his skull, their coupling must have been gymnastically ambitious.³⁰ It could be a scene of triumph, with victim at the foot of the victor; but it could also be a portrayal or parody of birthing.³¹ If so, it might offer an interesting transition to the abrupt change of scene, taking us from the tent of Jael to the palace of Sisera, with his mother on the balcony awaiting the return of her son.

A Mother’s Anxiety

In the Prose, Sisera is hardly given a biography. We meet him first as a redoubtable warrior with, unfortunately for him, God as his opponent. His end is ignominious: bloodied and swathed, his body is delivered to his enemies. In the Poem, however, he acquires a nameless mother who can display infinite tenderness toward her son. And there are harem ladies as well, who can recall Sisera’s capacity to win wars and gain booty. We zoom to them through a *ḥallôn*, a cut in the wall, and then through an *’ešnāb*, perhaps a grill or a shutter, inviting much incongruous comparison with artifacts showing full-faced women as if framed by a window.³² These women are said

30. ‘Terms such as “kneel” and “lie”, and the phrase, “between her legs”, found in Judg. 5.27, create the double-entendre in a traditional Israelite medium’ (Susan Niditch, ‘The Challenge of Israelite Epic’, in *A Companion to Ancient Epic* [ed. John Miles Foley; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005], pp. 277-87 [284]). There is hardly enough speculation on whether or not a soldier in retreat (as opposed to one in triumph) would have sex on the mind when negotiating an escape. Nor is there plausible discussion on the capacity of women in missionary (or any other) position to effectively wield weapons in both her hands.

31. Don Seeman, ‘The Watcher at the Window: Cultural Poetics of a Biblical Motif’, *Prooftexts* 24 (2004), pp. 1-50 (19).

32. A fairly comprehensive study is Claudia Suter, ‘Die Frau am Fenster in der orientalischen Elfenbeinschnitzkunst des frühen 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr.’, *Jahrbuch der staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg* 29 (1992), pp. 7-28; but see also Ellen Rehm, ‘Abschied von der heiligen Hure: Zum Bildmotiv der “Frau am Fenster” in der phönizisch-nordsyrischen Elfenbeinschnitzkunst’, *UF* 35 (2004), pp. 487-519. Similar interpretations are assigned to Chinese tomb arts scenes with women in doorways; see Paul R. Goldin, ‘The Motif of the Woman in the Doorway and Related Imagery in Traditional Chinese Funerary Art’, *JAOS* 121 (2001), pp. 539-48.

to be prostitutes, which is hardly the case of Sisera's mother. The entire tableau covers two verses only and reads as if from a dirge; yet nothing in the women's behavior permits us to credit them with critiquing war 'which creates heroes but eliminates sons'.³³

In striking contrast with the Poem's murder scene, these verses are suffused with conversations that Sisera's mother has with herself, bouncing her anxiety off her ladies-in-waiting. Pathos is increased if we imagine that events overtaking mother and son were synchronous. Nor must we confuse the anxiety of Sisera's mother with that of Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, who berates Shamash for giving her a restless son (GE III:ii [NA version]) or with that of Hecuba, who begs Hector not to face Achilles (*Iliad* 22.79-89).³⁴ Rather, it comes closest to the vision Aeschylus gives us of Atossa, mother of Xerxes.³⁵ Both mothers have sons who provoked God, and pay for it dearly.

The Structure of the Poem

Motherhood and matriarchy, therefore, seem to form a connective between crucial episodes in both Prose and Poetic versions. I would not venture to say whether we can credit the editing process for their presence or to speculate in which direction any harmonization occurred; except that there is one more observation to make, and it has to do with the structure of the poem.

As befits its bewilderingly differing voices, shifts of focus, embedded reflections, and torrents of words and images, the Poem is amenable to diverse structural analyses, leading to diverse evocations of contexts. It opens on an invocation and a theophany (vv. 1-5) before moving to the confrontation. An impotent Israel rallies behind Deborah (vv. 6-13). The tribes assemble, the intense or dedicated among them are followed by the indifferent, or perhaps, cowardly (vv. 14-21). The battle is fleeting, with the constellations above and the waters below united against the enemy. Cursed is Meroz, so effectively that the place is lost to memory (vv. 22-23). The curse resolves into a blessing for Jael, recapturing his murder and the fretfulness of his mother (vv. 24-30). Throughout, the Poem is punctuated by the poet's metaphorical glee, the last invoking divine support, as everlasting and constant as the sun rising daily.

In modern literature the surprising consensus is that the Poem forms a single unit, emotionally if not stylistically. The reasons are many and depend

33. Niditch, 'Israelite Epic', p. 284; see Exum, 'Feminist Criticism', pp. 73-75.

34. For an excellent review of women facing wars in classical myths and epics, see Foley (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, especially pp. 109-11.

35. Cited by R.J. Tournay, 'Le Cantique de Débora et ses relectures', in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. Michael V. Fox et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 195-207 (205); see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/aescpers.html> (lines 159-214). Death, it turns out, overtakes only the dreams of Xerxes.

on cues taken from apportioning the Poem. The opening theophany has inspired a cultic setting; the move from misery to triumph has suggested a ceremonial occasion; the focus on Sisera has stimulated comparison with Ugaritic myths, and the roster of tribes has prompted sociological reconstructions. Many of the proposals have merits; but for me the sequencing of tribes is a useful clue. We have already observed how the Poem early on invoked a triumphant Deborah—not as a judge, prophetess, or augur—, but as a 'Mother in Israel' (5.7). We have also noticed how it ended on the moaning of Sisera's mother (5.28-30). I suggest that maternity also plays a role in the invocation and arrangement of tribes in one of Israel's masterpieces.

The Matriarchs as Scheme

Ten tribes are listed, in an order that is not matched elsewhere in Scripture: Ephraim, Benjamin, *Machir*, Zebulun, Issachar, Reuben, Gilead, Dan, Asher, [Zebulun again], and Naphtali.³⁶ Machir and Gilead are cited here as if full-fledged tribes.³⁷ Naturally, some scholars emend the text to reach the traditional twelve and others trim the number into the preferred seven.³⁸ Opinions on the sequence differ sharply. Europeans tend to think it is aimless or devoid of useful historical information.³⁹ Americans, with higher stakes in the Poem's historicity, distribute them either by allegiance to Deborah (hence Israel) or geographically.⁴⁰ There is virtue in most proposals; but here I examine the tribe's alleged ancestry.

36. For those lists, see Jack M. Sasson, 'A Genealogical "Convention" in Biblical Chronography', *ZAW* 90 (1978), pp. 171-85. Johannes de Moor emends Judg. 5:13-14 disconcertingly and interprets other verses recklessly to arrive at twelve tribes ('The Twelve Tribes in the Song of Deborah', *VT* 43 [1993], pp. 483-94). Manipulating the poetry in 5:13-18 he arranges the resulting tribes into four triads that correlate with what is found in Genesis 49, and Numbers 2 and 10. For David Noel Freedman, the Song 'reflects the actual state of affairs at the time [twelfth century]: namely, that there was a ten-tribe league which bore the name of Israel' since a twelve-tribe federation did not materialize until a century later (*Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Collected Essays on Hebrew Poetry*; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), p. 153. Freedman's argument 'frôle le cercle' in Caquot's opinion ('Les tribus d'Israël', p. 50).

37. Zebulun occurs twice, perhaps imperfectly spliced from the prose where are cited just Naphtali and Zebulun.

38. Respectively de Moor, 'The Twelve Tribes', pp. 483-94, and Philippe Guillaume, 'Deborah and the Seven Tribes', *BN* 101 (2000), pp. 18-21.

39. Caquot, 'Les tribus d'Israël', p. 68.

40. See above, note 10. For Geoffrey Miller, the Song, with its listing of tribes, is a 'ledger in an oral culture for the recordation of inter-tribal obligations' ('The Song of Deborah: A Legal-Economic Analysis', *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 144 [1996], pp. 2293-320 [2295]). It was kept alive beyond the years of tribal confederacy as an argument for the superiority of the monarchy.

Table B: Tribal Lists

Order	(a) Gen. 29-30	(b) Gen. 35	(c) Gen. 46	(d) Gen. 49	(e) Exod. 1	(f) Num. 1.5-16	(g) Num. 1.20-43	(i) Num. 26	(h) Num. 13	(j) Deut. 33	(k) I Chr. 2	(l) I Chr. 12	(m) Judg. 5
1st	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _R	L _Y	R _E (J)
2nd	L _S	L _S	L _S	L _S	L _S	L _S	L _S	L _S	L _S	L _Y	L _S	L _S	R _B
3rd	L _L	L _L	L _L	L _L	L _L	L _Y	Z _G	Z _G	L _Y	L _L	L _L	L _L	R _{mach} (I)
4th	L _Y	L _Y	L _Y	L _Y	L _Y	L _I	L _Y	L _Y	L _I	R _B	L _Y	R _B	L _Z
5th	B _D	L _I	L _I	L _Z	L _I	L _Z	L _I	L _I	R _E (J)	R _J (E)	L _I	R _J (E)	L _I
6th	B _N	L _Z	L _Z	L _I	L _Z	R _J (E)	L _Z	L _Z	R _B	R _J (M)	L _Z	R _J (M1)	L _R
7th	Z _G	R _J	Z _G	B _D	R _B	R _J (M)	R _J (E)	R _M (J)	L _Z	L _Z	B _D	L _I	Z _{Gil} (G?)
8th	Z _A	R _B	Z _A	Z _G	B _D	R _B	R _J (M)	R _E (J)	R _J (M)	L _I	R _J	L _Z	B _D
9th	L _I	B _D	R _J	Z _A	B _N	B _D	R _B	R _B	B _D	Z _G	R _B	B _N	Z _A
10th	L _Z	B _N	R _B	B _N	Z _G	Z _A	B _D	B _D	Z _A	B _D	B _N	B _D	[L _Z] B _N
11th	R _J	Z _G	B _D	R _J	Z _A	Z _G	Z _A	Z _A	B _N	B _N	Z _G	Z _A	
12th		Z _A	B _N	R _B		B _N	B _N	B _N	Z _G	Z _A	Z _A	L _R Z _G R _{M2}	

LEAH: Rebuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah [Y], Issachar, Zebulun
 RACHEL: Joseph [Ephraim/Manasseh], Benjamin

ZILPAH: Gad, Asher
 BILHAH: Dan, Naphtali

In our list, first are mentioned Ephraim, Benjamin, and Machir, descendents of Rachel, Jacob's adored wife. Ephraim is Joseph's son and Machir his grandson, via Manasseh. Next are mentioned Zebulun, Issachar, and Reuben. They are sons of Leah, although not in the birth order they have in Genesis. There, their names and sequence are cue to the ferocious struggle taking place between the daughters of Laban.

The final group of tribes is born to Zilpah and to Bilhah, surrogates respectively to Rachel and Leah. If we leave out the repeat mention of Zebulun, we have Gilead, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. It is generally assumed that Gilead, which is a place rather than a tribe, is a substitute for Gad. A good link is that Gilead occupies the 7th slot in this roster, equivalent to the value of the consonants in the name Gad: *gimel* = 3 and *dalet* = 4.⁴¹ So the names in this last group play leapfrog with ancestry: Zilpah, Bilhah, Zilpah, Bilhah.⁴²

As an organizing device, listing tribes by descent from matriarchs is always deliberate. In fact, of about fourteen such lists, all but a handful follow this pattern, even if within these lists the inventory of eponyms does not always follow the birth order as classically laid out in Genesis 29–30. However, none of the other rosters begins with Rachel.

This particular investment in motherhood raises issues that are not easily solvable. What does it tell us intellectually and culturally about Israel that such an effort is set within a grandly martial context? The combination is certainly unusual; yet it cannot be proof, as is claimed, of gendered authorship. If so, we might assign vast portions of Biblical narratives to women authors, since the men in crises are rarely presented without women to save them from predicaments. It would be convenient—even attractive—to join a chorus of scholarly voices that attributes to women the creation of victory odes; except that I am not sure anyone knows how to control the criteria for such an attribution.⁴³ It is also not enough to claim that women likely composed odes because biblical lore says that they chanted them and danced to them. Nor is it necessarily logical, in my opinion, that the mocking and taunting that are characteristic of the genre should be an exclusive domain

41. Gad takes up the 7th slot in lists a (Gen. 29–30) and c (Gen. 46). In the latter, Gad is allotted 7 sons and forms part of a community of 70 individuals that went down to Egypt.

42. (1) *Ephraim* (via Joseph, #11/11), *Benjamin* (#12/12), and *Machir* (via Joseph, #11/11, and Manasseh). These are Rachel tribes. (2) *Zebulun* (#10/5), *Issachar* (#9/6), and *Reuben* (#1/1). These are Leah tribes. (3) *Gilead* (if = Gad; *Leah's Zilpah*, #7/8), *Dan* (*Rachel's Bilhah*, #5/7), *Asher* (*Leah's Zilpah*, #8/9), [*Zebulun* again], *Naphtali* (*Rachel's Bilhah*, #6/10). These are Concubine tribes.

43. The issues are reviewed, with bibliography, in Steve Cook, 'Habakkuk 3, Gender, and War', *Lectio difficilior* (2009/1), n.p. [cited 14 January 2010]. Online: http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/09_1/steve_cook_habakkuk_3.html.

of women.⁴⁴ Homer and Vergil are full of taunts and mockery, some of which are assigned to women (Hellene), but most are allotted to men.⁴⁵ And if we stay with Classical testimony, we might notice that similar categories of panegyrics were composed by men (Pindar, Simonides).

While I doubt that men alone crafted biblical lore, as far as the remarkable role maternity has played in organizing the Poem my conclusions are now rather modest. To begin with, the listing underscores the role of Northern tribes, not at all a surprise, given the context. The grouping by matriarchs warns us not to interpret their presence historically, geographically, or economically, as has been done. What is implied is that traditions about Jacob, his wives, and the personal tribulations that they experienced were available when the Poem was constructed, and their knowledge proved fundamental. Additionally, the arrangement may have been crafted *before* editing had made it conventional to open such series on tribes, perhaps also before traditions on the order of eponymous birth had become fixed. At the least, therefore, these observations might give us a useful angle from which to speculate on the composition, or perhaps better, on the redaction of the poem, if not from the historical or chronological perspectives, certainly from those that are cultural or intellectual.

A Mother for Israel

Pseudo-Philo, the highly nationalistic and inventive author of *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* who is presumed to be a near contemporary of Josephus, has the most extensive and effusive portrayal of Deborah, assigning to her some of the most moving language invented for biblical characters.⁴⁶ In it, Israel is said to lose its sense of ancestry, consorting with Amorite women. God decides to have a woman enlighten them (30.2). On taking charge, Deborah

44. A.L. Keith, 'The Taunt in Homer and Vergil', *CJ* 19 (1924), pp. 554-60.

45. David Sider, 'The New Simonides and the Question of Historical Elegy', *AJP* 127 (2006), pp. 327-46. See Deborah Boedeker and David Sider (eds.), *The New Simonides: Contexts of Praise and Desire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), with lots of relevant articles.

46. Useful studies on Pseudo-Philo are Frederick J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and the massive commentary of Jacobson (*A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum: With Latin Text and English*, 2 vols. [Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, 31; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996]). Mary Therese DesCamp, 'Why Are These Women Here? An Examination of the Sociological Setting of Pseudo-Philo through Comparative Reading', *JSP* 16 (1997), pp. 53-80 (68-70), has a nice table comparatively displaying HB and LAB on Deborah. Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, 'At the Hands of a Woman: Rewriting Jael in Pseudo-Philo', *JSP* 17 (1998), pp. 53-64, studies the Sisera episode in Pseudo-Philo. A serviceable online translation is at 'The Biblical Antiquities of Philo', <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/bap/index.htm>.

rehearses God's plan for Israel. Sisera dies at the hand of a proselyte (Jael) because he planned to enslave Israelite women (31.1). As his life ebbs away, Sisera recognizes that death has turned the tables on him (31.7). Pseudo-Philo finds a way to assign the Song to Deborah alone (32.19), shifting its contents towards another rehearsal of the past and adding poignant sentiments on matriarchs and the pain they have had in raising their children (32.1-6).

After forty years of judging Israel, Deborah tells the people, 'I admonish you as a woman of God, and give you light as one of the race of women; obey me now as your mother, and obey my words as mortals who must die' (33.1) Her advice does not differ much from the usual exhortation for leading a god-fearing life; but when people beg their mother to intercede for them from the beyond (33.4), Deborah insists that they must earn their own salvation here on Earth. These are tough parting shots, worthy of a mother raising children before Dr Spock's *Baby and Childcare*.

