

Ambiguity, Liminality, and Unhomeliness in the Book of Judges:
An Analysis of the Gendered Pairs and Families

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To my children, Parker and Sybil,

who bring such joy to my life

and

To my wonderful husband, Sean,

who tirelessly encourages and loves me.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I. Overview

The book of Judges is a story of war, but it is also a story of families. In fact, the family stories are not secondary and simply interwoven between stories; rather the narrator in Judges frequently spends more time detailing private family events than depicting war.¹ Family issues in Judges take precedence. Thus, such issues as inheritance, marriage, fertility, and children come to the fore and women are often at the center of all of these concerns.

This dissertation investigates the creation and dissolution of families in four stories in the book of Judges (Judges 19, 4-5, 11, and 13-16), providing a nuanced feminist interpretation of some of the book's most challenging and violent stories.² The foundation of the study is a literary analysis of the four episodes, focusing principally on characterization of the gendered pairs in each story. The project analyzes how the narrator names, describes, and attributes action and speech to each human character and also examines the portrayal of the Lord in these Judges stories. The approach also deploys

¹ The chapters in the book of Judges, "which initially appeared to be so exclusively about men, are not just a description of a man's world after all" (Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 2. The book might look like it is about men and their wars, their cunning, "but interspersed are stories of acting women" (Ackerman, *Warrior*, 2-3). Satterthwaite argues that the alternation between individual and tribal stories "is meant to suggest a sickness in Israel which permeates all levels of society, personal, familial, and national (Philip Satterthwaite, "No King in Israel: Narrative Criticism and Judges 17-21," *TynBul* 44 [1993]: 75-88). Satterthwaite's statement primarily refers to Judges 17-21, but it applicable to the way in which the entire book of Judges moves between individual and communal stories.

² Lanoir remarks, "la cohérence de la famille est fortement mise à mal dans les Juges" (Corinne Lanoir, *Femmes fatales, filles rebelle: Figures féminines dans le livre des Juges* [Sciences Bibliques; Genève: Labor Et Fides, 2005], 118).

contemporary reading strategies from feminist, anthropological and postcolonial thought.

A literary and ideological reading of these stories reveals that the history in the text is concerned with many issues such as social deterioration and the movement toward kingship, war and families, Israel's apostasy and YHWH's guiding hand, the stories of individual people and the story of all of Israel. The project demonstrates that as the state of Israel deteriorates in the course of the book, clear boundaries and divisions of gender also breakdown. This blurring of boundaries and narrative ambiguity often occur in the narratives through the exploitation of liminal spaces, times, and characters and in the representation of unhomeliness. This deconstruction creates elements of complexity and ambiguity, and fear and suspicion.

A literary reading that focuses on what happens at the level of family divulges an ideological concern with the roles, places, and statuses of women and the ways in which they operate in domestic and extra domestic functions. A concern with how women contribute to the realization of the ideal group identity becomes apparent.³ Certain fundamental social structures concerning marriage and kinship standards are in place in the stories this project considers, and they point to a social reality somewhere behind the texts, even if the texts themselves are fantasy. The embedded ideology of the text reveals a

³ My argument builds from Mieke Bal's premise. She demonstrates that in spite of the scholarly focus on the tribal warfare that exists in the book of Judges, there exists a "countercoherence" in the book which focuses on matters of lineage. See Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). I agree, but I add that the concern encompasses more gendered issues beyond lineage. Certain stories in Judges contain a preoccupation with the ways in which women, their status and locations, and their articulations of power either promote or hinder group identity and family construction, especially through matters related to marriage, begetting children, inheritance, and loyalty to the Israelite group.

Also, it is important to mention the tendency toward "romantic" notions of "relationships" and individualistic views of marriages in today's modern/postmodern context. It is not that biblical marriages – or marriages in biblical times – lacked romance or love. But the biblical texts expose a world very different from our context. And marriage was a union primarily between families, not just individuals. In the context of war, political unrest, and uncertain or shifting leadership, consistency and certainty about familial ties was important.

concern with pressure from inside and outside groups, not just through war but through marriage, kinship, and inheritance issues.

II. Methods and Approaches

Thus, while I build on historical-critical approaches and linguistic studies that have focused on the book of Judges, text critical issues and questions of redaction arise but are not of primary importance. I am not concerned with dating the Judges text, and I am not chiefly tracking the development of its composition.⁴ I treat the text as a complete literary work and focus on its final form. Furthermore, the text most likely developed over time and could easily reflect the perspectives of a variety of epochs in Israel's experience. Israel frequently experienced marginalization in the face of large empires, and the text certainly reflects internalized violence which could have come from any number of periods. Questions regarding gender dynamics, the impact of the home on society and vice versa, pressure from external groups, and how marriages and specifically women contribute to group identity are dealt with time and again in the Israelite/Judean identity formation. While my work considers the texts' literary qualities, I am also interested in the general socio-historical background and the longstanding social and political institutions (i.e. marriage practices, rites of passage, attitudes toward outside groups, etc.) that might have

⁴ Martin Noth's *The Deuteronomistic History* is still one of the most influential works on the Dtr as a literary entity and unity. He identifies that the Deuteronomist had a variety of available sources, namely that Judges contains two sources: a collection of stories about tribal heroes and their victories and a list of judges with information about their birthplaces, terms of office, places of burial, and odd facts about their lives. Noth identifies his task as focusing on the Deuteronomist himself and how he reworked the material he already had. Noth does not attempt to uncover the prehistory of the sources but instead considers the nature of the entire composition, the historical setting of the Deuteronomist, and the central theological ideas employed in the historical work (Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* [JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981], 1-3). See also Douglas A. Knight, *Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 120-124.

shaped the texts and the ideology therein. In this way, my approach engages both historical and literary questions.

A. Literary Criticism

The foundation of this study is a literary analysis of the four episodes, focusing principally on characterization of the gendered pairs in each story. The employment of ambiguity, the systematic and sometimes subversive and underdeveloped breaking of dichotomies, and repetition constitute the most common literary devices in these Judges chapters. These particular devices underscore an indeterminacy of meaning in the texts.

1. Ambiguity

By ambiguity, I mean an indeterminacy of meaning at the level of either semantics or narrative devices, such that different interpretations or reactions are possible from the same piece of literature.⁵ According to Robert Alter, ambiguity is a specific characteristic of Hebrew narrative and reflects the way in which the Hebrew narrators understood humanity and humanity's relationship to God.⁶ In this view of humanity, humans are created by an all-seeing God but they exhibit their own freedom; they are made in God's image but never fully accomplish this likeness in "ethical fact."⁷ Consequently, humans are full of paradoxes.⁸

Alter notices this perspective on humanity through the narrator's treatment of characters. "Indeed, an essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by

⁵ See Eric S. Christianson, "The Big Sleep: Strategic Ambiguity in Judges 4-5 and in Classic Film Noir," *BibInt* 15 (2007): 519-548.

⁶ Ambiguity is not limited to Hebrew texts. A sophisticated reader can find much ambiguity in Egyptian and Akkadian texts, but the responsibility rests on the reader to recognize the ambiguity.

⁷ Robert Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative* (2nd ed.; Basic Books: New York, 2011), 144.

⁸ Alter, *Art*, 144.

the Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially in regard to motive, moral character, and psychology.”⁹ Alter claims that Hebrew narrators used the “art of reticence,” namely restraint and a lack of clarity in descriptions of characters to demonstrate the Hebrew perspective of a complex humanity. Fictional characters are multifaceted and contradictory in their human individuality, “unpredictable, in some ways impenetrable, and constantly emerging from and slipping back into a penumbra of ambiguity.”¹⁰

The form and content of the narratives present a philosophical understanding of the human subject, or, according to Alter, a religious response and “faithful translation into art of this view of the human subject.”¹¹ The lack of clarity through the employment of ambiguity in characterization not only corresponds to the Hebrew perspective of humanity but also serves to “unsettle the sense of straightforward unilinear consequences to which lazy mental habits – ancient and modern – accustom us.”¹² In other words, the complicated characterizations make the reader think.

Although ambiguity implies a degree of complexity and a lack of clarity, it is not synonymous with the broader term of vagueness. I use ambiguity to reference questions about meaning, intention, or interpretation in a text that cannot easily be resolved. Contrary to the idea of vagueness, the ambiguity in these texts does not mean that the texts are so imprecise as to impede interpretation; rather, it suggests that we are dealing with texts that are open to multiple interpretations, meanings or intentions.

⁹ Alter, *Art*, 12.

¹⁰ Alter, *Art*, 13 and 162. Similarly, the narratives display a lack of clarity in causal connections (157).

¹¹ Alter, *Art*, 157.

¹² Alter, *Art*, 157.

Alter would argue that this ambiguity was intended by the narrator and was deliberately placed in order to make a theological point. This might be true, but it is hard to know what the narrator intended, and it is difficult to distinguish the intentionally ambiguous elements versus ambiguity that arises in the transmission of words to convey a point.¹³ That is to say, does the ambiguity derive from the narrator or from the text itself? It is important to remember that the narrator's ideology works consciously and unconsciously on him in the transmission of the text's values and judgments on characters. Cultural forces, like patriarchy (in regards to the treatment of the gendered pairings as explored in this project), impact how and what the narrator portrays in characters.¹⁴ Thus, we do not know the precise source of the ambiguity in the narratives. Ambiguity can be intentional; it can be there in the original text (intentional or not) and can be there for us in a way that it was not for earlier readers. For this reason, I maintain focus on the narrative as we read it and make claims about ways that ambiguity functions foreground, for us as readers.

There is always an issue regarding the agent of any text. I hope to maintain focus on the stories, themselves, and neither over-speculate on an implied author nor focus on the meaning and reception of the texts. I avoid referencing the "narrative" as doing, saying, or depicting anything. Narratives are not agents and do not say or do anything, themselves; some figure must be responsible for the narrative's production. I use the term "narrator" to

¹³ The book of Judges "exhibits an enigmatic complexity; so much transpires on different levels that multiple interpretations are inevitable, as the plurality of views in current scholarship illustrates" (Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 [1989]: 410-31).

¹⁴ I follow Gerda Lerner's definition of patriarchy: "The institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and, by extension, in society in general" (Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1986], 239). Patriarchy is "both a social system and an ideology in which women are subordinated to men" (J. Cheryl Exum, "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests are Being Served?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* [ed. Gale A. Yee; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 65-90).

describe the figure who is responsible for depicting the elements of events and characters and how these are presented and evaluated. A narrator is not a “real” person. And ultimately, the content, order, and evaluation of events and characters presented by the narrator are the creation of an unknown “author.”

Referring to this figure as “narrator” maintains focus on the story in the text and attempts to avoid questions about the tradition of the text. In this way, I do not use “implied author” because I am trying to avoid a socio-historical argument. I want to maintain the likelihood of a variety of implied authors working on these stories over many years. The narrator intentionally and unintentionally includes certain material in the texts, but it is beyond our ability to know what is deliberate and what is a product of ideology. The occasional shifting perspective, contradiction, or ambiguity by the narrator might reflect changing traditions of the text; but evaluating them must await another occasion. This project analyzes stories in the Judges texts as literary wholes, and the “narrator” remains the consistent figure throughout the book. The narrator replicates a certain general ideology from a narrow group that likely shaped the creation of the texts, but this still leaves open the possibility of reflecting a number of periods in Israel’s history.

The equivocal treatment of characters in Judges 19, 4-5, 11, and 13-16 arises in different ways. Careful consideration of the characters’ names and descriptions, their actions and speech, the places in which they dwell and operate, and the lack of narrative detail reveal complicated narratological evaluations of these characters.

The processes of naming characters creates a notable complication. On the one hand, names carry meaning and provide insight about a particular character. The Hebrew Bible uses cue names to develop or reinforce elements in narratives. Mahlon and Chilion in

the first chapter of Ruth reinforce the sense of sickness and annihilation because of famine and death. Perhaps the most obvious cue name in the Bible, Jacob (“holder of the heel”), reinforces the conflict that will ensue with his brother; and this notice is woven into the ensuing plot. In the case of the Judges narratives, Deborah as the *'ēšet lappîdôt* and Baraq as the man of lightning bear significance for the story; possibly Gideon too, as he is famous for cutting down (*gādaʿ*) false idols. However, names may not have any special implication for what they are portrayed to do. Taking Deborah again as an example, her name means “bee” and might create a connection with the honey notices in the Samson narrative; but not for segments in which she is mainly featured. Personal names can be narrative cues and bear significance, but they need not be foregrounded.