I opened this modest bouquet to Cheryl by referring to her insights into the theme of motherhood in Judges 4-5. I am glad to end it by citing Pseudo-Philo, likely a Jewish woman, who almost two millennia ago offered clues to nudge us closer to Cheryl's perspective.⁴⁷

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INTERPRETING HEBREW WRITING IN CHRISTIAN ART

John F.A. Sawyer

There has not been much research on this topic—for obvious reasons. Most people, like me, who know Hebrew do not usually know much about art, while most art historians do not know anything about Hebrew, Israelis being a conspicuous exception to the rule (e.g. Barash 1976; Ronen 1992; Haitovsky 1994; Sabar 2007). Besides, it is also a comparatively rare phenomenon. In Christian art for most of the history of Christianity, Hebrew never appears. But there are probably around 300 examples, several in or near Perugia where I live, and as someone who knows Hebrew and also someone with an interest in the reception history of the Bible, I thought I might have a look at some of them to see what happens to a Hebrew text when it is contextualized in this way. We are well used to Christian readings of biblical texts in Greek or Latin or other versions, far removed from their original context in ancient Israel. But the direct juxtaposition of the original Hebrew and a Christian interpretation is much less common and raises some interesting issues for biblical experts as well as for art historians. Cheryl has gone much further into the rapidly expanding field of the ‘Bible in Visual Culture’ than I ever will, and it is with huge admiration and warm congratulations that I offer this contribution to her richly deserved *Festschrift*.¹

Hebrew is exclusively the language of the Jews and the most obvious question to begin with, given the long history of appalling relations between the Church and the Jewish people, is why would Christians ever want to put Hebrew into their paintings? One of the few scholars to have examined this question is the late Gad Sarfatti, who was a Professor of Hebrew at Bar Ilan University and a frequent visitor to Italy (Sarfatti 2002). Hebrew of course was his native language and, like other Israeli visitors to Florence, he was at first perplexed by what he saw. For example, in the Church of Orsan Michele near the centre of Florence there is an altar with the following inscription, in beautifully designed Hebrew characters, carved in marble: **איגו סום לוקס מינדי**. Completely unintelligible to most Hebraists and Israelis, it must be said

1. The earliest version of this paper was read at a seminar organized by the Oxford Centre for Reception History of the Bible in Trinity College in April 2008.

it looks rather out of place and in fact is usually hidden by a vase of flowers. Of course, it is a Hebrew transliteration of the Latin EGO SUM LUX MUNDI 'I am the light of the world' (Jn 8.12 Vulg.).

The phenomenon attracted Sarfatti's attention and he compiled a list of 261 examples which he published with a brief introduction and bibliography (2002: 451-547). The majority are from Italy, Germany and the Netherlands from the period 1400-1650. There are not many examples in Western Christian art before 1400, very few after 1700, and, so far as I can find out, none at all in Eastern Orthodox art. We shall look at a few examples and then draw some conclusions on why Hebrew appeared relatively frequently in Christian art during that one period, and perhaps even more interesting, why it dropped out, almost overnight, at the end of the seventeenth century.

Sarfatti suggests three reasons why artists, or those who commissioned them, chose to put Hebrew into their work. To these I propose to add a fourth and a fifth.

(1) In some cases it is clearly to show off erudition. This seems to have been the motive in the case of one or two tomb inscriptions, for example, where the deceased was a proud renaissance man, a *homo trilinguis*, as Erasmus called those who knew Hebrew as well as Greek and Latin (Hobbs 2008: 458). Raphael's well-known painting of the prophet Isaiah (1502) in the Church of Sant'Agostino in Rome was commissioned for the tomb of the flamboyant humanist Johannes Goritz, who used to organize great parties in Rome for the rich and famous to show off their learning (Ettlinger 1987: 121-23). Isaiah holds a scroll showing the first words of 26.2-3, written in beautiful unpointed Hebrew: 'Open the gates that a righteous nation which keeps faith may enter in. A steadfast mind...' (Isa. 26.2-3a). Now, as Hebraists would know, *goy tzaddiq* 'a righteous nation' can also mean 'a righteous goy', that is to say, 'a righteous gentile', and no doubt that is how it has often been interpreted in this context, with reference to the deceased.

Another example is an inscription on the gravestone of Giovanni and Pietro Leopardi in the Church of Sant'Ambrogio in Florence, dated 1480. The words *ינוח על משכבותיו* 'may he rest upon his bed' come from a passage in Isaiah 57 about the fate of the righteous, and are interpreted here, as they are by Luther and most other pre-critical commentators, as referring to life after death. The original Hebrew text has the plural 'they will rest upon their beds', but this has the singular, perhaps influenced by the Vulgate *requiescat in cubili suo*. Luther in his comments on this 'excellent text', alludes to the Wisdom of Solomon ('The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God', Wisd. 3.1), citing as an example the Bohemian reformer Jan Hus who was burnt at the stake, and suggests that it is the Hebrew equivalent of 'May he rest in peace!' (Oswald 1972: 268-69).

One of Dürer's depictions of Jerome is a woodcut showing the scholarly saint in his study, bonding with the legendary lion, and three open Bibles on separate desks, in which the first words of the Book of Genesis can clearly be read in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. This charming tribute to Jerome, who incidentally applied the word *trilinguis* to himself (*Apol. contra Rufinum* 3.6; PL 23.483), may not be exactly showing off, but it beautifully expresses the current enthusiasm for all three languages.

(2) A second motive for the presence of Hebrew in Christian art is to achieve greater realism, an obvious general feature of renaissance art. Looking back at the formal, more stereotyped images of mediaeval Christian iconography, where realism was not the major concern, Hebrew is almost completely absent. But for many renaissance painters, if the biblical text says that the inscription above the cross was in three languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek (John 19.20), then that is what their paintings have to show rather than the traditional and much commoner Latin monogram INRI. Sarfatti refers to over sixty examples, including paintings by Fra Angelico, Signorelli, Michelangelo, El Greco, Velasquez, Rubens and van Dyck. Other references to writing in the biblical text similarly prompted the use of the Hebrew script. Rembrandt's famous picture of Moses holding up the Ten Commandments is a good example (1659). In pictures of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery, no one knows what Jesus wrote with his finger on the ground (Jn 8.6), but one artist who uses Hebrew in several of his paintings, Lukas Cranach, painted a few recognizably Hebrew letters, possibly intended to be read as *ha-no'efet* 'the adulteress' (Friedländer and Rosenberg 1978: 161).

Caravaggio's striking 'St Matthew and the Angel' (1602) shows the evangelist, guided by the angel, starting to write his Gospel in Hebrew (Sarfatti 2002: 490-91). The painting was destroyed in the Second World War, but a Hebrew version of Mt. 1.1-2a is still quite legible in photographs:

אברהם הול(יד) ספר תולדות ישוע משי(ח) בן דוד בן אברהם

A picture by the French painter Charles Le Brun (1619–1690), showing Mary teaching her son Jesus to read, displays the text of Isa. 7.14 in Hebrew (Sawyer 1996: 67), as does a seventeenth-century painting in the Church of Gesù in Perugia in which the Virgin Mary as a girl is being taught to read by her mother (Plate 1). Incidentally in both these cases the effort to recreate the original context as realistically and accurately as possible is not entirely successful, for the text is written in pointed Hebrew, which of course had not been invented in New Testament times (Plate 2). Mary might just as well have been shown reading the Latin of Jerome's Vulgate, as is the case in the vast majority of Christian paintings.



Plate 1. *The Virgin Mary with St Anne*, Church of Gesù, Perugia



Plate 2. *The Virgin Mary with St Anne*, Church of Gesù, Perugia (detail)

(3) Sarfatti's third reason for the use of Hebrew by Christian artists is to mark an object or a person as Jewish. Thus in paintings of the Temple in Jerusalem there are frequently inscriptions of various types on the walls written in Hebrew or pseudo-Hebrew. In paintings of 'Christ disputing with the doctors' such as that by Ludovico Mazzolino (c. 1520), for example, the Hebrew inscription at the top reads: *הבית אשר בנה שלמה לה*. The words come from 1 Kgs 6.2 ('The house which Solomon built to the Lord'), and their function is simply to label the building as Jewish. The same applies to paintings of 'The Marriage of the Virgin' such as one by Carpaccio (c. 1504), in which the Hebrew writing in the two inscriptions is unintelligible. Sarfatti calls this pseudo-Hebrew writing (2002: 453). It is just there for effect. In another painting of the same scene (Anon. 1470), the Jewish venue is again clearly indicated by a large Hebrew inscription on the wall. This time it is clearly intelligible, at any rate to someone who knows both Latin and Hebrew. It begins *UNUM CREDO DEUM PATREM OMNIPOTENTEM...*, the words of the Apostle's creed in Latin, written inaccurately but legibly, in Hebrew characters. It does not matter what it means, if anything: its sole function is to say, This is a Jewish building. Most people looking at it would have no idea what it meant.

This brings me to an important part of the story, one of which the Christian Church is today rightly ashamed. In many cases such Hebrew 'labels' have nothing to do with realism. In fact quite the reverse. In Rubens's painting of 'Jesus and the woman taken in adultery' (1612–1613), for instance, there are a few Hebrew characters on the hat of one of the men arguing with Jesus. They are the words of the seventh commandment, clearly legible, *lo tin'af* 'thou shalt not commit adultery', and have nothing whatever to do with realism. People do not normally go around with 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' written on their hats. The Hebrew is totally gratuitous and blatantly anti-Semitic. This is particularly frequent in scenes from the Passion story where the Jewishness of Christ's tormentors is highlighted, not only by their mediaeval Jewish dress, but also occasionally by Hebrew or pseudo-Hebrew characters on their garments and accoutrements (Schreckenberg 1996: 176–96, figs. 13, 20). Examples include the anonymous 'Arrest of Jesus' on the Karlsruhe Passion altarpiece (c. 1500) and the 'Carrying of the Cross' (Nürnberg 1480) but the grotesque hat with pseudo-Hebrew writing on it in Mantegna's *Ecce homo* (1500) is no less lurid. Elsewhere Hebrew writing appears on a witches' caldron (Schreckenberg 1996: 250) and a scroll carried by the devil (Melinkoff 1993: 105, 276).

Most Jews down the centuries, with good reason, went to considerable lengths to avoid entering Christian churches, and fortunately would never normally see these offensive works of art we have been discussing. So it is very unlikely that this use of Hebrew was explicitly addressed to the Jews in order to shock or shame them. In the vast majority of cases, it was a matter

of Christians addressing other Christians, reminding each other of the guilt of the Jews. They may not have known what the Hebrew meant, but they would certainly understand the anti-Semitic message all too clearly. There is one notorious example, however, where the use of Hebrew in Christian art is deliberately targeted at the Jews. On the facade of the Church of San Gregorio a Ponte Quattro Capi in Rome, there is an inscription, written in Hebrew as well as Latin, which says, in the words of Isaiah: 'All day long I have stretched out my hands to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually' (65.2-3a) (Sawyer 1996: 100). Today it stands right next to the synagogue on Lungotevere dei Cenci, where the Jewish ghetto was located from 1555 to 1870, and the use of Hebrew implies, as Paul does (Rom. 10.21), that the words are addressed to the Jews. In this context, under a fresco depicting Christ with his hands stretched out on the cross, the implication is that it is Christ himself who is speaking (cf. Jerome, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria), Christ himself who is rebuking the Jews—as he does in the liturgical text known as the Reproaches, until modern times recited by Catholics on Good Friday. The original building goes back to the sixteenth century, but it was when Pope Pius IX ordered it to be refurbished in 1858 that the stone inscription in Hebrew and Latin was added (Blunt 1982: 63). Today it still confronts the Jews, the only people capable of understanding the Hebrew, as they come out of their synagogue a few yards away. Those responsible for the upkeep of the Church of San Gregorio recently discussed having the inscription removed, but the Jewish community were consulted, and they requested that it be retained as a piece of their history, a reminder of centuries of Christian anti-Semitism.

(4) A fourth reason, not considered by Sarfatti, for why Hebrew was put into Christian art, concerns Jewish converts. They would make sense of it in a way that very few other Christians could. They are people who would know both Hebrew, the language of the Jews, and Latin, the language of the church, and therefore the only people, apart from academics, who could read the Latin texts written in Hebrew characters, like *Ego sum lux mundi* and the *Credo* mentioned above. Enormous efforts were made to convert the Jews, especially from the thirteenth century onwards thanks to the efforts of the Dominicans (Cohen 1982; Maccoby 1982). Indeed the study of Hebrew in the church was encouraged as a way of communicating with them. They were forced into churches to listen to compulsory conversionist Sermons (*Prediche forzate*) in Rome, Florence and elsewhere, a practice which continued in Rome until the nineteenth century, and these sermons were sometimes preached in Hebrew often by Jewish converts (Sawyer 2003: 396-98).

I recently came across what appears to be a rare example of a more benign use of Hebrew in Christian art for the benefit of Jewish converts (Scarpellini 1978; Cialini 2008) (Plate 3). Attributed to an anonymous artist, known as

the 'Maestro di Paciano', and dated by the experts to the beginning of the fourteenth century, it is a fairly conventional, stylized painting of the crucifixion, emphasizing the life-giving Eucharistic blood of Christ's sacrifice, with Mary Magdalene, representing sinful humanity, at his feet. The Virgin Mary and John the evangelist stand on either side, and a little Dominican figure kneels between them. The wood of the cross seems to be alive: in the words of Prov. 3.18, it is a 'tree of life (Vulg. *lignum vitae*) to those who lay hold of it'.



Plate 3. Maestro di Paciano, *Crucifixion*,
Diocesan Museum, Pieve del Vescovo, Perugia

What is most unconventional is the Hebrew writing in the inscription above the cross (Plate 4). It has nothing to do with showing off erudition. It

is unrealistic and inaccurate. There are only two scripts, Hebrew and Latin, instead of three (Jn 19.20), and only one language, since it is the same inscription written twice in Latin, once in Hebrew characters and once in Roman. Furthermore the Hebrew script is semi-cursive, unlike the familiar bold square letters in the other examples, and quite inappropriate for an official inscription. On the other hand, putting Hebrew writing at the top of a picture, and not just any picture, but the Crucifixion, sends out a clear signal: by labelling the main character in this way, it seems to be saying, quite unambiguously that Jesus is a Jew. There were never many converts, and very few people who knew Hebrew, if any, probably ever saw this inscription. But it does look as though the painting is trying to do something very unusual in those days. The motive for the use of Hebrew here cannot be anti-Semitic. It must be seen as trying to say something friendly to the Jews: 'We are not your enemies; in fact our Lord was a Jew like you and most of our Bible was originally written in your language'. This would explain the presence of a Dominican in the picture and it may also be relevant that the only other Crucifixion from this early period with a Hebrew inscription is one attributed to Giotto in the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, a large Dominican establishment founded in the thirteenth century. Much later, a Dominican writer included in a commentary on the Psalms 'the expositions and virtues drawn from many books by the virtuous Jewish Rabbis', but this too was the exception (Sawyer 2003: 398).



Plate 4. Maestro di Paciano, *Crucifixion* (detail)

Another example of a very different kind appears as the frontispiece of a book published in 1559 in Vienna by a young Jewish physician called Paul Weidner who had converted to Christianity (Sawyer 1996: 101). It shows him with his wife and four children standing at the foot of the Cross, with a verse from Isaiah (33.22), written in Hebrew and Latin, above their heads:

כִּי יְהוָה שֹׁפֵטֵנוּ יְהוָה מַחֲקֵקֵנוּ יְהוָה מְלִכֵנוּ הוּא יוֹשִׁיעֵנו
יִשְׁעֵהוּ לָנוּ

DOMINUS ENIM IUDEX NOSTER. DOMINUS LEGIFER NOSTER.

DOMINUS REX NOSTER. IPSE SALVABIT NOS.

ESALÆ 33

'For the LORD is our judge. The LORD is our ruler.

He will save us.' The LORD is our king.

The threefold repetition of the tetragrammaton YHWH has obvious Trinitarian significance in this context like 'Holy, Holy, Holy' earlier in the Book of Isaiah (6.3), and, for someone who knows Hebrew, the last word *yoshi'enu* 'he will save us', like the noun *yeshu'ah* 'salvation', is what gives the name Jesus (*yeshua* in Hebrew) a soteriological meaning. The Hebrew tetragrammaton, perhaps echoing the Latin tetragrammaton INRI at the top of the picture, is translated as DOMINUS 'the LORD' in Latin, and the author, pointing upwards, seems to be applying the Hebrew words directly to the crucified Christ. Of course this would be theologically offensive to orthodox Jews, applying the tetragrammaton to a human being, but it was not designed for them. It is for somebody who has converted to Christianity. The author apparently knows both languages equally well and the Trinitarian and Christological interpretation of a Hebrew text is graphically illustrated in a way that would have particular significance for a converted Jew. This is a case of an educated Jewish convert using Hebrew to make the point, proudly and unequivocally, that Jesus was a Jew like himself.

(5) This brings us to one final explanation for the appearance of Hebrew writing in Christian art, which is for me the most interesting. It is not to show off or for realism or to target Jews or for the benefit of Jewish converts. On the contrary, these are paintings in which artists and Hebraists seem to be working together to do something special with the biblical text. The Hebrew texts make excellent sense in their new pictorial context and often add a significant new dimension, both to the picture and to the meaning of the Hebrew. In Rembrandt's well-known *Belshazzar's Feast* in the National Gallery, London, for example, the Hebrew characters on the wall are accurate and ingeniously designed in a way that would make the Aramaic words mysterious and unintelligible to everyone except Daniel (5.24-28). Rembrandt had contacts with the Jewish community in Amsterdam and his way of representing the Hebrew writing is actually based on a Jewish tradition recorded in the Talmud (Rashi on *Sanh.* 22a; Sabar 2007: 387-89). The fifteen letters are arranged symmetrically in five columns of three, to be read vertically, like Chinese, from right to left:

ס	ו	ת	מ	מ
י	פ	ק	נ	נ
ן	ר	ל	א	א

Another example of a deliberate, sophisticated use of Hebrew in Christian art is the *Birth of the Virgin* (c. 1504) by Vittore Carpaccio, who incidentally has Hebrew lettering in two other paintings including the well-known *Meditation on the Passion* (c. 1490) (Hartt 1940: 25-35) (Plate 5). The scene is a beautiful peaceful one straight out of renaissance Venice. What is interesting is the framed Hebrew inscription on the wall (Plate 6). Carpaccio's Hebrew not only stresses the Jewish origin of the Sanctus, the Hosanna and the Benedictus from the Latin Mass, but is also clearly aware of the Jewish custom of hanging an amulet on the wall to protect a newborn child (Sabar 2007: 375-76). The thrice repeated Sanctus (Heb. *qadosh...*) comes from Isaiah's vision, quoted in Rev. 4.8 (cf. Isa. 6.3), all the more appropriate because of the close connection between Isaiah and the Virgin Mary (Sawyer 1996: 65-82). The Benedictus (Heb. *barukh ha-ba be-shem Yhwh*), from Ps. 118.26, is quoted in all four gospels in relation to Palm Sunday (Mt. 21.9; Mk 11.9-10; Lk. 19.38; Jn 12.13). Between them is the word *be-marom* which means 'on high' (Lat. *in excelsis*), alluding to the liturgical *Hosanna in excelsis*, but also recalling passages like Ps. 148.1 (Heb. *halleluhu ba-meromim* 'Praise him in the highest'), and, even more relevant, the song of the angels at the birth of Jesus, 'Glory to God in the highest' (Lk. 2.14), here celebrating the birth of his mother.