Related to the significance of names is the implication of character anonymity in the book of Judges, for the failure to attach a name to a character may itself bear significance. Anonymity falls frequently along gender lines, wherein women like the Levite’s *pîlegeš*, Samson’s mother and wife, and Jephthah’s daughter remain anonymous even if they play a major role in their relevant narratives. Also, as is the case in Judges 19, anonymity of all characters, including the men, can generalize a tale, turning a story into a paradigm that can be applied to *any* group of people. In that sense too, the absence of names might invite reading a narrative as parable.

Regarding characterization in Judges, most characters are represented as neither wholly “good” nor “bad,” but often with varying degrees of suspicion and sympathy. For example, Judges 19:2 describes the unnamed *pîlegeš*’s actions. But it is not clear if the narrator blames her for leaving the Levite or the husband who did something to make her angry (i.e. the questionable use of *zānāh* in 19:2) or to necessitate her leaving. It cannot be

easily decided who is at fault, or who is the victim. Similarly, at the end of the tale, the narrative never clearly states when she dies or who actually kills her. The narrative also leaves ambiguous the terrible “thing” referenced in the phrase “We have never seen anything like this...” (19:30). It is unclear from where this ambiguity derives. The precise Hebrew term in 19:2 remains tenuous as some argue for the translation “she became angry with him,” and others provide “she became a prostitute against him.” But it is not clear if this word confusion is a scribal mistake, an intentional device of the narrator, or evidence of semantic development. Nevertheless, the ambiguous Hebrew term creates an undetermined sense of meaning in the beginning of Judges 19.

2. Breaking gendered dichotomies

These Judges stories demonstrate the complexity of language and how language can produce multiple and complicated meanings. Language shapes how humans construct reality, and this construction of reality frequently occurs in the creation of dualistic language. But often these dualistic forms fail or are proven false.¹⁵

Preconceived boundaries, lines, and roles (of characters, locations, time, etc.) are constantly blurred in Judges. The Judges texts demonstrate an interest in promoting or reinforcing a male/political/public vs. female/apolitical/private and domestic dichotomy of the variety that exists in patriarchal societies. But Judges 19, 4-5, 11, and 13-16 also show that this dichotomy fails and breaks down. There are fissures and tensions inherent in the patriarchal structure such that it works against itself. Women are not limited to the

¹⁵ Derrida argues that when dealing with language, one can never arrive at a clear meaning, and he thus rejects any possibility of inherent and constant meaning. Derrida’s deconstruction first comes in the overturning of oppositions, but he also admits that the oppositions can also become reestablished. And thus, my work uses some of Derrida’s strategies as I expose contradictions and complex oppositions in the Judges text. See Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (trans. Alan Bass; London: Routledge, 1978) and Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (trans. Alan Bass; 1st ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

private or domestic spheres, and this is not necessarily to the detriment of the woman's narratological evaluation.¹⁶ Figures like Deborah and Jael work in a public way for the good of Israel. Even when women are depicted in private/domestic spaces, they are not necessarily apolitical.¹⁷ Sisera's mother and Jephthah's daughter both demonstrate ways in which women participate in war. Samson's Timnite wife and Delilah both enact political maneuvers within domestic spaces. Likewise, men can assume passive, apolitical, and private roles. Manoah, although he is the named character in the scene, is not as integral to the scene as his wife, receives less information than she does, and is not given an initial invitation from the divine messenger. The powerful men, Sisera and Samson, are both treated like vulnerable children in domestic spaces. In many ways, Jephthah, Samson, the Levite, and Baraq appear impotent or incompetent in public, political, and militaristic matters. Thus, the breakdown of gendered dichotomies and the destabilizing of gendered spaces in Judges is treated ambiguously by the narrator, sometimes with disdain, but sometimes as necessary or inevitable.

3. Repetition

The negative evaluation of these blurred boundaries becomes a device to emphasize Israel's demise. All of the narratives in Judges are framed in a cycle of increasing deterioration of the community and emphasize Israel's apostasy.¹⁸ The Lord's people are disobedient and commit apostasy, the Lord causes them to be oppressed by other peoples,

¹⁶ Ackerman also notes how the women in Judges defy gender expectations according to the ideology operative in the text by being wives, mothers, mistresses, and daughters *and* prophets and judges. Compared to other biblical books, the women in Judges are ethnically diverse (e.g. Israelite, Kenite, Canaanite, Philistine), are mixed in terms of social status (e.g. concubines and nobles), and assume difficult characterizations and roles (Ackerman, *Warrior*, 5).

¹⁷ Many women in the Hebrew Bible have political incentives in mind and work in domestic spaces toward those ends, e.g. Bathsheba, Rachel, and Rebekah.

¹⁸ See Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 44.

the people cry out to the Lord, and the Lord sends a deliverer to lead and save the people. Phrases that indicate the people “did evil the Lord’s eyes” or “did what was right in their own eyes” or that “there was no king” underscore the people’s disobedience to the Lord, providing general narratological evaluation of the state of things.¹⁹

The statement about Israel’s lack of a king occurs 4 times (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25). The first and last add “and every man did what was right in his own eyes.” Lapsley comments that kinglessness becomes linked to the moral disarray depicted in the text.²⁰ Similarly, Reinhartz claims that the phrase indicates the general anarchy of the time and implies that the bizarre events would not have occurred in the monarchy.²¹

What is odd is that in this book about judges, the narrator does not describe the people’s apostasy and bad behavior by writing “In those days there was no *judge* in Israel.” Judges act as authorities and military leaders, and thus, the disorder and inappropriate conduct of the people that exists because of the lack of leadership *should* reflect that the people become disobedient when there is no *judge* rather than no king (i.e. the phrase should correspond with the context of the book).