The *Annunciation* by Cima da Conegliano (1495) in the Hermitage Museum St Petersburg, shows Mary gently responding to the angel Gabriel's approach, with Isa. 7.14 carved in wood above her head, in Hebrew so she could understand it. Now of course, as all Hebraists know, the original does not have the word for 'virgin' (*betulah*) in it. It simply says that it is a young woman ('*almah*') who will 'conceive and bear a son called Immanuel...' The word 'virgin' first appears in a Greek translation of the verse cited by Matthew (Mt. 1.23). So putting up the Hebrew version in this picture might at first sight appear inappropriate—not that most of the Christians coming and going would know the difference. But, on the other hand, the meaning of the Hebrew text here, as in the image discussed above of Mary learning to read (Plate 1), is defined by its context, where the word '*almah*' 'a young woman' refers to the Virgin Mary. There is a picture by Rafaellino del Garbo in the Church of San Francesco in Fiesole near Florence, which makes the point more graphically. Isaiah, with the Immanuel prophecy on a scroll in his hand, is excitedly pointing at Mary as though to say, 'That is the young woman I am talking about, the one who is going to conceive and bring forth a son called Immanuel!' It is rather like Luther's comment on the Immanuel Prophecy: we know the Hebrew text does not specify that the young woman is a virgin, but she must have been, otherwise it would not have been a miracle (Heb. *ot* 'sign', vv. 10, 13) (Oswald 1969: 84). This shows how the new contextualization of a Hebrew text can make good sense of it. Like the furniture and the architecture, it is anachronistic, in the sense that this is not

eightth-century BCE Jerusalem where Isaiah lived, or first-century CE Nazareth where Mary was living at the time. But it makes excellent sense—at least to someone who knows Hebrew and believes in the Virgin Birth.



Plate 5. Vittore Carpaccio, *The Birth of the Virgin*, Scuola degli Albanesi, Venice



Plate 6. Vittore Carpaccio, *The Birth of the Virgin* (detail)

Another dramatic example of how the biblical text can be interpreted in a new way by being incorporated into a painting, is the *Presentation of the Child Jesus at the Temple* by Lorenzo Costa signed and dated 1502, which used to hang in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin until it was destroyed in 1945 (Haitovsky 1994: 111-20) (Plate 7). The holy family is in the centre of the picture. Approaching them is the aged Simeon who took the baby in his arms, blessed him, and said, 'Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation (Heb. *yeshu'ah*)' (Lk. 2.30). In the background around the altar are various members of the temple staff, and, in the foreground on the right, probably the donor Antonio Galeazzo, devoutly sharing in the timeless scene. On the left, the woman looking out of the picture at us, holding a Hebrew document, is Anna, the prophet who, according to Luke, 'did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day...' (Lk. 2.37).



Plate 7. Lorenzo Costa, *The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple*,
Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum Archives

The text is written in biblical Hebrew (Plate 8). It begins with the words: את דורו מי ישוהה 'as for his generation, who will declare it?' (Isa. 53.8). *doro* 'his generation' in this context is a Hebrew word with a Latin meaning. In Hebrew it means the time when the unnamed servant lived (Luther, Matthew Henry), but, applied to Christ, it refers to the miraculous process of 'generation' whereby he was conceived (Jerome, Augustine; cf. Cyril of Alexandria). Isaiah foretells the miraculous conception of the Messiah. Next he announces the birth of Jesus in words from Isaiah 9.6, but Anna inserts the word 'this' twice for emphasis: *כי זה הילד יולד לנו וזה הבן ניתן לנו* 'This is the child born to us...*this* is the son given to us!' Like Rafaellino del Garbo's prophet, the biblical text, modified in a quite dramatic way, points at the central character in the scene.



Plate 8. Lorenzo Costa, *The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple* (detail)

The next sentence is interrupted by the prophet's hand but the sense is clear and the gaps can easily be filled in: 'who (was foretold by) the prophets' אשר הנביאים (דברו עליו) טוב. The text ends with a doxology perhaps from Psalm 105: (זכרו) נפלאותיו (אשר עשה) הודו (ליהוה כי טוב): 'Give thanks (to the Lord for he is good)' (v. 1). It is not complete but enough is visible to illustrate the kind of effect the use of Hebrew can have in Christian art. Quoting Isaiah, Anna asks: 'Who could have imagined such a miraculous birth?' The answer, also from Isaiah, is 'Here he is: *This* is the Child born to us...*this* is the son given to us.' Then quoting a Psalm she calls upon the aged Simeon, the other members of the Temple congregation and other onlookers, including us, to thank God for all the wonders he has done, especially this one. In Luke's words: 'she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Lk. 2.38).

We end with a painting by Fra Angelico (Plate 9). It is part of the ceiling of the Cappella di San Brizio in Orvieto Cathedral, representing the 'glorious assembly of the prophets' (Latin *PROPHETARUM LAUDABILIS NUMERUS*). He is holding the two tablets on which are written what we call the 'Ten Commandments', but which are more accurately described as the 'Ten Words' (cf. Greek *dekalogos* 'Decalogue'). The first, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt...' (Exod. 20.2), is not a commandment at all, and it is these words that Fra Angelico has painted, in beautiful, fairly accurate Hebrew, on the two tablets in Moses' hands. This is a very different interpretation of the Decalogue from Rembrandt's where the first tablet is almost totally concealed by the second and the emphasis is plainly on the destruction of the old Jewish Law. By contrast the Dominican Fra Angelico has changed Law into Gospel, Moses the Law-Giver into Moses the Prophet of Redemption. Perhaps he was thinking of Hos. 11.1 'When Israel was a child I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt', rather than the Sinai narrative, a verse fulfilled according to Matthew in the early years of the life of Christ (2.15).



Plate 9. Fra Angelico, *The Assembly of the Prophets* (detail)

Conclusion

The use of Hebrew changes the picture. Most of the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, and anyone who knows Hebrew knows that something is lost in translation. Biblical Hebrew is quite different, grammatically and semantically, from most of the languages it has been translated into. It is richly allusive and often very difficult if not impossible to translate, despite the millions of attempts to prove otherwise. The Hebrew script is also distinctive and extremely beautiful, and yet Christian readers of the Bible have always preferred translations, and in Christian art the Hebrew script is rare. But for 250 years or so, thanks to enlightened renaissance artists, it began to look as if Hebrew might appear more often in Christian art and that churches might be able to share some of the beauty of Jewish art and architecture. In the first place, renaissance artists sought to achieve greater realism in their depiction of biblical scenes, and Hebrew writing, often beautifully and accurately represented, is sometimes used simply to add a touch of realism to a biblical scene. Secondly, there was a fresh interest in Hebrew and Jewish studies amongst Christian academics like Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, Reuchlin and many others, not to mention Luther, Calvin and a host of biblical scholars. Thirdly, and perhaps most significant of all, this was a period when it seems Hebraists and artists worked together to produce a variety of new pictorial and sculptural contexts for the biblical text. We have to judge the phenomenon from the best examples, rejecting as unacceptable some of the Christian abuses of Hebrew that we had occasion to consider. We saw how some paintings of the Annunciation and other biblical scenes can be graced by a verse in Hebrew, beautifully written and marvellously relevant. It is a pity they are so rare, but even the few that there are illustrate what is possible.

So why did Hebrew disappear from Christian art almost overnight in 1700, apart from a very few conspicuous exceptions such as William Blake's famous *Illustrations to the Book of Job* (1820–1826)? I think the answer is obvious and interesting. It was because at the beginning of the eighteenth century the study of Hebrew became the preserve of historical critics, and the special, creative relationship between them and artists was broken. They wanted to get away from fanciful artistic interpretations like Cima da Conegliano's *Annunciation* and for that matter Handel's *Messiah*, and get back to original meanings and contexts. It is only with recent interest in the reception history of the Bible that renaissance interpretations of scripture are once again being appreciated.

Whether Hebrew will reappear in Christian art is an interesting question. Hebrew is the sacred language of the Jews but it is an important part of Christian heritage as well, and I can see no good reason why it should not

appear more often in Church art and architecture. Negative attitudes towards Jews and Judaism are hopefully becoming less common among Christians, and maybe there will come a time, when even the most reluctant Jews will be able to enjoy seeing their sacred language in a Christian context as much as Christians do in their synagogues. We have seen how putting an appropriate text in a painting, in the original language in its very beautiful script, can add an extra dimension to the painting—as well as an extra dimension to the meaning of the biblical text. I hope I have shown it can be worthwhile taking the use of Hebrew in Christian art seriously, both in the interests of art history and as a significant element in biblical interpretation, while maybe at the same time recommending the study of Hebrew to anyone who loves renaissance painting or reads the Bible.

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GOD AND CYRUS IN ISAIAH 41.2-3

H.G.M. Williamson

In Isa. 41.1-5 the nations are depicted as being summoned to a trial (v. 1) to decide who among the gods has controlled a significant series of past historical events (vv. 2-3). Before other contenders are even given a chance to speak, Yahweh claims that he alone has done this (v. 4), and the passage closes with a clear indication that the nations are cowed into agreement (v. 5).¹ The general shape of the passage conforms closely, therefore, with the so-called trial speeches which are familiar within Isaiah 41–48.²

The events which clinch the case for Yahweh concern the advent and success of a warrior from the East. There has been discussion over the years as to the identity of this character and it is a topic to which I shall return later. For the moment I shall simply follow the majority opinion in referring to him as Cyrus.

The point of dispute in these verses, and one that opens up wider interesting questions which have not, perhaps, been fully aired previously, concerns how to construe vv. 2-3 in detail, and in particular how to decide who

1. I am aware of the probably related textual issues in vv. 1 and 5, and I agree with the proposal that the last two words of v. 5 have probably been displaced in the course of transmission from their original position (with slightly different vocalization) at the end of the first line of v. 1. **יְהוָה לִי פֶּה כֹחַ**, which now stands in that position, was probably borrowed from the previous verse (40.31) in order to fill in the awkward gap. Sense tells against its originality in 41.1; for a different opinion, see J.G. Janzen, 'Another Look at *yahālîpû kōah* in Isaiah xli 1', VT 33 (1983), pp. 428-34; J.L. Koole, *Isaiah III.1: Isaiah 40–48* (HCOT; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1997), p. 134, including a list of earlier commentators who support MT; J. Goldingay and D. Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* (ICC; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), I, pp. 140-41. As this does not affect the main argument of the present article I shall not discuss the matter more fully here.

2. A. Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. xl–lv* (VTSup, 24; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), pp. 207-13, with references also to earlier studies; for further literary analysis see R.G. Kratz, *Kyros im Deuteronesaja-Buch* (FAT, 1; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), pp. 36-52. This understanding of the unit is without prejudice, of course, to the issue whether it is itself only a building block in a more extended composition or compilation; cf. J.T. Walsh, 'Summons to Judgement: A Close Reading of Isaiah xli 1-20', VT 43 (1993), pp. 351-71.

is the subject of the main verbs. To illustrate, the initial *מִי הָעֵר* is usually assumed to have God as subject but the question then arises as to what is its object. 1QIsa^a, with its reading *וַיִּקְרָאֵהוּ* (MT lacks the conjunction), seems to take *צֶדֶק* as the object, and LXX construes the first half of the line in the same way even though it does not appear to have had the conjunction in its *Vorlage*. Although this has recently been followed by Berges,³ it seems most unlikely, both because it completely destroys the rhythmic balance of the line (4:2 would be completely out of keeping with the generally regular pattern in the context, where 3:3 is standard, with one line of 3:2 in v. 2b) and because it would be unparalleled to construe *צֶדֶק* in a personal manner, as the continuation seems to demand. More usually, an object is assumed or supplied: 'Who hath raised up *one* from the east' (RV), or more forcefully 'Who has roused *a victor* from the east' (NRSV). This certainly fits with the transitive use of this verb elsewhere, such as at Ezra 1.1, '... the Lord stirred up (*הָעִיר*) the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia', and indeed we have precisely this use attested at Isa. 45.13 with reference to Cyrus, here indicated as the direct object in the form of a verbal suffix: 'I have aroused him (*הָעִירְתִּהוּ*) in righteousness', a line where the use of 'righteousness' (*צֶדֶק*) affords a further link with 41.2. Moreover, the first-person use of the verb with God as speaker also occurs without an object expressed at 41.25.

In theory, however, an alternative construal is possible, namely to render the verb as an internal hiphil, 'Who has aroused himself', in which case, of course, no object would be expected. This usage is admittedly less common than the transitive use of the hiphil, but there are a few examples elsewhere, e.g. Ps. 35.23; Job 8.6.⁴ The attraction of this alternative is that it at once explains why no object is expressed even while it provides the expected antecedent of the suffix later in the line and also that, since Cyrus will now be the subject, it means that there is no point in the following lines where one has to switch without any textual indication from God as the subject of the verbs to Cyrus, who certainly must be the subject by the time we reach v. 3 at the latest.

The probability that this uncertainty was recognized even in antiquity is increased by consideration of the curious Masoretic form *יִרְיֶה* in the second line of v. 2. As it stands, this has to be construed as a shortened form of the hiphil of *רָדָה*, 'he makes him tread down (kings)'.⁵ It is true that occasionally the jussive appears to be used in place of an ordinary imperfect form, but this most commonly occurs at the start of a sentence, or alternatively (though

3. U. Berges, *Jesaja 40–48* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), pp. 175, 179: 'Wer hat erweckt aus dem Osten Gerechtigkeit, [wer] ruft sie an seinen Fuß?'

4. This is defended against suggested alternatives by D.J.A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC, 17; Dallas: Word, 1989), p. 198; see too J. Schreiner, *TDOT*, X, p. 569.

5. See GKC, §75gg.

less frequently) in association with the principal tone of the verse—sometimes, indeed, even in pause itself. Otherwise, such forms are commonly used with the *waw*-consecutive. None of these conditions applies to our example, however, so that appeal to any such explanation is extremely weak.⁶ The case is rendered further unlikely by the observation that רדה, which is common in the *qal*, occurs nowhere else in the *hiphil*. The likelihood must be, therefore, that the vocalization is an artificial form. It should, of course, be taken seriously as a testimony to the Masoretic understanding of the verb (a factor too often forgotten when commentators rush to emend), whereby among other things they were able to indicate that they understood its subject to be God, but it seems unlikely that this was how the consonants were ‘originally’ read.

Several suggestions have been made about alternative vocalizations,⁷ of which the most attractive in my opinion is ירה (imperfect *qal* of רדה, ‘he beats down’), simply because we find the same verb used with Cyrus as subject in a somewhat similar context at 45.1.⁸ It should be noted, however, that 1QIsa^a has יירי, which is equally good in terms of sense⁹ and which also implies Cyrus as the subject. It lacks the close parallel elsewhere, however.

The subject of the next verb, יה, is also potentially ambiguous. There are several ways of construing the line that it introduces, so that inevitably it

6. Berges cites GKC, §109k to support this explanation without mentioning GKC’s careful qualifications of the matter, as summarized above. J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 76, cites GKC, §165n (which I take to be a misprint for §165a) in justification of the use of a jussive in a purpose clause; but the paragraph in GKC deals with jussives following a *waw* copulative, which is not the case here; see too S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions* (3rd edn; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 68. R.P. Merendino, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung von Jes 40–48* (VTSup, 31; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 124, also states that there is no need to question MT, but he offers no reason at all why this apocopated form should anomalously be used here.

7. See C.R. North, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Commentary to Chapters xl–lv* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 91–92. Some other suggestions, which have not attracted further support, are listed by Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, I, p. 144.

8. This is favoured also by many others; see, for instance, with characteristically precise argumentation, A. Dillmann, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (KHAT, 5th edn; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1890), p. 376. According to D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament*, 2. *Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations* (OBO, 50/2; Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), pp. 286–87, the conjectured vocalization was first proposed by J.D. Michaelis (1779).

9. It is favoured by K. Elliger, *Deuterocesaja*. 1. *Jesaja 40,1–45,7* (BKAT, 11/1; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), pp. 105–106, noting the apparent support of Theodotion, παιδεύσει.

cannot play a determinative role in our quest. If we have already determined on other grounds that the subject is God, and given that he is hardly likely to make the victor Cyrus's sword like dust, we could understand *חרבו* as an adverbial accusative and render as in the RV: 'he giveth them as the dust to his sword'; alternatively, appealing to the use of the instrumental accusative (cf. GKC, §118*m-r*), we might compare NEB: 'he [i.e. God] scatters (them) with his [i.e. Cyrus's] sword'. Some have proposed adding a plural suffix to the verb (*יִתְּנֵם*; cf. *BHS*), but in poetry this hardly seems necessary. Even less plausibly, some have taken a hint from the LXX and emended the singular suffixes on *חרבו* and *קִשְׁתּוֹ* to plural, 'he makes their sword like dust', but this is desperate: what scribe would make the same mistake twice without cause or reason?

More plausibly, therefore, we might consider that Cyrus is the subject, 'he makes (them) like dust with his sword' (and again, it hardly seems necessary to restore an object suffix) or, with the same implication, to take *חרבו* and *קִשְׁתּוֹ* as the formal subject: 'his sword makes (them) like dust, etc.'¹⁰

Given that in v. 3 immediately following Cyrus must be the subject of the verbs, there would seem to be much in favour of regarding him as the subject here at the end of v. 2 as well. Such an assumption allows us to choose what is certainly the easier of the two main options just outlined.

The only clause not yet considered comprises the three words at the start of the second line of v. 2: *יִתֵּן לִפְנֵי נָרִים*. This is most naturally rendered 'he gives nations before him', which certainly indicates that God is the subject. However, just as we have seen that with some of the other clauses there is potential ambiguity, so, it may be claimed, the same is the case here. Furthermore, given that we have just argued that Cyrus is the more likely subject of precisely the same verb at the start of the following line, we should certainly at least explore that possibility.

The verb *יָתַן* has quite a wide range of meanings. With God as subject and followed (as here) by *לִפְנֵי*, it can certainly have the familiar sense of 'give over to, deliver up to'.¹¹ However, as the full listing by S.R. Driver shows, apart from our verse this idiom is found *exclusively* in Deuteronomy and closely associated Deuteronomistic prose,¹² so that, when it is used by a separate writer, as (uniquely) here, we should allow for the possibility of other senses, if appropriate. Thus, for instance, *לִפְנֵי* can have a more or less reflexive sense (e.g. Isa. 40.10), so that, with Cyrus as subject, we might here

10. The use of a masculine verb preceding a feminine subject is well attested, especially in poetry; cf. GKC, 145*o*.

11. So Koole, *Isaiah III*, p. 138.

12. S.R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; 3rd edn; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), p. lxxxii, listing Deut. 1.8, 21; 2.31, 33, 36; 7.2, 23; 23.15; 31.5; Josh. 10.12; 11.6; Judg. 11.9; 1 Kgs 8.46; cf. Deut. 28.7, 25.

render 'he puts down nations before himself', the allusion perhaps being to the submission of captives before their conqueror (Josh. 10.24; Ps. 110.1).¹³ Thus, while we may understand why the Masoretes later took this as an example of the Deuteronomistic idiom that was familiar to them and so extended the same general sense artificially to the second half of the line, we might equally well argue that the second half so clearly has Cyrus as its natural subject that we should be prepared to read the present clause in a less well-attested manner in order to align what is ambiguous with what is more certain.

The upshot of this somewhat tortuous line of discussion is that there are two possible ways of reading Isa. 41.2. The Masoretes seem certainly to have understood God as the subject, and their general interpretation along this line has led to their undoubtedly artificial vocalization of ירר in the second line. On this view, we have nevertheless to postulate that at some undefined point there is a silent switch to Cyrus as subject, as the position with regard to v. 3 in this respect is unambiguous. Contrariwise, if we think it more likely that the same subject is retained throughout vv. 2 and 3, as the lack of any indication to the contrary implies, and if we vocalize ירר in either of the two ways which are natural and for which there is some evidence (the parallel with 45.1 on the one hand and the reading of 1QIsa^a on the other), then we should be open to the less frequently canvassed opinion that the opening verb of the verses is to be taken as an internal hiphil and the first occurrence of יתן followed by לפניי is not used in its commonest sense but nevertheless, under the clearer contextual steer, in a manner which is at least defensible.

Grammatically, therefore, there are two possible ways of reading this passage, and the one word which gives us a firm clue at the diachronic level is ירר, since here we can see, I maintain, that the concern to make God the subject is dependent upon an unnatural vocalization and therefore must be the later interpretation.

It is probable, therefore, that the passage first wished to have Cyrus as subject,¹⁴ and at the rhetorical level this can be seen to be most effective. It is the first, allusive, reference to him in Deutero-Isaiah, and it is also the first

13. See, for instance, E. König, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1926), p. 361; Elliger, *Deuterjesaja*, p. 120; W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja, IIA* (De Prediking van het Oude Testament; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1979), p. 63.

14. I note without discussion the lone alternative voice of N.H. Snaith, who proposed that the reference was to 'exiled Israel, returning as conqueror', a suggestion that has not attracted any following at all; cf. 'The Servant of the Lord in Deutero-Isaiah', in H.H. Rowley (ed.), *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Presented to Professor Theodore H. Robinson* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), pp. 187-200 (192), and *Isaiah 40-66: A Study of the Teaching of the Second Isaiah and its Consequences*, in H.M. Orlinsky and N.H. Snaith, *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah* (VTSup, 14; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), pp. 163-64.

trial scene in the book. A series of questions is asked about an unnamed but no doubt immediately recognized warrior who has risen and advanced swiftly and ruthlessly. We may well imagine that an initial response to this would be apprehension, as international upheaval, then as now, is disconcerting in the unpredictability of its outcome. The 'who?' of v. 2, however, is then picked up by a counter 'who?' in v. 4, something that we might almost draw out by emphasizing it in translation: '*who* has performed and done this?' The response is emphatic: contrary to surface appearances, 'I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last'. If God were the answer to the first 'who?', this second question would be merely repetitive and anti-climactic. As interpreted here, however, it functions as a probe behind the surface of historical events in a manner which evokes a response of awe by the international jury in v. 5.

It is a well-known feature of early Jewish biblical interpretation, however, that there is something of an antipathy towards unnamed characters in the text. It is common in the Targums and similar literature, therefore, to find that such characters are identified with named figures as known from elsewhere in the text. The present instance is no exception, so that the unnamed character is identified in quite a wide range of Jewish exegetical literature with Abraham. This is most familiar in the Targum, which renders v. 2 as 'Who brought Abraham openly from the east, a select one of righteousness in truth? He brought him to his place, handed over peoples before him and shattered kings; he cast the slain like dust before his sword, he pursued them like chaff before his bow.'¹⁵

This interpretation is by no means limited to the Targum, however. In his discussion of this passage, Jones drew attention also to several passages in the Talmud which follow the same line, including *Shabbat* 156a-b, *Sanhedrin* 108b and *Ta'anith* 21a as well as a number of passages in the Midrash.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, it was followed as standard by the main mediaeval commentators, and indeed it has found occasional supporters more recently.¹⁷ Among

15. For convenience I cite the translation from B.D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible, 11; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), p. 79; see too J.F. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), pp. 134-36.

16. G.H. Jones, 'Abraham and Cyrus: Type and Anti-Type?', *VT* 22 (1972), pp. 304-19. The main burden of Jones's article is that although our passage refers to Cyrus, it drew some of its language typologically from the Abraham narratives. See too A. Laato, *The Servant of Yhwh and Cyrus: A Reinterpretation of the Exilic Messianic Programme in Isaiah* 40-55 (ConBOT, 35; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1992), p. 168.

17. C.C. Torrey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), p. 312, and especially 'Isaiah 41', *HTR* 44 (1951), pp. 121-36; E.J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1943), II, pp. 22-23, 29-30.

the factors which will have aided this identification may be mentioned especially the use of צדק, which could be understood as 'righteousness', in v. 2, and the reference to this character 'pursuing' (רדף) his enemies in v. 3 which evokes the use of the same verb with reference to Abraham in Gen. 14.15 (and of course the account of Abraham's military victory in Genesis 14 as a whole provides a possible background against which to read our passage). Less plausibly, Torrey maintains that, further afield, the reference to him 'calling on my name' in 41.25 will also have been influential (cf. Gen. 12.8); however, we should note that although we might well identify the character in our passage with the one at the end of the chapter, this interpretation is specifically not followed in the Targum, who interprets the character in v. 25 as that of a victorious king, while the mediaeval commentators refer to him explicitly by name as Cyrus.

The extent to which the rendering in the Targum writes round the text in order to support its interpretation is sufficient to indicate that it is unlikely to reflect the most plausible exegesis. Despite Abraham's warrior-like portrayal in Genesis 14, it would represent a radical and unparalleled re-reading of the familiar narrative about his call and journey to Canaan in Genesis 12, and the gratuitous addition in the Targum of קרביה לאתריה, 'he brought him to his place', to go no further, merely underlines this discrepancy.

The Masoretes, of course, did not have the liberty of reworking their text in this manner, but that does not mean that there are not ways in which their vocalization and punctuation may reflect one interpretation in favour of another.¹⁸ I suspect that the move to read this passage as relating to Abraham has influenced the reading tradition—and hence in particular the vocalization of ירד—in order to avoid creating the impression that Abraham acted independently. The gracious election and calling of God which are dominant in the master narrative will have affected the way in which the passage was read, with significant theological consequences. Although the question of an 'emendation' of the Masoretic vocalization has generally been dismissed by textual critics as a minor issue that should not trouble us, there are cases, of which this is a modest example, where to do so without due consideration may involve overlooking some significant steps in the history of interpretation.¹⁹

18. In order not to be misunderstood, I should clarify that I am not suggesting that some Masoretic scribe wilfully manipulated the text at his disposal in order to import some novel interpretation. It is in every respect probable that in their textual work the scribes sought to reflect what by their day was the standard pronunciation and reading tradition. With integrity, therefore, they nevertheless reflected what had become standard understanding by their day even in cases where we should now judge that that was not 'original'.

19. This is not an isolated example, of course. For another recent and more extensive

In a recent proposal for the publication of an eclectic text of the Hebrew Bible the problem posed by the curious fact that the consonantal text and its vocalization are many hundreds of years apart raises an obvious procedural difficulty. The editor's proposed solution is to treat the vocalization in line with what in the textual criticism of a standard English literary work would be called 'accidentals', i.e. matters of spelling and the like which make no material difference to the 'substantive' readings (i.e. the sequence of words).²⁰ Elsewhere I have reflected on several problems with this suggestion, attending primarily to issues that arise at the linguistic level.²¹ If the argument of the present article is sound, then we may add to those objections the further consideration that, far from being merely accidental, the Masoretic vocalization includes valuable clues to the history of interpretation of this intricate text over the centuries.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to contribute to this celebratory volume in honour of Cheryl Exum, whose research has done so much to illuminate many less frequently visited aspects of the history of interpretation of the Hebrew Bible both in antiquity and in more modern times.

proposal of this same sort, see H.M. Patmore, 'Did the Masoretes Get It Wrong? The Vocalization and Accentuation of Ezekiel xxviii 12-19', VT 58 (2008), pp. 245-57.

20. R. Hendel, 'The Oxford Hebrew Bible: Prologue to a New Critical Edition', VT 58 (2008), pp. 324-51, with reference on p. 343 to W.W. Greg, cited from a reprint of his articles edited by J. Rosenblum, *Sir William Wilson Greg: A Collection of his Writings* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1998), pp. 213-28.

21. 'Do We Need a New Bible? Reflections on the Proposed Oxford Hebrew Bible', *Bib* 90 (2009), pp. 153-75.

THE BOW IN THE CLOUDS IN GENESIS 9.12-17: WHEN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS MEETS VISUAL CRITICISM

Ellen van Wolde

In her impressive key note paper presented at the 2010 IOSOT conference in Helsinki, Cheryl Exum demonstrated how literary criticism could learn from visual criticism. In this tribute to her, I will examine if and how cognitive linguistics could learn from visual criticism. The structure of this examination is as follows. After a short introduction to a cognitive linguistic approach, I will concentrate on Gen. 9.12-17, the text known as the 'rainbow story' which follows upon the story of the flood, and I will offer a cognitive semantic study of possible meanings of the word 'bow' in Gen. 9.12-17. After a visual-critical study of paintings that relate to this text, I will discuss the differences between the two approaches and see whether visual criticism can correct or expand semantic studies.

A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

The goal of a cognitive linguistic approach is to study meaning embedded in language, culture, and cognition by exploiting verifiable semantic methods for the analysis of linguistic expressions. In contrast to other, non-cognitive types of semantic research that are lexicographically (language-internally) oriented, cognitive linguistics examines words, concepts, and texts

1. as embedded in cognition, that is to say, in semantic relationships (i.e. language-internally), in cognitive configurations (i.e. figuring in experiential, conceptual, and social routines) and in metonymical and metaphorical networks of meaning;
2. in relation to the world views and cultural categories of the times in which they functioned;
3. in relation to the communicative contexts of use.

These basic tenets explain why cognitive linguistics cannot accept a dictionary-view of meaning, but takes an essentially encyclopaedic view of meaning in which even the meaning of common, everyday terms is seen as supported by a vast network of interrelated knowledge. The cultural concerns

of cognitive linguistics are obvious: the study of dictionary and encyclopaedia as closely related phenomena is, in fact, a study of the rich repository of cultural knowledge.

Consider, for example, the concept of the word 'island'. In our common understanding an island is a mass of land completely surrounded by water. In one sense, an island is nothing more than 'land'. The land is what the word profiles, or designates. However, it is not the land as such, but the land enclosed by water which is designated by the term 'island'. In other words, the notion of surrounding water is intrinsic to the concept [ISLAND], in the sense that the island cannot be conceptualized without reference to a water mass. If there were no surrounding water, there would be no island. Consequently, the word 'island' designates a profile–base relation, which itself presupposes the broader cognitive domain of the earth's geographical features (Taylor 2002: 199). In an expert view of the earth, that is to say, not from a common-sense perspective but from a geological perspective, an island is a mountain on the sea-floor or on the ocean-floor with its top above the water line. Hence, the term 'island' profiles a mountaintop above the water line and includes in its base an under-sea mountain, and this profile–base relationship figures in the cognitive domain of historical geology.

This example elucidates how a word's meaning is closely related to the cognitive domain on which it stands out. A **cognitive domain** is defined as any knowledge configuration that provides the context for the conceptualization of a semantic unit. In this definition, a distinction is made between the domain against which concepts take shape and the base on which an entity is profiled. The **base** of an expression is the conceptual content that is inherently, intrinsically, and obligatorily invoked by the expression. It comprises the full array of conceptual content that it specifically evokes and relies upon for its characterization. A cognitive domain is a more generalized 'background' knowledge configuration against which conceptualization is achieved. The semantic unit 'island' **profiles** the conceptual entity [MASS OF LAND] and this profiling takes place against a conceptual **base** [SURROUNDING WATER] and **the profile–base relation** is what constitutes the semantic value of a word. The cognitive domain in which this relation functions is [GEOGRAPHY].

However, the cognitive domain so far described as [GEOGRAPHY] is commonly not figuring as the single background of the profile–base relation, but is part of a complex of related domains. For example, to understand the concept of the Hawaiian islands, the concept of Eyjafjalljökull, and the concept of Moruroa means something completely different. In the Hawaii case, the cognitive domain [GEOGRAPHY] is prototypically extended with the cognitive domain [HOLIDAY], in the second case the cognitive domain [GEOGRAPHY] is prototypically extended with the cognitive domain [VOLCANIC ACTIVITY] and, since its eruption in 2010 with [DISRUPTION OF FLIGHTS

AND HOLIDAYS], and in the third case the cognitive domain [GEOGRAPHY] is prototypically extended with the cognitive domain [NUCLEAR TESTING]. The usage of the word 'island' depends, therefore, on multiple domains that figure in a specific communicative context and these domains constitute together the configuration of knowledge. Typically, these cognitive domains overlap and interact in numerous and complex ways. This **matrix of cognitive domains** constitutes the general schema against which a word stands out as its instance.

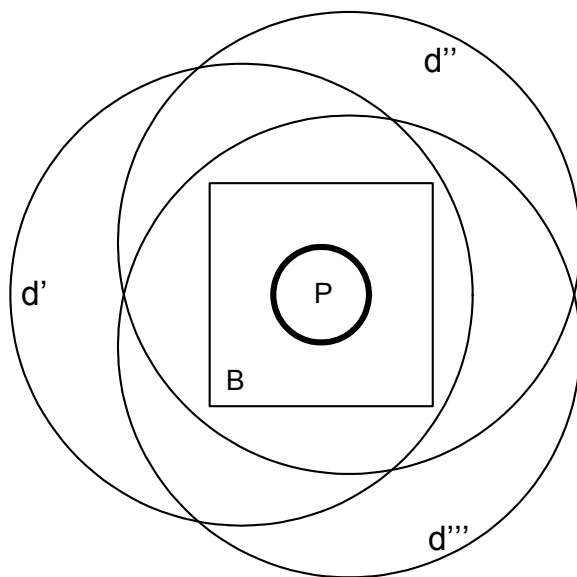


Figure 1. Profile, Base and Domains

In Figure 1, the bold circle represents the semantic unit profiling an entity (profile P), the box represents the base (base B), and the D with single or double accents stand for a cognitive domain, and the complex of D'-D''' for the matrix of cognitive domains.

It is clear that cognitive linguistics is a usage-based approach. It is an approach to language that takes into consideration the various components of cognition that should provide us with an instrument for interpreting language in a way that can reveal the thought that is implicated in it. The approach presented here is adapted from Ronald Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (2 vols., 1987, 1991) and elaborated and applied on biblical concepts and texts in more detail in my book *Reframing Biblical Studies. When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition and Context* (2009). Among the fundamental assumptions of this approach are that humans are

social animals, that language is social, and that the categories in which people think are social—that language is used within culturally determined categories of conceptualization. Language, as a cultural given that people use, is not only shaped by the mind but itself shapes the mind. And acts of language and acts of cognition are events that take place in contexts of conceptualization—in what is above described as the profile–base relationships in cognitive domains. In order to understand an act of language, one must be familiar not only with the language being used, one must be aware of the social and/or literary context in which the language is used, and one must know as much as possible about the cultural and conceptual realities that are embodied and evoked by that language. Hence, meaning is considered to be both conceptual and contextual.

The Word qešet in Genesis 9.12-17: A Rainbow?