Some scholars claim that the phrase reveals a theological statement about *YHWH*’s kingship. Boling emphasizes that “no king in Israel” meant that *YHWH* was King, and this is an important theological thrust in the final chapters.²² When the statement is made in 18:1,

¹⁹ See Judges 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1, 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25. Satterthwaite demonstrates elements of implicit commentary by the narrator, but he claims that these phrases reflect “explicit narratorial evaluation” (Satterthwaite, “No King,” 80).

²⁰ Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 37. Eynikel also remarks that with neither a king nor a judge to rescue Israel, there is complete social, moral and religious chaos (Erik Eynikel, “Judges 19-21, an ‘Appendix:’ Rape, Murder, War and Abduction,” *Communio viatorum* 47 [2005]: 101-115.).

²¹ Adele Reinhartz, *Why Ask my Name?: Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126.

²² Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (AB 6A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 273.

Boling claims “that what is lamented is the lack of acknowledgment of Yahweh’s kingship in Israel.”²³ Wong opines that YHWH is absent as king because the people have made him absent.²⁴ Similarly, Block argues,

In the final episodes the degeneracy of the nation is attributed to the lack of a central authority and the individualization of society, an anarchy in which each man has become the standard of his own morality (17:6, 21:25). No one, not even Yahweh, is king in this land.²⁵

The statements about there being no king in Israel, people doing what is right in their own eyes, or the people doing evil in the sight of the Lord point to a sense of autonomy in the Judges epoch as well as a movement toward kingship. The phrases emphasize the temporal space as an “in-between” time in Israel’s past. Israel, lead by Judges, is on the way to becoming. The final or intended condition of the Israelites has not yet been realized. This intermediary time lends itself to a mixed evaluation. The phrase as negative judgment reflects the attitude that an “in-between” phase is unsatisfactory and even threatening for the Israelites as a people. People are not behaving as they should, and people are also being subjugated. Thus, these are statements about formation and process. According to Bhabha, this liminal time could be a kind of “revisionary time,” a time of inhabiting an intervening space.²⁶

The other repeated phrases that comment on the general state of things, i.e. about doing evil in the sight of the Lord or doing what is pleasing in one’s own eyes, also highlight the recurring theme of eyes and sight that marks the Lord’s involvement in the events in Judges. The theme of sight and the way in which the Lord works are intimately related. The

²³ Boling, *Judges*, 258.

²⁴ Gregory T.L. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 215.

²⁵ Daniel I. Block, “Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature – a Study in Judges 19,” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 325-341.

²⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

act of seeing, *rā'āh*, is not only about the physical ability to see but is also about comprehension, both the acts of perceiving and knowing. "Seeing" is considered in its totality, where sensation and perception merge.²⁷ The Judges narratives' interest in the Lord's eyes vs. specific peoples' eyes and peoples' seeing is not a problem with sensory perception, but a problem with the peoples' comprehension. Human characters in these narratives wrongly perceive or comprehend, so that they do what is wrong and contrary to the Lord's intentions (as the narrator understands them) rather than what is considered right (according to the narrator's understanding of the Lord's view of what is right). Therefore, as in other places in Judges, this misperception creates a separation between humans and the Lord.

Similar narratological statements occur in other parts of the Hebrew Bible and are often followed by a response from the Lord for the people's proper or improper behavior. The Lord's people are called do what is right in the Lord's eyes (Exod 15:26) by refraining from eating certain foods (Deut 12:25), worshipping in a certain way (1 Kgs 11:33), and generally keeping God's laws and commandments. Specific kings and various groups of people receive affirmation when they do what is right in the eyes of the Lord (1 Kgs 15:5, 11, 1 Kgs 22:43; 2 Kgs 12:3, 14:3, 15:3, 34, 18:3, 22:2, 2 Kgs 10:30). Others, like Ahaz, are condemned when they do not do what is pleasing in the Lord's eyes (2 Kgs 16:2).

Israelites are criticized not only for failing to do "what is pleasing in the Lord's eyes," but also for doing what is right in their own eyes. This is unacceptable behavior. 2 Sam 19:7 supplies an indictment of Joab who does what was pleasing in his own eyes. He loves those who hate him and hates those who love him. Prov 12:15 claims that, "The way of a fool is

²⁷ Olson also connects blindness to Samson's knowing (Dennis T. Olson, *NIB* 2:876). See also Susan Niditch, *Judges* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 858.

right in his own eyes (*derek 'ěwîl yāšār bě'ênāyw*), but the wise hears counsel." Proverbs 21:2 specifically juxtaposes God's ways and human ways, "All the ways of man are right in his eyes, but the Lord measures the heart." Judg 17:6 and 21:25 (i.e. the last verse and summarizing condemnation of the people's behavior in the book) both reference the problematic state of Israel because of the lack of a king and the subsequent poor behavior of and chaos that reigns amongst the people.²⁸ Schneider argues that the phrase is a "sign of anarchy which followed the civil war."²⁹ Thus, the biblical text repeatedly suggests that human actions are necessarily and implicitly flawed when they do according to what is pleasing/right in their own eyes, and often these actions do not coincide with what is right in the Lord's eyes.

B. Feminist Criticism

1. Feminist Scholarship on Judges

I situate my observations of the Judges narratives within feminist scholarship, but also push beyond some of the feminist work that has been done on Judges. Feminist scholars raise important questions about the patriarchy embedded in the texts of the Hebrew Bible, the lacunae of women's experiences in the texts, and the male perspective that the biblical text assumes. Feminist biblical scholars remind readers that any presentation of women (and men) in the biblical texts is mediated through a male lens that derives from a very specific time and social location. And thus, some feminist scholarship also challenges contemporary readers to consider the ways in which the text, given the

²⁸ Noth claims that this is a "framing motto that emphasizes every person's acting according to what was right in his or her eyes" (Martin Noth, "Background of Judges 17-18," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg* [Harper, 1962], 68-85).

²⁹ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000), 203-4.

considerable ideological gap between Ancient Southwest Asia and a modern/postmodern context, can still remain authoritative to today's religious communities.