The bow, *qešet*, occurs three times in Gen. 9.12-17, and is understood to designate a rainbow,¹ a warrior's or hunter's bow,² a constellation,³ or a combination of two of these options.⁴

Textual arguments provided to support the rainbow option are (1) God sets the bow in the clouds in v. 13, (2) the bow appears in the clouds in v. 14, and (3) God sees the bow in the clouds in v. 16. Intertextual support for this view is found in Ezek. 1.28, where the bow is said to shine in the clouds on a day of rain, and in Ben Sira 43.12-13 and 50.7 where the Greek word *toxon* 'rainbow' functions analogously to the word *qešet* in Ezek. 1.28. This has led to a long history of Judaic and Christian interpretations in which the word *qešet* is understood as a rainbow in Gen. 9.12-17.⁵ In terms

1. See BDB 906, *HALOT*, III: 1155; *NIDOTTE*, III: 1004; *TWAT*, VII: 223; Jacob (1974: 255); Cassuto (1964: 136); Westermann (1974: 632-35); Hamilton (1990: 317).

2. De Boer (1974/1991), Zenger (1983), Rütterswörden (1988).

3. Horowitz (1998), Rochberg (2004).

4. See Gunkel (1901: 150-51): 'קֶשֶׁת ist der Bogen zum Schießen...hier ist Jahves ungeheurer Kriegsbogen der Regenbogen am Himmel. Nach dieser Vorstellung ist also Jahve ein gewaltiger Krieger, der Pfeil und Bogen führt ... der Regenbogen am Himmel ist ein Zeichen, dass Gott des Gelübdes gedenkt und den Regen nicht zur Sinnflut steigert'. Cassuto (1964: 136): 'The story of the rainbow was, apparently, one of the episodes on which the ancient Israelite poetry concerning the Flood expatiated, but which were blurred and compressed in the Torah section so that the merest relic was left. The poetic saga may have related that after the Lord had used His bow to shoot arrows (that is, lightnings) at the Deluge storm, He hung it in the sky, intending not to use it again in this manner in future. The Torah, in accordance with its usual practice, declined to accept the mythological portrayal of the Deity shooting arrows from His bow, and therefore retained only the final symbol, which is not in conflict with its concepts and principles.'

5. For a survey of literature and views, see Fabry (1993).

of cognitive linguistics we can say that according to this view, the word *qešet* figures in the cognitive domain of [METEOROLOGY] and expresses the concept of [RAINBOW], including in its base the concepts of [ARC] and [COLOURS].

Since Julius Wellhausen many scholars have wondered about the certainty of the word's meaning as a rainbow, yet most have in the end opted for *qešet* in Gen. 9.12-17 as a designation of the rainbow or for a warrior's bow which God sets as a rainbow in the sky. However, de Boer (1974/1991) was the first to ask why the Hebrew Bible did not have a distinctive term for a rainbow.

Les mots d'Ezechiel *bějôm haggešem*, rendus par le Père Auvray «les jours de pluie», par le professeur Zimmerli «am Regentage» ne se rencontrent pas ailleurs dans l'ancien [sic] Testament. Il est évident que l'arc-en-ciel suppose un temps pluvieux. Et ceci nous fournit la raison pour laquelle il est si peu parlé de l'arc-en-ciel dans la littérature du Proche-Orient. L'arc-en-ciel est effectivement assez rare en Palestine. La Palestine possède moins que nos régions les conditions nécessaires à la formation de l'arc-en-ciel. Elle se trouve, en effet, à 20 degrés de latitude plus au sud. Il y a donc une vingtaine de degrés de différence dans la hauteur du soleil par rapport à nos régions. Ainsi, les circonstances atmosphériques comme la situation géographique expliquent que l'arc-en-ciel soit relativement rare dans le Proche-Orient (de Boer 1974/1991: 134).

The very rare occurrence of rainbows in the ancient Near East or in the present day Middle East thus explains for de Boer why the Hebrew language and Akkadian language do not have a word for rainbow. It does not explain, however, why the word combination <the bow-in-the clouds> could not designate 'rainbow'.⁶ Yet three other elements seem to confirm de Boer's scepticism with regard to the rainbow option.

In Genesis 9 <the bow-in-the clouds> functions as the sign of the covenant between Elohim and all life on earth. If, in fact, the rainbow is seldom seen in the ancient Near East, God would remember his covenant rarely. This seems contrary to what the text implies.

A second element makes it questionable that the word *qešet* figures in the cognitive domain of [METEOROLOGY], and that the concept of this bow necessarily invokes the base of [ARC] and [COLOURS]. However, in Gen. 9.12-17 these colours are expressed neither explicitly nor implicitly.

A third argument against the understanding of <the bow-in-the clouds> is the fact that a rainbow depends on the observer's position and perspective. Modern science has explained the nature of a rainbow.⁷ In a rainbow,

6. The symbols <...> indicate a fixed word combination.

7. Based on www.howstuffworks.com/question41.htm; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow>; www.knmi.nl/cms/content/31648/regenboog (cf. also <http://eo.ucar.edu/rainbows/>).

raindrops in the air act as tiny prisms. Light enters the raindrop, reflects off the side of the drop and exits. In the process, it is broken into a spectrum just as it is in a triangular glass prism. The angle between the ray of light coming in and the ray coming out of the drops is 42 degrees for red and 40 degrees for violet. The angles cause different colors from different drops to reach the observer's eye, forming a circular rim of color in the sky—a rainbow. Hence, a rainbow does not actually exist at a particular location in the sky, but depends on the observer's location and the position of the sun. All raindrops refract and reflect the sunlight in the same way, but only the light from some raindrops that reaches the observer's eye constitutes the rainbow for that observer. As a result, someone who is living above the atmosphere is unable to see a rainbow at all. Although people in the Ancient Near East did not have this scientific knowledge, they would have been aware of the fact that the rainbow is dependant on the observer's eyes and location. And if they thought of the deity as living above the heavenly vault (compare Ezek. 1.26), and the sun, moon and stars as moving below the heavenly vault, then they would have known that it is impossible for a deity to see a rainbow.⁸

To summarize the arguments contra the view that <the bow-in-the clouds> designates a rainbow:

1. due to its position on the globe, in the ancient Near East and in the present Middle East, a rainbow is very rare; if the perceptual and conceptual perspective of humans is shared by the deity according to this text, the implication would be that the deity hardly ever remembers his covenant with the earth and all creatures on it.
2. the concept of rainbow includes a profile of a [BOW] and necessarily and obligatorily includes a base of [COLOURS], that is to say, without colours one could not speak of a rainbow. However, in Gen. 9.12-17 these colours are not implied, and are expressed neither explicitly nor implicitly.
3. scientifically defined, the position of the deity above the heavenly vault makes it impossible for the deity to see a rainbow.

The Word qešet in Genesis 9.12-17: A Warrior's Bow?

Linguistically, the argumentation that the word *qešet* expresses a warrior's or hunter's bow is a strong one. Out of its 76 uses in the Hebrew Bible, this meaning is obvious in 72 texts (DCH, VII: 339). In the book of Genesis the

8. The same is true for artists in the Middle Ages, Renaissance and later who painted this 'rainbow scene' of Gen. 9. Although they did not have scientific knowledge about the nature of a rainbow, they were aware of the observer's perspective in relation to the rainbow (see pictures below).

word *qešet* occurs seven times, three times in our text, three times in the sense of a warrior's bow⁹ and once as a hunter's bow.¹⁰ Once, in Gen. 21.20, Ishmael is said to become a *qaššāt*, bowman. Apart from the use of *qešet* in Ezek. 1.28 in relation to a rainy day (followed by Ben Sira in 43.11 and 50.7), all other uses of the word *qešet* in the Hebrew Bible clearly indicate the meaning of a warrior's or hunter's bow. It appears that the prototypical meaning of the word *qešet* in the Hebrew Bible is [FIGHTING BOW] (P or profile), and necessarily includes in its base the concept of [ARROW], [ATTACK], and [ENEMY] and this profile–base relationship stands out against the cognitive domain of [WAR].

Cognitively speaking, culture, place and time-bound information on the way wars are fought, the structure of an army or troop, the person and function of an archer, the fabrication and use of a weapon, the development of warfare, and so on, might enlighten us about the configuration of knowledge in which this bow functions. From texts in the Hebrew Bible we learn that bows (and arrows) are mainly used as a weapon of attack of powerful fighters (mainly kings, commanders or other powerful persons; cf. Fabry 1993: 222) and often figure in a war-winning situation. Because the bow is such a distinctive mark of warfare it comes as no surprise that the end of the war is represented by the 'breaking of the bow' and that such a reference sometimes occurs in the same context as the making of a pact or covenant.¹¹ The question is then, does the bow in Gen. 9.12-17 represent war against an enemy or does the covenant of which it might be a sign represent the end of war and a peaceful pact? In other words, is this word used here in the context of violence or peace? Not surprisingly, many exegetes opt for the latter.¹²

9. Gen. 21.16, the distance of a bowshot. In Gen. 48.22 Jacob says to Joseph that the portion of land he has taken from the Amorites was taken 'with my sword and with my bow'. In Gen. 49.24, Jacob says that archers assailed Joseph, yet 'his bow abode as an enduring, firm one'.

10. In Gen. 27.3, where Esau is sent by Isaac to hunt game.

11. The text of Hos. 2.20 is an example of such a usage: 'In that day, I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; I will also break/banish the bow, sword, and war from the land. Thus I will let them lie down in safety' (NJPS). Similarly, Zech. 9.10: 'He shall banish chariots from Ephraim and horses from Jerusalem; the warrior's bow shall be broken/banished. He shall call on the nations to surrender, and his rule shall extend from sea to sea and from ocean to land's end' (NJPS).

12. Cf. Hamilton (1990: 317): 'The Hebrew <language> uses *qešet* for both the rainbow and the bow as a weapon. A common motif in ancient Near Eastern iconography is that of a bow-wielding deity. It is a symbol of his prowess. With this lethal weapon he eliminates his foes. The OT itself describes Yahweh as a warrior (Exod. 15:3) who vanquishes his opponents with a bow and a quiver full of arrows (Hab. 3:9). So too do God's representatives fight off their assailants with the bow (Gen. 49:23-24). But here, in what is nothing less than a radical reinterpretation of divine power, the bow

However, de Boer (1974/1991: 135) opposes that view, stating that in Gen. 9.12-17 the bow is neither broken nor laid down. On the contrary, he says, Elohim sets his bow visibly in the sky, he shows it as a sign of the battle, not against life on earth or against certain people, but against any threatening enemies. Those who threaten the life of human beings and other living things on earth are the waters of the flood, as v. 15 explicitly states. This pact and the bow that is its sign remind Elohim of his permanent fight against the powers of the waters, so that the *mabbûl* will never again wipe out the living beings on earth.

Various arguments seem to support de Boer's view. In Gen. 49.22-24 Jacob says that 'archers assailed Joseph, yet his bow abode as an enduring, firm one, and his arms were made firm by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob'. The word *qaštô* is used here in combination with the verb *yāšab* 'to stay, abode, sit' plus the adverb *b'ētān* 'permanent, enduring', so that the clause points to the powerful permanent position of the bow as a sign of protection in a threatening situation. A comparable use of the word *qešet* is noticeable in Isa. 41.2-3, where Cyrus's bow defeats his enemies and brings them down to the dust.¹³ This text refers to both Cyrus's sword and bow, his might, as well as to Yhwh who has brought this about.

Intertextual relationships with Mesopotamian texts support this understanding of *qešet* as a warrior's bow, too. Anthonioz (2010) demonstrates that in the available ancient Near Eastern flood stories, the flood is described as a great combat between divine beings against the winds of the flood; the bow is the crucial instrument with which the deity or flood hero assails the dangerous and bad powers of nature. In *The Myth of Anzû*, Ninurta is the hero who fights seven battles and overcomes all seven bad winds. At the heart of the story describing the turning point in the fight (Tablet II 53-60), the text describes how Ninurta beat the flood. This powerful deity 'drew his bow (*qaštu*) and armed it with an arrow, from the middle of the bow he sent his arrow'.¹⁴ Thus, he calms down the flood and makes it powerless. In *Ninurta*

ceases to function as a symbol of combat and is now a symbol of peace and well-being. Its placement in the clouds points to the cessation of God's hostilities against mankind.'

13. Isaiah 41.2-3: 'Who has roused a victor from the East, summoned him to His service? Has delivered up nations to him, and trodden sovereigns down? Has rendered their swords like dust, their bows like wind-blown straw? He pursues them, he goes on unscathed... I, the Lord, who was first and will be the last as well' (NJPS).

14. Anthonioz (2010: 191) translates Tablet II, line 53-60 as follows: '53. Au milieu du combat, sur le point de la mêlée, s'abattit le déluge! 54. La poitrine de la cuirasse (d'Anzû) baignait (dans) le sang! 55. Un nuage de mort se mit à pleuvoir, il fulgurait des pointes des flèches, 56. (?) entre eux le combat grondait. 57. L'omnipotent, l'illustre, le fils de Mammi, 58. L'aide d'Anu et de Dagan, l'aimé de Nišiku (Ea), 59. Il banda (son) arc et l'arma d'une flèche, 60. Du centre de l'arc, il lui décocha une flèche.' (Anthonioz bases her translation on Annus [2001: 23-24]).

and the Stones a similar fight against the winds and the monster of the deluge is pictured, in which the long bow again takes up a crucial position. In *Enuma Elish* (IV 35-50), Marduk's fight against Tiamat is described (translation by Talon 2005 cited by Anthonioz 2010: 197):

35 Il façonna l'arc, révéla son arme,
 36 Il fit chevaucher la flèche, il plaça la corde,
 37 Il brandit la masse, (la) saisit de sa droite,
 38 Il suspendit à son côté l'arc et le carquois,
 39 Il plaça l'éclair devant lui,
 40 Il emplit son corps de flammes ardentes,
 41 Il fit le filet (pour y mettre) Tiamat intacte au-dedans,
 42 Il prit les quatre vents, rien d'elle ne (pourra s'en) sortir,
 43 Le vent du sud, ...

While Marduk's great skills as an archer brings Tiamat to an end, the victory of Marduk is marked by the verb *nāhu*: it is not the sea that is brought to rest, but the hero, the Lord himself. Anthonioz concludes that the biblical story of the flood with its protagonist and hero Noah opens and closes the story with this same concept of [REST]. In the section immediately following our text section in vv. 12-17, Noah plants a vineyard, drinks of the wine and becomes drunk (vv. 20-21), thus showing the common winning warrior's situation. The hero Noah finds rest, after he had first offered rest to Yhwh in 8.20-22.

Ces différents récits sont diluviens dans la mesure où le déluge apparaît comme l'arme par excellence de la victoire, mais ils n'ont cependant rien de diluvien dans le sens où les eaux apparaissent absentes pratiquement de la narration, ce qui n'est pas le cas des vents... Le verbe *nāhu* sanctionne bien dans les plus grands mythes de l'histoire mésopotamienne la fin des combats... Ainsi, après des millénaires de combats divins et guerriers, de combat diluviens, Noé non seulement offre à Yhwh son repos, puisqu'il n'y aura plus jamais de déluge sur la terre, mais semble aussi recevoir son repos de Yhwh, puisqu'il reçoit non pas une sagesse en abondance ou en excès, non pas une vie éternelle, mais un repos de guerrier, celui de planter une vigne et de s'enivrer dans sa tente! (Anthonioz 2010: 198-99).

Let me evaluate the arguments in favour of the view that the word *qešet* in Gen. 9.12-17 expresses the concept of [WARRIOR'S BOW]. The first argument is a linguistic one. In 72 out of the 76 occurrences of the word *qešet* in the Hebrew Bible, it certainly designates a weapon.

The second argument is a cultural one. The word *qešet* in its common, prototypical meaning of a warrior's bow figures in the cognitive domain [WAR]. In the ancient Near East the conceptual configuration of [WAR] is grounded on warfare as performed by human armies and is used in reference to deities. As shown above, intertextual relationships between the flood story in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Mesopotamian stories can give us a

glimpse of such a divine war-like conceptualization of the battle against the flood. The only other usage of the term *mabbûl* in the Hebrew Bible, in Ps. 29.10, allows us another glimpse: we see Yhwh as a king sitting on his throne vis-à-vis the flood as if he is the winner over and against the flood. And it is this image that coheres with Gen. 9.12-17, and especially v. 15, and the Mesopotamian flood stories.

Not only linguistically, intratextually and intertextually is the conceptualization of *qešet* as a fighting bow very plausible, but its position in the context of Genesis 6–9 makes it even more likely. Gen. 9.12-17 is the concluding section of the flood story in Genesis 6–8, a text that starts with the extraordinary position of Noah. At the end of chap. 8, immediately preceding our text, Noah, a man whose name means ‘rest’, puts Yhwh to rest by his sacrifice. In the text immediately following, Gen. 9.18-28, Noah receives the rest of a warrior who gets a vineyard after he has finished his active service as the hero of the flood (Anthonioz 2010: 199). In this context of war and the end of it, God sets up his bow in order to prevent the floodwaters from returning to earth and devastating all life on earth again.

In short, according to this view Gen. 9.12-17 shows God as the war-winning deity Elohim who sets his bow in the clouds as a sign of his victory over the waters of the *mabbûl*. It is not a sign of peace but of power and might.

The Word qešet in Genesis 9.12-17: The Bow Star Constellation?

In the same line of reasoning the meaning of the word *qešet* is extended from [WARRIOR’S BOW] to the constellation [BOW STAR]. Various Mesopotamian texts narrate how the bow, after being used by deities as a successful weapon of attack, becomes a victorious sign of the war won over enemies and how it is set in the sky as the Bow Star, *qaštu*. The most important testimony to this view is *Enuma Elish* VI 80-94, where Anu, the deity of the Upper Heavens, presents his bow to the other gods and praises its power; he calls the bow his daughter and gives it three names, ‘long bow’, ‘conqueror’, and ‘Bow Star’, and he makes it appear in the sky as a constellation. Finally, he gives this bow its place in the assembly of the gods.