While feminist biblical scholars share similar commitments, they are far from unified and arrive at very different conclusions about how to engage and interpret biblical texts.³⁰ My emphasis on the ambiguity within the Judges text seeks to highlight the myriad of ways in which the book of Judges *might be* interpreted and read, and to focus on the complexity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and potentiality of meaning that the text evokes instead of what is "right" or "wrong" or "true" in a reading. Although this study is not a reader response project, this project has a purpose similar to Cheng's queer Asian Pacific American Biblical hermeneutic commitment in "preserving the multidimensionality of scriptural texts" and resisting the tendency "to reduce such narrative into one-dimensional stories or lessons."³¹

A consideration of the character portrayal of male and female characters in Judges demonstrates the complexity in the texts and the difficulties in determining one "right" interpretation of the Judges narratives. While the Judges narrator most often tracks the lives and movements of the men in the tales, the narrator also expends much focus on the presence of the women. Even if the tendency for the modern reader is to look for the preeminence of the male figure, it is difficult to ignore when these stories accentuate key actions and words by the women. The women are often portrayed in ways that follow patriarchal assumptions. Feminists frequently claim that these women in Judges are

³⁰ Mieke Bal comments on this phenomena in biblical scholarship in Judges and remarks that reading another's interpretation of the text "leads routinely to a survey of the 'mistakes' or 'distortions' of such reading. This gesture of comparison implies that we believe that the text of Judges can be read 'wrongly,' hence, by implication, also 'rightly.' She goes on to argue that it is impossible to find the "Truth," even though we all seek it (Mieke Bal, "Body of Writing: Judges 19," *Continuum* 1 [1991]: 110-126).

³¹ Patrick S. Cheng, "Multiplicity and Judges 19: Constructing a Queer Asian Pacific American Biblical Hermeneutic," *Semeia* 90-91(2002): 119-133.

categorized by the narrator and interpreted by modern scholars by patriarchal standards. Either the women in these stories are good and safe (i.e., mothers and virgins) or they are “bad” and threatening (defined by their sexuality).³² For example, Exum argues that male fear of women’s sexuality is implicit in patriarchy and is immediately evident in the Samson narrative. The ways in which Samson’s mother and his “foreign” women are portrayed serve patriarchal interests that seek to justify women’s subjugation.³³

The warnings by feminist critics about patriarchal assumptions and characterizations of women are relevant, and often this dissertation makes similar arguments. Exum argues for a tension that is created: i.e. “the need to show women as powerful and therefore dangerous and, at the same time, to appropriate their power for androcentric purposes.”³⁴ But arguments like Exum’s do not adequately account for the ambiguity and complexity of the narrator’s portrayal of the characters. I would argue that there is even more compelling evidence that the tensions that are created by way of the presentation of women serves *more* than patriarchal incentives. Such matters in the text include and expand beyond patriarchal initiatives and more precisely concern identity issues. Women are dangerous, powerful, potent, and necessary in terms of creating or maintaining group identity. They are also often victims and caught in the middle of men’s

³² Exum, “Feminist,” 77 and 80. Klein similarly argues that some women are characterized by sexuality in Judges (like the aggressive Delilah and the passive Timnite wife), yet also puts Manoah’s wife in this category (even if she is regarded positively in Judges) (Lillian R. Klein, “A Spectrum of Female Characters in the Book of Judges,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* [eds Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 24-33). Crenshaw’s reading of the women in Samson’s life follows patriarchal assumptions and suspicions about women’s roles and sexuality when he characterizes Samson’s mother, his Timnite wife, the prostitute in Gaza, and Delilah. Crenshaw writes, “Samson’s mother represents the ideal Israelite wife and mother. Over against filial devotion to her, Samson enters upon competing relationships with foreign women. First is power of physical attraction, second is sexual gratification on a casual basis and third is unreciprocated love” (James L. Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, a Vow Ignored* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1978], 98).

³³ J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 62.

³⁴ Exum, *Fragmented*, 62.

political exploits. The patriarchy within the text does not account for all of the issues that arise between men and women in Judges. Gender plays a role, but the complexities implicit in social location, status, political affiliation and familial relationships moves the conversation beyond the bounds of patriarchy. The way in which women function in the families in Judges defy clear binary gender structures and reveal complex social dynamics at work.

Importantly, Exum's character analyses also point out how even in a patriarchal context, there are affirmations of women that serve to temper patriarchal assumptions and biases.³⁵ This observation does not point to any kind of anachronistic countercultural or even "feminist agenda" of the narrator, but instead, Exum's observation indicates an implicit concern in the Judges narratives that runs deeper than patriarchy. The narrative portrayal of male and female characters does not follow patriarchal tendencies simply for the sake of an androcentric agenda but instead points to other forms of subjugation, communal tensions, and identity concerns that *inform* patriarchal attitudes within the text. The character analyses in this study demonstrate that an ambiguous portrayal of many of the Judges characters suggests the marginality of these characters, both male and female, and even Israel as a whole. Thus, this study repeatedly exhibits how women characters are both overtly and implicitly praised for their *noncompliance* with patriarchy as well as for their compliance with it because Israelite identity issues are at stake. And thus, again, women as characters – and men as characters - are ambiguously presented.

2. Why these stories?

³⁵ J. Cheryl Exum, "Mother in Israel: A Familiar Story Reconsidered," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press: 1985), 73-85.

This dissertation considers the particular narratives of Judges 19, 4-5, 11, and 13-16 because of the attention they have received in biblical scholarship. In addition and most importantly, all of the narratives have in common a major focus on familial and gendered dynamics. As will be explored in the coming chapters, the Judges stories reveal the practice of different types and degrees of marriages (e.g. the Levite's *pīlegeš* and Samson's Timnite wife), complicated expectations for daughters (e.g. Jephthah's daughter), and certain articulations of tribal, group, and familial loyalty (e.g. Jael and the Timnite wife) that portray a world of gender roles and expectations very different from our postmodern North American/European context. Nevertheless, each narrative depicts at least one gendered pair upholding or destabilizing the gender expectations operative in the text. My chapters do not follow the order of the chapters in Judges, but instead I use Judges 19 to introduce some of these gender-based elements in the discussion, and I end with the Samson narratives because they encompass and reemphasize many of the issues raised in the other chapters.³⁶

Each of the chapters I examine in Judges contains some form of, or allusion to, gender-based violence. Gender-based violence signifies physical, sexual, or psychological violence directed against a person on the basis of gender. This violence is often perpetrated against women and reflects or reinforces the inequalities between men and women. Gender-based violence is a modern term, especially as the phrase carries with it an

³⁶ Samson is the last of the named Judges in the book. Webb argues that the story of Samson is the thematic climax of the book as his career mirrors and summarizes the experience of Israel in the Judges period (Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* [JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987], 18).

understanding of fundamental human rights, equality, and liberty that might not have been directly relevant in ancient times.³⁷

Harold Washington analyzes the connections between violence and gender and notes the ways in which the violence in the practice of warfare and the feminine object as the perpetual victim of that violence are both part of the construction of normative masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and throughout the Ancient Near East.³⁸ “Male is by definition the subject of warfare’s violence and the female its victim.”³⁹ Specifically, war and rape are integrally connected in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew texts contain no historical accounts of rape, the rape scenes (e.g. in Judges 19, Genesis 19, etc.) are literary constructs, and we lack anthropological studies. Nevertheless, Washington argues for defining ancient Israel as a rape culture.⁴⁰ However, he insists, “the biblical narratives do not recognize rape as a crime against women, because the culture circulating through these texts does not grant to women their bodily integrity, and sexual access to women, above all,

³⁷ For a helpful text on gender-based violence in biblical texts, see Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, ed., *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex and Violence in the Bible* (Semeia Studies 44; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). The scholars in this volume consider tales of gendered violence in the Bible (including the Judges story of Jephthah’s daughter) and often point out how many of these instances of violence are either condoned or at least do not receive divine condemnation.

³⁸ Harold C. Washington, “Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A New Historicist Approach,” *BibInt* 5 (October 1, 1997): 324-363.

³⁹ Washington, “Violence,” 346. “The masculinity of the ancient was measured by two criteria: (1) prowess in battle, and (2) ability to sire. Because these two aspects of masculinity were frequently associated with each other in the mind of the early Near Easterner, the symbols which represented his masculinity to himself and his society often possessed a double reference. In particular, those symbols which primarily referred to his military exploits often served to remind him of his sexual ability as well (H.A. Hoffner, Jr., “Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals,” *JBL* 85 [1966]: 326-334).

⁴⁰ Washington provides helpful resources on rape culture. He offers that “Rape culture” designates societies where a relatively high incidence of sexual violence is supported by social mechanisms ranging from the tacit acceptance of sexual assault to the ritual celebration of rape. The category is informed by the work of anthropologist Peggy R. Sanday, who distinguishes between “rape-prone” societies, where sexual assault is frequent, and “rape-free” societies, in which rape is rare or practically unknown (Washington, “Violence,” 352 and 352n108). See Peggy R. Sanday, “The Socio-Cultural Context of Rape: A Cross-Cultural Study,” *Journal of Social Issues* 37 (1981), 5-27; “Rape and the Silencing of the Feminine,” in *Rape: An Historical and Cultural Enquiry* (ed. Sylvana Tomaselli and Roy Porter; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 84-101. See also Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, “Introduction: Rereading Rape.” in *Rape and Representation* (ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver; Gender and Culture; New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 1-11.

is regarded as the possession of fathers and husbands.”⁴¹ This might be true to an extent, but I also would argue that the narrator in the biblical texts employs narratological devices as clues that the gender-based violence *is* worthy of note, not because it is condoned or considered necessary by the narrator but because it is so abhorrent. A close examination of these devices and the gendered-violence in these stories signals the narrator’s ambiguous and possibly negative evaluation and even condemnation of the violent situations.

Washington’s analysis that links violence in war with violence against women is directly relevant to the book of Judges, which, as I have already mentioned, constantly and effortlessly moves between war accounts and family stories. Women hold a prominent role, especially in the family accounts. Judges 19, 4, 5, 11, and 13-16 are extended narratives with gender and gender-based violence taking a prominent role in narrative development. Specifically, all of these narratives contain threats and performances of gender-based violence *by* both men and women and *against* both men and women. Domestic violence, rape, sexual violence during conflict and war, and forced marriages all constitute gender-based violence and are all arguably present in the Judges text. Although the texts do not name it as such, when I refer to gender-based violence in these Judges stories, I am referring to the fact that the violence, itself, highlights differences in gender that are operative in the text. Secondly, I am referring to the particular kind of violent act that is depicted.

The Levite’s *pîlegeš* is brutally raped, dies, and then is divided into 12 pieces. Deborah and Baraq are co-participants in masculinized warfare. Jephthah’s daughter dies (or as some scholars opine, loses her chance for a reproductive life) as a result of her

⁴¹ Washington, “Violence,” 353.

father's rash vow. Samson's Timnite wife is caught between loyalties to different men, and subsequently loses her life. Both Sisera and Samson become the "other" (i.e. the child or woman), while their female counterparts, Jael and Deborah, reverse gender roles and become the "masculinized" aggressors.⁴²

Each story also uses characters' names and anonymity in important ways in the gender-based violence scenes. Both Sisera and Samson lose their names, along with their power and authority, and become "the man." The anonymity of the Levite and the reference to him as "man" emphasizes his gendered role and his failure to protect the woman.⁴³ The text obscures the relationship between the male and female pair when the Levite is referenced as "her man." The narrator's practice of giving characters specific or descriptive names, taking away their names, and implementing character anonymity serves to mark differences in gender between the characters and especially identifies who wields the power in the scene and who does not.

C. Anthropology and Postcolonial Thought: Liminality, Unhomeliness, and the Blurring and Breaking of Boundaries

I use anthropological and postcolonial lenses to understand the social context and ideology in these Judges stories. Such theories and schools of thought have developed in modern and postmodern times, and have been used to study mostly contemporary societies or cultures very different from Ancient Israel. It is necessary to avoid universalizing the experience of different cultures across time, and it can be problematic to

⁴² Washington comments on this phenomena specifically. He points out that women like Deborah, Jael, and Delilah (i.e. "the female killers" of Judges) demonstrate the "discursive force of patriarchal containment" (Washington, "Violence," 361). They "are still masculinist creations. They express the male fear of transgressive females and undergird the insistence that a woman's place is in the home – unarmed" (Washington, "Violence," 361).