- 80 Les grands dieux, à cinquante, prirent place
 81 les dieux des destins, à sept, fixèrent les sentences.
 82 Le Seigneur présenta alors l’Arc, son arme, et le jeta devant eux,
 83 ils virent le filet qu’il s’était fait, les dieux, ses pères.
 84 Ils virent l’Arc, combien était parfaite sa forme,
 85 ses pères louèrent les actes qu’il avait accomplis.
 86 Anu l’éleva et prit la parole dans l’assemblée des dieux,
 87 ayant embrassé l’Arc, (il dit): «C’est bien ma fille!»

88 De l'Arc, il nomma ainsi les noms.
 89 «Long bois», que ce soit le premier; que le deuxième soit «Conquérant»,
 90 son troisième nom est «Etoile de l'Arc», il la fit apparaître dans le ciel,
 91 il fixa sa position parmi les dieux, ses frères.

92 Après qu'Anu eut décrété les destins de l'Arc,
 93 il instaura un trône royal, élevé parmi les dieux,
 94 et Anu le fit s'asseoir, lui, dans l'assemblée des dieux.
 <...>? (Talon 2005: 101)

Enuma Elish VI 80-94 shows us the process of metaphorical conceptualization of *qaštu*, 'bow'. This word begins its life in the source cognitive domain of [WAR] where it expresses a [WARRIOR'S BOW]. It is then extended to a [SIGN OF VICTORY], still figuring in the same domain. Consequently it is transferred to the target domain of [ASTRONOMY] and [DEITIES], and comes to express a bow or an arc-like constellation, the [BOW STAR].

On the basis of this text, Horowitz (1998: 124) describes the Bow Star as the final addition to the universe in *Enuma Elish* and explains that in the *Astrolabe B* (KAV 218 B I 14-16) the Bow Star is identified with Ištar of Elam and is called the daughter of Anu. Also the astronomical text 5R 46 23 identifies the Bow Star with Ištar of Babylon. In Mesopotamian iconography the bow is clearly the standard attribute of Ištar. Walker (1983: 146) mentions an Old Babylonian prayer to the 'gods of the night', which contains a list of stars, *qašum* the Bow Star being one of them. Rochberg (2004: 56) mentions the Babylonian *namburbû* ritual, which is a ritual against the 'evil of the bow'. It includes offerings to be made to the god Ea and the goddess Ištar. She concludes:

The goddess Ištar, daughter of Anu, was identified with the heavenly Bow as a result of Anu's declaration in Tablet VI of *Enūma eliš*, the creation account, that the bow was 'his daughter'. Ištar therefore represents the Bow Star (Akkadian *Qaštu*, a star in the constellation Canis Minor). Given the mythological equation of the Bow Star with Ištar, reflected in the scholarly substitution of the name *Qaštu* for the planet Venus, the planet associated with the goddess Ištar, the logic of the ritual is straightforward. The Bow Star receives supplication by means of sacrifice to Ištar, who stands for the star *Qaštu*. And when the Bow Star receives its supplication, the evil of the bow should be dispelled (Rochberg 2004: 56).

In other words, the semantic content of [WARRIOR'S BOW] is valid here, but it is metaphorically extended to the constellation Bow Star. The Bow Star *Qaštu* is identified by Reiner and Pingree (1981: 11) as *Canis maior*. This conspicuous constellation lies mainly just south of the Milky Way between Orion and the long train of bright stars from the old *Argo Navis*. The constellation is dominated by the bright star Sirius, the brightest-appearing star in the sky. It is also known that the ancient Egyptians based their calendar on its yearly motion around the sky, so that it is certain that

both in ancient Mesopotamia and in ancient Egypt this Bow Star was an important constellation.¹⁵

In sum, this third study of the conceptual meaning of the bow in Genesis 9 is based on astronomy and on intertextual relations. The important constellation of the Bow Star in Babylonia is explained in relation to the deity Anu and is equally important in Mesopotamian and in Egyptian astronomy. Apart from a comparable background, the Bow Star's location in the sky might fit the text in Gen. 9.12-17 as well. If so, God places his bow in the sky as a remembrance of the war against the enemies, the waters, and this bow can be identified with the Bow Star or *Canis maior*. In this case, the semantic unit *qešet* profiles the conceptual entity [BOW STAR] and this profiling takes place against a conceptual base [CONSTELLATION] and the profile-base relation is what constitutes the semantic value of a word. The cognitive domain in which this relation functions is [ASTRONOMY] (i.e. the ancient knowledge of astronomy).

Results of a Cognitive Linguistic Study of the Word qešet

In cognitive linguistics, meaning is considered to be both conceptual and contextual. Conceptual, because words are viewed as distinct and separable semantic units, as conceptualizations that derive their meaning from specific profile-base-cognitive domain relationships expressed in language. Contextual, because the matrix of domains contextualises a word's meaning structure in a culture-related knowledge configuration. The examination presented above has shown us the meaning potential of the word *qešet* in Biblical Hebrew and demonstrated how much of its conceptualization depends on the cognitive domain in which it is used.

In Gen. 9.12-17 the relation between bow and God is described as one of possession, 'my bow'. That is to say, *qaštī* represents in Gen. 9.13 a relational state in which the pronominal suffix expresses the unique relation to God. In the Mesopotamian texts mentioned above, the deities have bows and arrows to fight against the flood waters. In *Enuma Elish* Tablet VI Anu, the deity of heaven, places his bow in the sky and the meaning of the word *qaštu* is metaphorically extended from long bow to the sign of victory and the constellation Bow Star. It is possible that similar ideas are lingering in the background of Gen. 9.12-17.

Profiled in this ancient Near Eastern background is the specific semantic network of Gen. 9.8-17 in which various concepts are closely linked together: 'My bow // My covenant', 'I set // I establish', 'Clouds over the earth

15. According to Rochberg (2004: 56 n. 31) a new identification of *Qaštu* as *Canis minor* (with Procyon, the eighth brightest star in the sky) by Hunger and Pingree (1999) replaces the earlier identification.

// All life on earth', 'I see directly (with my eyes) the bow // I see indirectly (in my mind) the covenant'.

The prototypical conceptual content of *qešet* as the [WARRIOR'S BOW] of the victorious winner is related in Gen. 9.13-17 to *b'rit*, the covenant between a superior party and an inferior party, a lord and his vassals. Both words share the concepts of hierarchy and power and the pronominal suffix 'my' relates them exclusively to the deity. The verbs *nātan* and *qūm* in the first person singular used in combination with *qešet* and *b'rit* share the same spatial concept of 'setting up' or 'establishing'. Thus the bow may function as the sign of the victory and of the hierarchical pact between the deity and all living beings on earth.

A Visual-Critical Approach

Visual criticism can, at least in theory, correct and extend cognitive linguistics. It acknowledges, just as cognitive linguistics does, that meanings of words and texts exist only when they are grounded in a communicative setting—that is, when they are related to the participants of the language event, the author and the reader—and that only in the active participation of their users, authors and readers does meaning arise. However, it is only the linguistic and textual production of meaning that is closely examined in cognitive linguistics, and not the reader's production of meaning. Visual criticism allows us to systematically research the cultural matrix in which a text is read and received and not only the cultural matrix in which the text is produced, because it focuses on visual images of meaning. Whereas cognitive linguistics could lead us to a virtual inventory of potential meanings, visual criticism can lead us to actual and factual meanings produced by artistic readers.

In practice, however, some difficulties arise. Paintings that relate to Gen. 9.12-17 reveal that painters over the ages have based their interpretations on translations in Christian Bibles. And these have all translated the word *qešet* with 'rainbow'. Notwithstanding this difficulty, the painters show us aspects of the text neglected so far. For the visual-critical examination below, I refer to the paintings on the website http://www.biblical-art.com/biblicalsubject.asp?id_biblicalsubject=43&pagenum=1 and include only two pictures here: that of Willem de Pannemaker (1567) and Caspar Luiken (1712).¹⁶

16. Chosen are ancient paintings from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century CE that have their origin in different countries, viz. Italy, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, make use of various materials, and focus on the (sacrifice and) rainbow episode, but differ with respect to God's position vis-à-vis the rainbow. The paintings I will refer to are in chronological order: Paolo Uccello—fresco 1447–48, Michelangelo Buon-

One of the first features that characterize these works of art is the integral representation of the rainbow section in Gen. 9.12-17 and the sacrifice section in Gen. 8.15-22. In reading of Gen. 8.20-9.17 as a unity, most painters are able to create a coherent picture of Noah's sacrifice, Yhwh's promise to rescue the earth and never again destroy its living beings, the covenant of God with all living beings on earth, and the rainbow as the sign of this covenant.¹⁷ Since the distinction of P- and J-sources, it became standard procedure for historical-critical biblical scholarship and synchronic literary criticism to read the two chapters in separation, Gen. 8.20-27 being a product of the J-redactor (because of the divine name Yhwh), and Gen. 9.1-17 the product of the P-redactor (because of the use of Elohim). The obvious relationships in the final redaction are thus too often neglected, as the artists remind us.

Another striking element is the foregrounding in the paintings of the human personae, Noah and his family, as well as the presence of many animals, the presentation of the landscape, the plants and earth. The tapestry of Willem de Pannemaker is very interesting for its representation of landscape (see Figure 2).¹⁸

Two landscapes are visible in this carpet, the landscape of Noah's family and a larger scene in the border. The border landscape shows us a glimpse of the contemporaneous idea of an ideal landscape full of plants, shrubs, and trees with living beings that represent all kinds of water, air and land animals. We discover two horizons, one in the border and one in the embedded picture. Whereas Noah's world depicts a bucolic land with only one hill on which Noah's boat was stranded, in the border world we detect a land with various high mountain peaks with castles and buildings on it. Even the heavenly angels in the embedded landscape return as *putti* in the border

arotti—fresco 1509; Jacopo Bassano—oil painting 1560, Willem de Pannemaker—tapestry 1567 (included), Gérard Jollain—engraving 1670, Matthias Scheits—woodcut 1672, Caspar Luiken—engraving 1712 (included), Gerard Hoet and Jan van Vianen—engraving 1728.

17. The exceptions are Uccello (1447-48), who shows in his fresco the rainbow episode and the vineyard episode in one picture, and Michelangelo (1509), who paints on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel only the sacrifice scene and not the rainbow scene.

18. http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/aria/aria_assets/BK-1955-99?lang=nl. The Rijksmuseum website tells us that this tapestry was part of a series depicting the history of Noah. The series was various times woven in the Brussels workshop of Willem de Pannemaker according to the design of Michel Coxcie. The first time the tapestries were produced for the Polish King Sigismund II Augustus Jagello. Between 1563 and 1565 Philip II had the carpets woven again, now with his arms omitted and the carpets got new borders with animals. The Rijksmuseum Carpet weaving is part of yet another series, made after 1567 for the regent of the Netherlands, Margaret of Parma (1522-1586). The arms of Margaret of Austria and Burgundy are shown in the upper corners.

world. This is a perfect illustration of the reader's response to a text. In interaction with one's own mental framework meaning is dynamically produced, over and over again new borders are construed and connected as the border to the pre-existing inner-picture. New coats of arms are added, ancient ones removed. The various carpet borders of Noah's landscape over the ages make visible what reception history entails: the way readers ground the textual network of meaning in a communicative context in which they themselves are participants.



Figure 2. Willem de Pannemaker

Art can also open our minds to another remarkable feature in Genesis 8.20–9.17, namely the elliptical presentation of human characters. In Gen. 9.1 and 9.11 God blesses Noah and his sons and commands them to be fertile and fill the earth. And in v. 9 God establishes his covenant ‘with you and your offspring to come’. In the present cognitive linguistic study and in most other biblical studies, the covenant is seen to be directed towards Noah and his sons and to deal with their future behaviour only, although the promise and covenant have regard to fertility and offspring.¹⁹ This shortsightedness, so

19. Cassuto (1964: 130) is a good example: ‘[T]he covenant is a promise that they would be fertile and fill the earth; here God reiterates the assurance given in the preceding communication in order to extend it and include in it the future generations’.

common for biblical exegetes familiar with the patriarchal framework of thinking on the part of the biblical authors, is exposed by the artists, since they had to choose whether or not to include women in their picture. And they all include Noah's wife and the sons' wives in their paintings. Yet, these figures are not pictured in the same way. In the fresco made by Uccello (1447–48), in which a rainbow and vines are included, one of Noah's sons is set to one side, turning away from the main group which consists of Noah and three other figures (three women and one man), and this man is presumably Ham, although he could also be represented by a male figure on the background. In Michelangelo's fresco (1509), the sons are naked and busy slaughtering a sheep, whereas the women are wearing clothes. It is remarkable that Michelangelo paints both Noah and his wife standing at the altar to bring a sacrifice, as well as their beautiful daughter-in-law. Bassano's oil painting (1560) presents in the foreground a busy family life with four women and three sons, and far away in the distance Noah on his own at the altar. In the tapestry of Willem de Pannemaker (1567) the family is arranged in two groups. Noah, his sons and wife are positioned on his right-hand side, while the daughters-in-law are pictured as the three Graces on his left-hand side. All the humans are looking upwards, towards heaven; only one of the sons (Ham?) is looking downwards. In Jollain's engraving (1670) Noah and two of his sons are looking upwards, the others are hardly visible. In Scheits's woodcut (1672), two men and one woman are busy slaughtering in the distance, whereas Noah with two women and one son are preparing the fire. The eight human figures in Luiken's engraving (1712) fall into two groups as well, while only Noah is standing at the altar. Finally, Gerard Hoet (1728) offers an engraving with Noah as the ancient patriarch in the centre and three wives kneeling around him. Their faces are directed downwards, while his three sons are also praying and kneeling but with their faces upwards. One woman, presumably Noah's wife, is half standing and near the altar. Whatever the clothing, grouping or positioning, the artists' impressions of the biblical scene includes both men and women, either in the bringing of a sacrifice or in praying. Thus they all assume and express the fact that men and women are included in the promise of fertility and in the covenant.

The striking thing about these paintings is that none of these human characters is looking at the rainbow. The rainbow is always painted frontal, but hardly anyone seems to notice it. In Uccello's fresco, the humans are grouped around Noah with a nimbus and are looking at him alone, with the exclusion of one. In Bassano's painting everyone is too engrossed in their work to see the rainbow in the far distance. In de Pannemaker's tapestry and in Jollain's painting the humans look at God above, but not at the rainbow itself. In Scheits's woodcut and Luiken's engravings the main protagonist, Noah, looks at the fire on his altar. There is one exception, though. In Caspar Luiken's picture (1712) one woman is looking upwards, shading her

eyes and holding up her other hand as if to protect her eyes from the radiant light of the rainbow. She is positioned in the right hand lower corner, closest to the spectator, as if we are invited to share her perspective.



GEN. VIII

Gratus grata Deo sua fert holocausta Noachus;
Pax inita est, signum fœderis Iris adest.
Iride sed super hac iudex aliquando sedebit.
Fœdifragus timeat Numinis hostis homo.

*Das Opfer, Noa war aus Dankbarkeit entglommen,
der Friede, den Gott macht, im Regenbogen, kund.
Der Richter wird, am End auf diesem Bogen, kommen.
Den Bogen sehen, und brich nicht willig Gottes Bund.*

Figure 3. Caspar Luiken

The accompanying Latin and German text explains that 'God ("the judge") will come at the end (of times) sitting on this rainbow'.²⁰ So in this view the rainbow represents the deity and the fear of a final judgment, which appears to be based on Gen. 9.12-17 as well as on Ezek. 1.26-28 and Rev. 4.3.

This brings us to God's relation to the rainbow as visualized in these pictures. Here the conceptual element mentioned above in the cognitive linguistic analysis returns. Genesis 9.16 states that God sees the bow and remembers his covenant; his position above the heavenly vault, however, would not enable him to see such a rainbow. The artists we have looked at know, of course, that a rainbow depends on the observer's location and the position of the sun. How then could they visualize God's vision of the rainbow, as the translations of Gen. 9.12-17 would have it? Uccello paints the rainbow as a kind of vault beneath which God faces downwards, while blessing Noah's family. Bassano shows rays of sunshine falling from a clouded sky; these rays fall through the rainbow onto the fire on the altar, while no divine figure is noticeable. In de Pannemaker's carpet, God is sitting on the rainbow, dangling his legs as if he is sitting on a chair or bank. His hands are spread out in a gesture of blessing. This deity is not alone but is joined by a multitude of heavenly figures, presumably angels. Jollain made a graphic of a shining deity in the heavenly clouds, but he is separated from the partially visible rainbow on earth; how in fact the two are related remains unclear. Scheits depicts a rainbow in the clouds without suggesting any relation to the deity. Luiken is the only one to present a complete half-circular rainbow, and as explained above, invites us to share the viewpoint from the position of the woman who is looking up at the rainbow, which seems to represent the deity. The text accompanying his engraving supports this view.

In sum, some painters have chosen not to include God in their pictures and to share the human perspective only. They show that it is the human perspective that makes the rainbow visible, not the (shared) divine one. Others have expressed a divine relation to the rainbow—which is impossible from a sensory perspective. These works of art demonstrate that painters are readers who have to make up their own minds and to draw their own conclusions, because the rainbow in the translated text forces them to do so. The artists are confronted with the same conceptual perspectives and the incongruities in the text of Genesis 9 as we are. They have solved it visually, whereas biblical scholars try to acknowledge the linguistic, textual and cul-

20. The text that comes with Luiken's engraving reads: 'Gratus grata Deo sua fert holocausta Noachus; Pax inita est, signum foederis Iris adest. Iride sed super hae judex aliquando sedebit. Foedifragus timeat Numinis hostis homo.' And the German translation says: 'Das Opfer Noae war aus Danckbarkeit entglommen, der Friede, den Gott macht, im Regenbogen kund. Der Richter wird, am End auf diesem Bogen kommen. Den Bogen sehen und brich nicht willig Gottes Bund.'

tural features in the original language and setting, and to solve it abstractly and conceptually.