⁴³ Adele Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 80.

employ these modern/postmodern ideas when studying an ancient culture or the literature it produced. However, this project cautiously utilize these theories in order to uncover patterns in the texts and to unveil elements of the meaning of ideas within Israelite social life that are only implied in the text. As few texts and artifacts derive from the conjectured era of Judges, these theories can help reconstruct what the biblical text does not make explicit.

The term ideology is used in similar ways to the contemporary concept of identity. Ideology embeds the many ways individuals and groups understand themselves and the world around them. In the broadest sense, ideology denotes any kind of intersection between belief systems and political power, yet the term also carries connotations of having to do with the dominant forms of social thought, namely those in power who participate in “the obscuring and ‘naturalizing’ of social reality” and “the specious resolution of real contradictions.”⁴⁴ Judges 19, 4-5, 11, and 13-16 reveal an ideology associated with the group that produces the accounts, but this ideology is not necessarily self-consciously reflected in the texts. The ideology is often implicitly presented in the book of Judges, and the texts exhibit a male narrator who is knowingly and unknowingly promoting or generating ideas and beliefs about the Israelite group and the surrounding world.

Even as the anthropological and postcolonial theories I use provide helpful terminology for understanding the ideology within the texts, they also assist in accounting for the apparent complexity and ambiguity within the texts as well as the divergent interpretations of the narratives by scholars. These chapters in the book of Judges reveal a

⁴⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

breakdown, blurring, and invasion of categories at a number of literary, social, and ideological levels, such that the evaluation by the narrator reveals a confusing and destabilizing time in Israel's history. This blurring of boundaries and narrative ambiguity often occur in the narratives through the use of liminal spaces, times, and characters and in the representation of unhomeliness.

1. Liminality

a. Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner

Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner provide the theoretical framework from which I understand and use the concept of liminality. Van Gennep's anthropological theory identifies the notion that both individual and communal life involves various significant thresholds that require crossing.⁴⁵ Each of these thresholds is a "rite of passage" and includes three phases: separation (preliminal rites), transition (liminal or threshold rites), and incorporation (postliminal rites).⁴⁶ Victor Turner builds on Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* and focuses specifically on the sociocultural properties of the liminal period, which he names as an "interstructural situation."⁴⁷ He argues that liminal ritual subjects dwell in an intermediate position, on the way from one state to another state of being.⁴⁸ It is not helpful to understand liminality as a "state" of transition but rather as "a process, a

⁴⁵ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), xix.

⁴⁶ Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 11; See also Subha Mukherji, "Introduction," in *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces* (ed. Subha Mukherji; London: Anthem Press, 2013), xvii-xxviii and Manuel Aguirre, Roberta Ann Quance, and Philip C. Sutton, eds., *Margins and Thresholds: An Enquiry into the Concept of Liminality in Text Studies* (Madrid: Gateway Press, 2000), 7.

⁴⁷ Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93.

⁴⁸ Turner, *Forest*, 93. See also Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 7.

becoming, a transformation.”⁴⁹ Thus, the liminal figure reflects that which is on the border or “in-between” and is in the process of transition.

The passenger in the liminal period is often considered ambiguous and even threatening, even though the person’s liminal qualities frequently represent necessary and natural transitions. The liminal person is in a paradoxical condition, a confusion of the customary categories.⁵⁰ The individual is “neither one nor other...neither here nor there...betwixt and between all the recognized fixed points in space time of structural classification.”⁵¹ From the perspective of those concerned with the maintenance of “structure,” any manifestation of sustained liminality appears as threatening:

We find social relationships simplified, while myth and ritual are elaborated. That this is so is really quite simple to understand: if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs.⁵²

However, these liminal figures are also viewed as powerful and as the *tabula rasa* on which the group’s knowledge and wisdom can be written.⁵³ Therefore, as liminality evokes suspicion and confusion as well as reverence, mystery, and sacrality, the liminal figure is treated with ambivalence.

b. The Threshold

⁴⁹ Turner, *Forest*, 94.

⁵⁰ Turner, *Forest*, 97. See also Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co, 1969), 95.

⁵¹ Turner, *Forest*, 97. Turner considers Mary Douglas’ work on pollution, and notes how the liminal persons and transitional beings are considered socially polluting by way of the confusion they create.

⁵² Turner, *Ritual Process*, 167 and 109.

⁵³ Turner, *Ritual Process*, 103.

The “threshold” serves as a helpful metaphor for characters’ liminality or the liminal states in which they dwell.⁵⁴ Thresholds, both in their literal manifestations and in their metaphoric sense, represent the in-between space, the boundary, and the movement between one place and another. Characters operate in thresholds, in places in-between categorically clear spaces, locations, statuses, and identities.

The threshold holds multiple connotations. Thresholds as transitional psychological and mental spaces represent the brink of clarity and the excitement in the anticipation of knowing.⁵⁵ Doors represent many kinds of “entrance,” and thresholds also symbolize the beginning of new social statuses.⁵⁶ These spaces also separate the public from the private and the familiar from the foreign. Van Gennep articulates, “The door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling...therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world.”⁵⁷

c. Biblical Scholars and Liminality in Judges

Some scholars have noted the liminal qualities of characters in Judges and their ambiguous treatment, but few have conducted a thorough examination of character liminality in the narratives, nor have they considered the implications of liminality on the interpretation of these stories.

The utilization of liminal times, spaces, and characters is prolific in the Judges stories and requires careful consideration. The reader gets a better sense of the narrator’s

⁵⁴ The contributors in *Margins and Thresholds* “show that the study of thresholds, whether at formal, positional, or structural levels, whether thematic, symbolic, or narrative, whether in written, oral, iconographic or performative text, is a most useful analytical strategy, and strongly encourages a redrawing of cultural maps so as to make central room for the concept of the limen and –as seems more and more needful – for a poetics of the threshold” (Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, iv.)

⁵⁵ Mukherji, “Introduction,” xvii.

⁵⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger; An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 141. From one status to another is “opening of the doors” (Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, ix).