So what have we learned from this exercise? That visual criticism might help us to understand the reader's attribution of meanings to biblical texts, and to become aware of textual ellipses and gaps and of distinct viewpoint positions. Art history tells us that painters in the past have been very accurate readers of translated biblical texts. In some way they are much more accurate than modern paintings on the internet, especially those made by fundamentalist Christian organizations. They use the rainbow as a symbol of God's covenant with the world, a sign of peace while referring to Genesis 9. A similar view is visible in the following picture from the Internet.²¹



Figure 4. The Rainbow Path

It is easy to indicate what goes wrong in this Rainbow Path picture: the rainbow is viewed from one side, as if we were sharing the divine perspective. It is as if we are in a rollercoaster, together with God in the front seat, adopting his broad perspective upon the earth and its living beings. It is

21. Picture from: www.secondcomingmission.com/s7_rainbowpath/7_1_index.htm.

suggested that in our participation in this perspective, we share the divine perspective. Both visual criticism and linguistic criticism demonstrate that the divine perspective is impossible to share, either experientially or conceptually.

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‘A WOMAN OF VALOR, ’ESHET HAYIL’ (PROVERBS 31.10-31): A CONSERVATIVE RESPONSE TO THE SONG OF SONGS

Yair Zakovitch

I

The alphabetical acrostic poem ‘A Woman of Valor’ (Prov. 31.10-31) praises the ideal woman, who is both intelligent and industrious, and enumerates, one by one, her manifold deeds which free her husband from mundane worries and the need to provide for his family. The poem, with which the book of Proverbs ends, connects both with the unit that precedes it, ‘the words of Lemuel, king of Massa’ (31.1-9)—to which we will return, later—and with the Book of Proverbs’ introductory cycle (chaps. 1–9).

The similarity between wisdom, as described in Proverbs’ introductory cycle, and the characterization of the valiant woman has already been recognized. The literary unit consisting of Prov. 3.13-20 opens with, ‘Happy is the man who *finds* wisdom’ (v. 13), to which we compare, ‘A woman of valor, who will *find*?’ (Prov. 31.10; on finding a woman see also Prov. 18.22 and the pessimistic Eccl. 7.16, 28); wisdom, it is written, is ‘more precious than *rubies*’ (Prov. 3.15, see also 8.11; Job 28.18), while the ideal woman’s ‘worth is far beyond that of *rubies*’ (Prov. 31.10). About wisdom we read, ‘In her right hand is length of days, in her left, riches and honor’ (3.16), while the valorous woman makes ample use of her hands for the welfare of her home (31.13, 16, 19, 20), for which she is commended: ‘Extol her for the fruit of her hand’ (31.31).¹ Wisdom commands and bestows respect (3.16), and the ideal woman earns respect and praise (31.28-31). One more of wisdom’s characteristics in the introductory cycle (9.1-6) is paralleled in our poem: wisdom builds its own home (9.1), while caring for home and family comprises a central motif in the Woman of Valor poem (vv. 15 [twice], 21, 27); wisdom offers food to its guests (9.2-6), to which we compare the woman who ‘supplies provisions for her household, the daily fare for her maidens’ (31.15) and, as the ideal wife has ‘maidens,’ so, too, has wisdom

1. R.J. Clifford, *Proverbs* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999), p. 274.

'sent out her maidens to announce on the heights of the town' (9.3).² It is not surprising, therefore, that our poem mentions explicitly that the woman of valor's 'mouth is full of wisdom' (v. 26).

The Septuagint to v. 30 reads, γυνή γὰρ συνετή εὐλογεῖται, φόβον δὲ κυρίου αὐτὴ αἰνεῖτω, '...for a woman of understanding will be blessed and the fear of the Lord, she herself will praise.' A. Rofé³ has rightly concluded that these represent two versions: 'a God-fearing woman will be praised' and 'for a woman of understanding will be praised,' the second clearly being the original. It was amended to the woman's own 'fear of the Lord' to accord with the statement at the beginning of the book: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge' (1.7; and see Ps. 111.10; Job 28.28).⁴ Replacing 'understanding' with 'fear of the Lord' introduced God into the secular poem and imbued it with theological overtones.

The valiant woman is also presented as the reverse of the 'foreign' (lit. 'strange') woman whose proximity bodes death and against whom we are repeatedly cautioned in Proverbs' introductory cluster (Prov. 2.16-19; 6.20-35; 7.1-27; see also 22.14; 23.27). Like the foreign, seductive woman who lures men with her well-practiced voice and blandishments (5.3; 6.24; 7.13-21) so, too, does the Woman of Valor wield impressive rhetorical skills (v. 16), but hers are used quite differently: the forbidden woman outwits her husband (7.19-20) while the valiant woman has the implicit trust of hers (31.11); the forbidden woman leaves her home to stalk her innocent prey (7.11ff.) while the valiant wife conducts her assorted business affairs from within the home and it is her husband who sits at the gates of the city (31.23). The forbidden woman is beautiful, and therein lies the danger (6.25), while our poem holds that 'grace is deceptive, beauty if illusory' (v. 30).⁵

In this essay I aim to reveal the underlying, programmatic intent of the poem 'A Woman of Valor' as a polemic against a different female figure who is depicted in poems from another book within the corpus of Wisdom Literature, a book which, like Proverbs, was also attributed to King Solomon: the

2. C.V. Camp, *Wisdom and Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), pp. 90-93; M.V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 18B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 908-909.

3. A. Rofé, "'A Virtuous Wife" [אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל], γυνή συνετή, and the Redaction of the Book of Proverbs' [in Hebrew], in Z. Talshir et al. (eds.), *Homage to Shmuel: Studies in the World of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2001), p. 386.

4. The resemblance between the woman of valor and the personified Wisdom does not mean that the woman of valor is, herself, a personification of wisdom, as claimed by A. Wolters, 'Sôpiyyâ as Hymnic Participle and Play on Sophia', *JBL* 104 (1985), pp. 577-87. There are no grounds for his claim that *tzofiah* is a play on the Greek 'Sophia'.

5. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 911.

Song of Songs.⁶ Moreover, we will identify a source from which the author of the 'Woman of Valor' likely drew his inspiration for his ideal woman. The women in the Song of Songs, an anthology of erotic and originally secular love poetry,⁷ are far removed from those typically depicted in biblical literature, which usually casts men (patriarchs, judges, priests, kings, prophets⁸) in its leading roles. The Bible generally relegates women to their husbands' shadows, where they can remain nameless, if not ignored entirely,⁹ and where their births and deaths are rarely noted. Indeed, due to women's secondary status in the Bible, even books with an eponymous heroine—Ruth and Esther—begin and end with a man.

Male supremacy, however, disappears entirely in the Song of Songs; the beloved's words to her lover, 'I am my beloved's and his desire is for me' (7.11), which allude to the story of the Garden of Eden—'your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you' (Gen. 3.16)—exemplify the distinct worldview reflected in the Song of Songs and the equality between the sexes that resonates throughout its pages. In the Song, the woman's speaking role is larger than the man's. Her character is also more fully depicted: while he is rendered only when he speaks to her, she is seen addressing also her brothers and the 'daughters of Jerusalem.' The beloved is more daring than is the lover: in both dialogues and monologues (1.2-4; 2.15, 16-17; 3.1-5; 7.11-14; 8.1-4; 8.5b; 8.6a) it is she who initiates their courtship. In only two of the dialogues is the man given the final word (1.7-8; 4.12-5.1) while in all others it is the woman's (1.9-14, 15-17; 2.1-3; 7.8-10; 8.13-14), as it is, too, in her conversation with her brothers (8.8-10). A study of the interactions between the beloved and her lover shows that she often teases him regarding something he has said and it is she who delivers the winning 'sting' and demonstrates her superior cleverness (7.10; 8.13-14). Likewise she makes fun of her brothers who sought earlier to mock her (8.8-10). This

6. For Song of Songs' connection to Wisdom Literature, see Y. Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied* (HTKAT; Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2004), pp. 46-47.

7. It may be that, even before the individual songs were anthologized, several of them were interpreted allegorically by the prophets; see, e.g., Isaiah's allegorical interpretation (5.1-7) of the Vineyard Song (Song 8.8-10). Elsewhere I intend to address the beginnings of the allegorical interpretation previous to Song of Songs' compilation and as a possible reason behind it.

8. See, too, 'In Praise of the Fathers' (Ben Sira 44.1), beginning with 'Our forefathers, men of mercy in their time' (without mentioning a single woman).

9. When women are heroines of the story we must look, in each case, for the reason: e.g., Deborah and Yael (Judg. 4-5), Delilah (Judg. 16), the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam. 14), and the wise woman of Abel Beth-maacah (2 Sam. 20), Bathsheba, Solomon's mother (1 Kgs 1), the cruel Jezebel (1 Kgs 21), the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4), Naomi, Ruth, Esther.

suggests that at least some of the poems in the Song were composed by women and depict the woman's sentiments, worldviews, and aspirations.¹⁰

The erotic nature of the Song of Songs is well known and, in contrast to the Bible's other books in which physical descriptions are only rarely supplied, the Song is generous in its depictions of the male body (5.10-16) and, especially, the female's (4.1-7; 6.4-10; 7.1-7). Moreover, while beauty is mentioned in the Bible primarily in dubious contexts when its effect on the unfolding of events is unfavorable (e.g., Gen. 12.11; 2 Sam. 12.1; 13.1), and even biblical prophecy is unappreciative of female beauty (e.g., Isa. 3.18-24; Ezek. 16.4-15), in the Song of Songs physical beauty is applauded and praised (see 1.15; 2.13; 4.1, 10; 6.1, 4, 10; 7.2, 7).

In its attitude towards love, too, we see a marked difference between biblical love poems and narrative. In the Song of Songs the root *ahv*, 'love', is repeatedly employed to favorably depict the relationship between the lover and his beloved (see 1.3, 4, 7; 2.4, 7; 3.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10; 5.8; 7.7; 8.4, 6, 7), whereas in the biblical narrative, *ahv* in contexts of intimate relations usually betokens an unhappy ending and the verb from the root is sometimes used even to describe forbidden relations, such as love for foreign women (Judg. 14.16; 16.4, 15; 1 Kgs 11.1-2). The Bible's two stories of rape begin with 'love' (Gen. 34.3; 2 Sam. 13.1), and even when the word is used in a context that would appear positive, it transpires that love for one woman has come at the expense of another who is unloved (Gen. 29.18, 30; 1 Sam. 1.5).

II

In Proverbs' poem we find little appreciation for beauty—'grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory' (31.30)—and a husband's love for his wife is not to be demonstrated by declarations of praise whispered into her ears (vv. 28ff.). Instead of equality between the lover and the beloved, like that in the Song of Songs, in this poem the woman is assessed by her usefulness to her husband and his satisfaction with her. This we find at the beginning of the poem (vv. 11-12), at its conclusion (vv. 29ff.), and also in the middle (v. 23).¹¹

Of course, the conservative ideology of 'A Woman of Valor' is not, in itself, sufficient proof that it was written specifically against the depiction of the female in the Song of Songs. What, then, underlies my claim that it was the Song of Songs that provoked the writing of the poem 'Eshet ayil, the 'Woman of Valor'?

10. P. Trible, 'Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation', *JAAR* 41 (1973), pp. 30-48.

11. The same standard is used to compare wife to husband also in Prov. 12.4; see, too, Ben Sira 26.1-2.

In 'A Woman of Valor' we discern clear connections with the passage in the Song of Songs that characterizes female beauty (6.4-10). In that poem, the women-maidens celebrate the woman: 'Women see her and acclaim her [*ra'uha banot vaye'ashruha*], queens and concubines, and they praise her [*vayehaleluha*]' (6.9b)—to which we compare Leah's words upon the birth of Asher: 'What good fortune [*be'oshri*]! For I was acclaimed by women [*'ishruni banot*]' (Gen. 30.13). In our poem, with its male orientation, the husband and sons praise the woman: 'Her sons acclaim her [*baneiha vaye'ashruha*], her husband praises her [*vayehaleleha*]' (31.28). The women, on the other hand, are mentioned in the very next verse, one more element in the men's approval of their wife/mother: 'Many women [*banot*] have succeeded [*asu ayil*], but you surpass them all' (v. 29). Whereas the women in the Song of Songs praise the woman's beauty, 'Who is she that shines through like the dawn, *beautiful* as the moon, radiant as the sun, awesome as bannered hosts?' (Song 6.10), in our poem, the men emphasize that 'Grace is deceptive; *beauty* is illusory' (v. 30).¹²

Song of Songs 6.4-10 paints a portrait of a woman's face. Other descriptive poems extend our vision beyond the face to include the full bust, including hair and breasts (4.1-7), or the whole body—e.g., the body of the Shulamit, from the soles of her feet (indeed, the dancer's feet and legs are of foremost importance) to her head and hair (7.1-6). Our poem, interested as it is in industriousness and not beauty or eroticism, focuses mainly on the woman's busy hands: 'With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard' (v. 16); she 'girds her loins with strength and is vigorous with her arms' (v. 17; regarding the man's body in the Song of Songs, his hand [lit., arm] is mentioned when the woman says to him: 'Let me be as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your hand', 8.6); 'She stretches her hand to the distaff, and her palms work the spindle' (Prov. 31.19; in the Song, it is the man who stretches out his hand—'My beloved stretched his hand through the [door]-hole [i.e., in order to open the door and enter] and my heart was stirred for him', 5.4); 'Her palm is open to the poor, her hands stretched to the needy' (v. 20; note the chiasmus in vv. 19-20); 'Extol her for the fruit of her hand [i.e., for her labors] ...' (v. 31; cf. the first verse mention of her hand: 'She plants a vineyard with the fruit of her hands', v. 16).

12. Although elsewhere ("Head of a Woman—A Painting in Poetry": A Study of Song of Songs 6:4-10', in *Bezalel Narkiss Memorial Volume* [forthcoming]) I demonstrate that, originally, v. 10 preceded vv. 4-9 in Song 6. However, the author of Proverbs was familiar with the present order of the verses in Song, according to which v. 10 is understood as the praise sung by other women and, as a result, following the verse, 'Her husband praises her' (Prov. 31.28), the women's words of praise to the wife and mother are quoted: 'Many women have succeeded, but you surpass them all' (Prov. 31.28).

Along with references to body-parts in order to illustrate the woman's industriousness and strength, the poet includes also a facial feature: 'Her mouth is full of wisdom, her tongue with kindly teaching' (v. 26); again, the mention of mouth and tongue are employed to underscore the wife's industriousness, not her beauty or eroticism, in contrast to the verse in the Song of Songs: 'Your lips are like a crimson thread, your mouth [*midbarekh*] is lovely' (Song 4.3), a verse that, in the Septuagint and Peshitta, appears again, following 6.3.¹³ (The term *midbarekh*, literally 'your words,' designates the woman's tongue, the organ used for speech; cf. Isa. 32.4.) 'Lips' and 'tongue' appear in the same verse also in Song 4.11: 'Sweetness drops from your lips, O bride, honey and milk are under your tongue' (and see also Isa. 30.27).

In the Song, the beloved speaks erotically of her clothing in order to arouse her lover (5.3). As the Shulamit dances, the poet notes her shoes, too: 'How lovely are your feet in sandals' (7.2), from which we observe the erotic quality of women's shoes (cf. the effect of Judith's shoes on Holofernes, Jdt. 16.9). In our poem clothing is also mentioned, although, once again, it characterizes the woman's industriousness. She buys the wool and flax (v. 13), spins and weaves the cloth (vv. 19, 24), dresses the members of her household (v. 21), and she, herself, is impeccably dressed (v. 22). The colors of the clothes, 'crimson'¹⁴ (v. 20) and 'purple' (v. 22), appear also in the Song of Songs, though not only as fabric color (see 3.10) but as the shades of the beloved's face, which arouse desire: 'your lips are like a crimson thread' (4.3); 'the locks of your head are like purple [cloth]' (7.6). Our toiling woman also makes 'coverlets' (from the root *rbd*, v. 22), to which we compare the erotic context in which appears the related root *rpd* ('spread, spread out, support' [the exchange of *bet* and *pe* is common]) in the Song of Songs: 'Sustain me with raisins, *support* me with apples for I am faint with love' (2.5).¹⁵

I have mentioned how the beloved in the Song is proactive in her relations with her lover. In contrast to the poem in Proverbs, where the woman is found by the man who actively seeks her out ('a woman of valor, who will find?', v. 10), in the Song it is the woman who, in the dream-poem, embarks on a quest to find her lover and succeeds, 'when I found the one I love I held

13. Some scholars (e.g., J.C. Exum, *Song of Songs* [OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005], p. 212), regard this as an original verse that was deleted due to textual error.

14. As in Isa. 1.18: 'Be your sins like crimson, they can turn snow-white'.

15. The roots *rpd* and *rbd* are closely affiliated. See, too, the eroticism associated with the 'covers' (*marvadim*) on the bed of the forbidden woman, which she uses to lure the 'lad' (Prov. 7.16-18): 'I have *spread* my couch with *coverlets* [*marvadim ravadeti*] of dyed Egyptian linen; I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Let us drink our fill of love till morning; let us delight in amorous embrace.'

him fast, I would not let him go...' (3.4). In the second dream poem (5.2–6.3) the woman also sets out to find her lover (5.6), as, too, in one more poem, 'I will find you outside and will kiss you' (8.1). In Proverbs the wife's energies are channeled elsewhere: she is 'eshet *ayil*, which, in this context, means 'industrious'; cf. Prov. 12.4: 'An industrious wife is a crown for her husband, like rot in his bones is the lazy [*mevisha*] one' (this meaning of *mevisha* is clear from Prov. 10.5, for example: 'He who lays in stores during the summer is a capable son, but he who sleeps during the harvest is a lazy son'; see also 17.2). The woman of valor, 'eshet *ha-ayil*, also 'makes *hayil*', that is to say, she increases wealth (v. 29), which is the unambiguous meaning of *hayil* in Prov. 13.22: 'the wealth (*hayil*) of sinners'. Though this meaning of *hayil* is clear from the context, nonetheless the term's use inevitably prompts associations of masculine qualities: the corresponding 'man of valor' (*ish hayil*) is often used of warriors (e.g., 2 Sam. 24.9; Jer. 56.14), while 'making *hayil*' often denotes military prowess (e.g., 1 Sam. 14.48; Ps. 60.14).¹⁶ Justification for acknowledging the military connotation of the term *ayil* in our poem emerges from the next verse, 'Her husband's heart trusts her and benefits (*shalal*, lit. 'spoils') are not lacking' (v. 11): the noun *shalal* always occurs in the context of war (e.g., Exod. 15.9; Judg. 5.30; Isa. 9.2; 10.6). Moreover, in v. 15 we find the term *teref*, which, though sometimes conveying the sense of 'food' (Mal. 3.10; Ps. 111.5; Job 24.5; and see also Ps. 30.8, 'provide me [*hatrifeni*] with bread', and compare 'and supplies provisions for her household' in Prov. 31.15), usually has to do with carnivorous animals (e.g., Gen. 37.33; 49.9; Deut. 33.20) and thus also connotes a masculine sort of strength: 'She rises while it is still night, and supplies provisions [*teref*] for her household' (31.15). Masculinity is evoked once again by the expression 'girds her loins' (v. 17; cf. 2 Kgs 4.29) and in the woman's being 'clothed with strength' (v. 25; cf. Ps. 93.1; Job 29.14).¹⁷ The determination to expunge any trace of eroticism from the depiction of the ideal woman apparently led to this adoption of masculine terminology, which blunts the woman's femininity.

The beloved of the Song spends much of her time outdoors, in nature and away from home, an expression of her liberty and of her disdain for society's conventions and the limitations it imposes on her (see 1.5-6, 7-8, 17; 2.10-13, 14, 15; 3.2-4, 6; 4.6-8; 5.5-7; 7.12-14; 8.1-4, 5, 13-14). In Proverbs' 'Woman of Valor', on the other hand, the woman is active within the confines of her home. Although she is described as 'bringing her food from afar' (v. 14; i.e., from distant lands, similar to Jer. 6.20; Prov. 25.25), she herself does not travel there but, rather, controls distant routes of commerce

16. See Clifford, *Proverbs*, p. 277.

17. This masculine, heroic quality led Wolters to conclude that the 'Woman of Valor' is a paean to bravery; see Wolters, 'Proverbs 31:10-31 as Heroic Hymn: A Form-Critical Analysis', VT 38 (1988), pp. 446-57.

from her home. She 'brings' [the hiphil form of the root *bw'*] her food, whereas, in the Song, the beloved 'comes' [the qal form of *bw'*] from afar: 'With me, from Lebanon, my bride, with me, from Lebanon, come' (4.8). In Proverbs the woman rises [*qamah*] before dawn to begin her daily labor (v. 16), whereas in Song she rises in order to wander outdoors and be in nature (2.10, 13). In our poem, the vineyard is no more than the plot of land the housewife purchases (31.16), while in Song it is the place for romantic trysts, the place where the woman is free to act on her desires (1.6, 14; 7.13), an allegorical term for 'woman' herself (8.11-12), or perhaps even a metaphor for female genitalia (2.15).

In the Song, both beloved and lover experience the world beyond the confines of their home, but in Proverbs' poem only the husband enjoys a place of honor at the gates of the city (v. 23), and the praise that is sung there for the wife speaks precisely about her remaining at home (v. 31). The removal of any underlying eroticism from the poem in Proverbs becomes apparent from the use of other words and expressions: 'her husband's heart trusts her' (v. 11), versus the Song's 'I sleep but my heart is awake' (5.2), 'You have captured my heart, my sister, my bride, you have captured my heart in one of your eyes // with one of your glances' (4.9), 'Let me be a seal upon your heart' (8.6). In Proverbs we find that the woman's hard work has produced 'spoils [that] are not lacking [*lo' yesar*]' (31.11) versus Song 7.3: 'let mixed wine *not be lacking*' (in the woman's navel, which is likened to a vessel); 'And works with eager hands' (*be-hefetz kapeikha*, cf. *hefetz lev* 'with a desiring heart', 31.13) whereas the Song of Songs uses the same verb for quite another reason: '... do not wake and do not rouse love until it is *willing* [i.e., wants to be awakened]' (2.7, and also 3.5). And, finally, in Proverbs' 'the bread of idleness she does not *eat*' (31.27) the poet speaks of simple, straightforward eating, while in the Song of Songs, the beloved arrives to the gates of the garden singing, 'I have come to my garden, my sister, my bride ... *eaten* my honeycomb with my honey ...' (5.1).

The position of the 'Woman of Valor', too, I would suggest, attests to efforts to eliminate eroticism from the image of the ideal woman. I have already mentioned, at the beginning of this paper, that the poem relates to the preceding unit in Proverbs, 'The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, with which his mother admonished him' (31.1-9). Lemuel's wise mother admonishes and counsels her son, and the capable wife opens her mouth in order to speak words of wisdom (31.26). Lemuel's mother warns him: 'Do not give your strength [*heilecha*; the same word as in the title of our poem] to women' (v. 3), while the woman 'of valor' does not steal a man's strength or potency with her seductions but, on the contrary, bears the entire burden of providing for the home. Lemuel's mother commands him to judge the poor fairly: 'Open your mouth, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy' (v. 9), while the Woman of Valor 'opens her mouth with wisdom and graciousness

is on her tongue' (v. 26) and 'Her palm is open to *the poor*; her hands are stretched out to *the needy*' (v. 20).

We turn now to a somewhat bold conjecture, it, too, relating to the placement and juxtaposition of passages.¹⁸ It cannot be ruled out that, at an early stage in the redaction of the *kethuvim* (Writings), the Song of Songs was placed immediately following Proverbs. When the *baraita* that is in Talmud *Baba Batra* 14b-15a, which attests to the order of the books in the Writings, places the three compositions attributed to Solomon one after the other, it locates Ecclesiastes before Song: 'Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.' This arrangement reflects the view that Song was the last book that Solomon composed, after he had completed Ecclesiastes. As Rashi explains: 'It seems to me that he [wrote it] in his old age'. The same order of the three books appears in the Septuagint and is reflected in the order of the Scriptures listed by some of the Church Fathers, e.g., Melito, Bishop of Sardis, and Origen. Needless to say, the view that Song is the last of King Solomon's writings presumes that it should be understood as an allegory, that it was only in his old age that Solomon attained the clarity and religious sublimity that are expressed in the allegorical interpretation. Admitting the plain meaning—the *peshat*—of the Song of Songs, on the other hand, requires a placement *before* Ecclesiastes, the same order of Scripture that we find in Sephardic manuscripts such as the Leningrad Codex, an order of the books that reflects a chronological approach. We submit, then, that when the Song was still understood according to its literal, straightforward sense (*peshat*), as love poetry of a man and a woman, it was placed following Proverbs and preceding Ecclesiastes. The author of 'A Woman of Valor' wrote his composition as a polemical retort to the poems in the Song of Songs. It was to be an antidote, of sorts, to be taken before reading the love poems, and he positioned it at the very end of Proverbs, with 'the words of Lemuel' on the one side and the Song of Songs on the other, thereby fastening the two books together.

III

'A Woman of Valor' displays a close affinity to the book of Ruth. Aside from Proverbs, only in the book of Ruth is a woman described with the term *'eshet hayil*, when Boaz tells Ruth, 'for all [those at the] *gate* [i.e., the elders] know you are a *woman of valor* (*'eshet hayil*)' (3.11; it is possible that the writer of Ruth borrowed this designation from Prov. 12.4). Moreover, in that same verse, Boaz tells Ruth that he heard her praises sung at the gates of the city,

18. For the interpretive significance of the juxtaposition of different passages, see Y. Zakovitch, *On Inner-Biblical and Extra-Biblical Midrash and the Relationship between Them* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), pp. 95-117.

exactly as is written in the concluding verse of the 'Woman of Valor': 'let her works praise her at the gates' (v. 31). In his words, Boaz praises Ruth, 'Your last *act of graciousness* [*hesed*] is even greater than the first, when you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich' (3.10), to which we compare the verse from the 'Woman of Valor': '*graciousness* [*hesed*] is on her tongue' (31.26). When Boaz sets out to arrange to redeem Ruth, which will lead to his marrying her, he sits at the gates of the city with the other dignitaries and elders of the city: 'Meanwhile, Boaz had gone to the *gate* and *sat* down there... Then [Boaz] took ten *elders* of the town and said, "Sit here", and they *sat*' (4.1-2), and compare our poem: 'Her husband is known at the *gates*, as he *sits* among the *elders* of the land' (v. 23). The term 'known' in the verse refers to someone with authority (cf. Ps. 48.4; 76.2) and suits the status and actions of Boaz at the gate, where his orders are carried out by all.

The root *ahb*, 'love,' appears only once in the book of Ruth, where it does not describe the relations between Ruth and Boaz but those between Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi: 'for your daughter-in-law who loves you has given birth'. Note, too, that not the slightest hint of Ruth's physical appearance is provided anywhere in the entire book.

Ruth is industrious, hard-working, and takes the initiative; her deeds lead to a solution to the desperate straits in which she and her mother-in-law find themselves. Gathering sheaves in Boaz's field ensures that the two women will not starve (cf. the Woman of Valor, vv.11, 14, 15).

These marked similarities between the Book of Ruth and the poem lead us to propose that the writer of 'A Woman of Valor' made use of the story of Ruth, too, in addition to the use he made of verses from Proverbs that spoke of wisdom, the foreign woman, and the woman of valor (12.4), for building blocks in the composition of his poem and for characterizing what he regarded as the ideal woman.

In another place¹⁹ I have put forward the argument, based on linguistic, literary, and ideological considerations, that the book of Ruth—a polemical document written against the demand to expel foreign women, including Moabite and Ammonite, from Israel—was written in the Second Temple period (mid-fifth century BCE). The Song of Songs did not take its final form, in my opinion, until the Hellenistic period (third century BCE),²⁰ a dating based on linguistic grounds. 'A Woman of Valor', too, is to be dated to the Hellenistic period, apparently to the second century BCE.²¹ These

19. See Y. Zakovitch, *Das Buch Rut. Ein jüdischer Kommentar* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien, 177; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999), pp. 62-64.

20. See Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied*, pp. 66-67.

21. M. Waegeman, 'The Perfect Wife of Proverbs 31:10-31', in K.D. Schunk and M. Augustin (eds.), *Goldene Äpfel in silbernen Schalen: Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament*, Leuven, 1989 (BEATAJ, 22; Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 101-107 (101).

conclusions accord with my assertion that 'A Woman of Valor' resonates with borrowings from the Book of Ruth, on the one hand, and criticism of the Song of Songs, on the other.

To return to the matter of juxtaposition: the author of the book of Ruth designed his book to be placed between Judges and the book of Samuel—the position it occupies in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and in the writings of the Church Fathers. The book's opening words, 'In the days when the judges ruled' (1.1), hint at this position. The writer of the book of Ruth furthermore structured his narrative in such a way that it would resemble the two stories/appendices at the end of Judges: the story of Micah's sculptured image and the journey of the Danites in chaps. 17–18, and the story of the concubine at Gibeah, in chaps. 19–21. Each of the three stories tells of a character from Bethlehem in Judah: the Levite youth (Judg. 17.7ff.); the concubine (19.1), and, of course, Naomi and her household, and David, with whose birth the story of Ruth ends. The formulas that frame the two appendices to Judges—'In those days there was no king in Israel' (17.6; 18.1; 19.1, 21, 25)—prepare the reader for the monarchy and for the birth of David.

A correspondence is evident between the book of Ruth and the story of the concubine at Gibeah (the story that the author of Ruth intended would immediately precede his own), mainly in the form of an oppositional structure:

1. The concubine leaves her husband's house, 'leaving him for her father's house in Bethlehem' (19.2), and her husband must persuade her to return to him and 'win her back' (v. 3); Naomi tries to dissuade Ruth, her daughter-in-law, from accompanying her to Bethlehem, and tries to persuade her to return to Moab, to her mother's home; see the recurrence of the verbs 'to go' (*hlk*) and 'to return' (*shwb*) in the conversation between Naomi and Ruth (vv. 7-19).

2. The concubine's father tries to persuade his son-in-law to remain in Bethlehem, to no avail, and the man and his concubine leave the city (19.4-10); Naomi tries to dissuade her daughter-in-law from coming with her to Bethlehem and fails, and they arrive to the city together.

3. Both stories deal unconventionally with the problem of descendants and its solution. Following the statement: 'This day one tribe has been cut off from Israel' (21.6), the Israelite men seek a solution for the lack of women available to the men of the tribe of Benjamin, although they had vowed not to give them their own daughters in marriage (v. 7). In the book of Ruth, too, Naomi and Ruth seem to be facing a desperate situation: no more men are alive in the family to marry. While the solutions in the concubine story are violent ones, in the book of Ruth everything is resolved peacefully and tenderly. In Judges the solution is to abduct girls from the vineyards, while in the book of Ruth it ensues from the gentleness of the act on the threshing floor, in the field (chap. 3).

At the end of the book of Ruth are links to its intended neighbor on the other side, the beginning of the book of Samuel: the women say to Naomi, about the newborn infant: '...for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons' (4.15). The words of the women evoke those of Elkanah to the barren Hannah, in Samuel's first chapter: 'Am I not better to you than ten sons?' (1 Sam. 1.8). The elders at the gate congratulate Boaz with the words: '...through the offspring which the Lord will give you by this young woman' (4.12), which are reminiscent of Eli's blessing to Elkanah: 'May the Lord grant you offspring by this woman' (1 Sam. 2.20).

It is likely that the intention of the author of Ruth to place his story after Judges failed due to the gradual finalization of the biblical anthology. The Prophets (at least the Former Prophets), as a unit, became finalized prior to the decision to include the book of Ruth in the biblical anthology.

And indeed, in manuscripts in which Proverbs follows Psalms and Job, e.g., Codex Leningrad, a juxtaposition between Proverbs and Ruth was created, since, we recall, the Massoretes (and, consequently, many Sephardic manuscripts) set Ruth first among the five Scrolls, which they arranged in chronological order. The redactor of the midrash *Lekah tov* appended the following passage to the end of the manuscript (Petersburg MS), though it did not belong to it, which reads as follows:

...For Solomon who spoke in proverbs...juxtaposed [Ruth's] book to his book, and Solomon said at the end of his book (Prov. 31.10), 'A woman of valor, who will find?', and he praised and glorified the woman of valor a great deal, alphabetically until *tap* [i.e., the last letter], all praises, and he ended his book (ibid. 31.30) 'grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory' (31.31) and 'extol her for the fruit of her hands'. Since Naomi was a god-fearing woman and Ruth a *woman of valor*, for it says of her (Ruth 3.11), 'for all the elders at the gate know what a woman of valor you are', that is why he [i.e., Solomon] mentioned them and juxtaposed them to the Book of Proverbs, teaching us that everything that Solomon said about the woman of valor refers to such as them, as Naomi and her daughter-in-law...

Fate would have it, then, that when the order of the books was established following the tradition described above, the three pieces of writing came to be juxtaposed one to the other: 'A Woman of Valor,' followed by its inspiration, the Book of Ruth, and, last, the Song of Songs, the love poems against which the author of 'A Woman of Valor' wrote his polemic.

IV

In conclusion, let us once more recall that the poet who composed 'A Woman of Valor' sought to replace the paragon of femininity in the Song of

Songs with a different female ideal: instead of the clever, active, and bold woman who is not confined by conventions, the physically beautiful woman who is not afraid to wander outside her home and to arouse her lover's desire, the author of 'A Woman of Valor' put forward a smart, active woman of a different sort: a woman who remains inside her home and supervises the household. Her beauty is not referred to, and the parts of her body which are mentioned are those that contribute to her activities for the prosperity of her home and for revealing wisdom and graciousness. The elimination of all eroticism from the poem has left a somewhat masculine woman as the protagonist who does not leave her husband much to do in his home, much with which to distinguish himself, and he is therefore free to devote himself to the public affairs that are dealt with at the gates of the city. Rather than being praised by other women for her beauty, this woman is praised by her husband and sons for her industry. As a model for the ideal woman, a 'woman of valor', our author drew upon Ruth, whom Boaz labels 'eshet ayil (as the woman who is worthy of her husband is called in Prov. 12.4). The poet, I believe, knew the juxtaposition between the end of Proverbs, the passage attributed to Lemuel, king of Massa (31.1-9), and the Song of Songs, and he composed his own poem as a link that would join them together.

The book of Ruth eventually found its place within the *kethuvim*, and in Sephardic manuscripts it was placed first among the five Scrolls, following Proverbs and its concluding text, the poem 'Eshet hayil, and before the Song of Songs. These three texts—the poem 'A Woman of Valor'; the poem's inspiration, the book of Ruth; and the book that spurred the poet to inveigh against it, the Song of Songs—have thus come down to us one next to the other, bound together like good neighbors.

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