⁵⁷ Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 20–21.

conscious and involuntary ideology embedded in the texts by studying the liminal aspects of the book of Judges, and especially the liminality of the women in the tales. Namely, as readers observe the roles of women in domestic, public, political and familial functions, they come to determine how women might contribute to Israelite identity. A thorough study of liminality in Judges makes possible the opportunity to intimate about the ambivalence women provoke.

Focusing on elements of liminality in the Judges stories also helps readers track how narrators generate ambiguous characterizations. The liminal nature of a character relates to their ambivalent treatment by the Judges narrator, but liminality and ambiguity should not be equated. The narrator employs spaces, cues, and vocabulary to identify characters in particular ways, places, and social statuses. Because characters in the Judges narratives are evidently liminal figures, and because of their indistinct or blurred qualities, the characters often receive equivocal appraisal. Also, as liminality most often relates to temporality, the liminal quality hinders achieving a permanent manifestation of the character.

Although her work does not focus on the book of Judges, Mary Douglas's seminal anthropological study *Purity and Danger* studies the concept of pollution and the symbolism of dirt in different cultures, and is helpful in understanding Israelite concerns with boundary-maintenance. Borrowing from Durkheim and Mauss, Douglas argues that classifying is a human universal, as classification sets up a vocabulary of spatial limits by which to avoid vulnerable situations to the humanly ordered system.⁵⁸ She argues for the

⁵⁸ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, xiii and xvii. Mary Douglas identifies four different kinds of social pollution, all of which indicate some kind of boundary transgressing. There is danger that presses on external boundaries, danger from transgressing internal lines in the system, danger in the margins of the lines, and danger in internal contradiction wherein the system is at war with itself (151-152). Liminal figures and thresholds can be categorized within and by these transgressions.

symbolic boundary-maintenance that is implicit in Israelite dietary laws and practices.⁵⁹ When Douglas discusses Israelite categorizations as ready for wholeness and completeness, she emphasizes the importance of class distinctions and avoidance of “hybrids” or other confusions in the Israelite framework.⁶⁰ Her reflections on rituals, magic, boundary breaking and bodies, community issues, and perceptions of women demonstrate the ways in which in-between people and spaces can be problematic for a sense of clear identity. Thus, the overarching concern seems to be that which is liminal. She highlights the concern with thresholds and new status.⁶¹ And she argues that some imposed restrictions protect from foreign influence.⁶²

Regarding specific studies on the book of Judges, a number of scholars reflect on the liminal portrayal of women in the texts.⁶³ Athalya Brenner mentions the social liminality emphasized in female figurations in Judges as they often have outsider status (including Jael, the Timnite wife, Delilah, and the Levite’s *pîlegeš*). Out of 19 characters, 6 are presented as ethnically foreign, and the text is replete with warnings against “outsider” or “liminal” women, and exogamous liaisons.⁶⁴ These outsider and foreign women are liminal and “inferior” persons, but they also follow other cultural tendencies to play important

⁵⁹ See Mary Douglas’s chapter on Leviticus in *Purity and Danger*.

⁶⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 66.

⁶¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 141.

⁶² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 60-62.

⁶³ Because of the relatedness of liminality and the symbolism of the womb, Turner and Van Gennep hint at women as almost universally considered liminal figures, though neither says so explicitly (Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 32). “In our mythic constructions of the genders, man visits, woman remains at the threshold” (Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 68). Literary scholars often cite Turner’s analyses as helpful for readers to think about this ambiguous status of women in cultural texts (Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 10). In fact, Turner’s work has caused not only literary critics, but also art historians, philosophers and social historians to pay more “attention to the symbolic cultural dimensions of their own materials” (Turner, *Ritual Process*, ix).

⁶⁴ Athalya Brenner, “Introduction,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 9-23. Ruth, whose story also takes place “in the time when judges ruled,” is an obvious exception to this ideology.

roles in myths and popular tales as they symbolize or model expressions of universal human values.⁶⁵ This could be the reason why scholars have found little agreement for the text's implicit positive and/or negative judgment of these characters in the book of Judges.⁶⁶

Cheryl Exum highlights the insecurity inherent in the liminal life stages of women. She reflects on Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11, who is a *bētûlâ* and who bewails her own transitional stage as a young woman preparing for her new way of life. Her new life will not be realized."⁶⁷ Mieke Bal notes how the *pîlegeš*'s last living moment in Judges 19 is a depiction of spatial liminality wherein the woman falls at the threshold of a house and becomes the embodiment of transition.⁶⁸

Some scholars make note of the ambiguous treatment and gendered implications in these liminal characterizations. Gerstein regards Judges as a male-focalized text and observes the way in which gender differences operate in Judges 11:

A look at Bat's [Jephthah's daughter] strength in dealing with her own death, whatever it may symbolize, makes one realize that perhaps the narrator uses 'permanently liminalized' women for his own critique of men's activity depicted within the fabula. Even though Bat is sacrificed, this ritual could in Bat's eyes mean

⁶⁵ Turner, *Ritual Process*, 110. For example, this is evident in the way that Shamhat tames Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

⁶⁶ The ambiguous portrayal of female characters likely corresponds with the frequent ambiguous treatment of the liminal state of pregnancy. Fertility and maternity have often been conceived in diverse ways and as ambiguous goods. On one hand, fertility/maternity are viewed highly, consistent with other aspects associated with the point of origin or source. On the other hand, fertility/maternity are considered attributes that must be mastered and surpassed in order to bring progress, and are thus appraised relatively low (Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 35). Van Gennep explicitly states that pregnancy is considered a transitional period (liminal rite) in many cultures (Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 41). Sometimes the woman is considered impure and dangerous, or sometimes she is considered in a physiologically and socially abnormal position. "Nothing seems more natural than that she should be treated as if she were ill or a stranger" (41).

⁶⁷ J. Cheryl Exum, "On Judges 11," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (eds Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 131-144. See also Bal, *Death*, 48-49 and Peggy L. Day, "From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 58-97.

⁶⁸ See Bal, "A Body of Writing," 119.

some kind of connection with God. It could also mean her actions would become exemplary and ritualized by other women.⁶⁹

In this way, the liminal aspects of female characters might serve more as a narratological critique of men's actions than a condemnation of the specific woman. However, even as the woman remains in a "permanently liminalized" state because of the man's actions, she is still forever condemned to an uncategorized, undesirable and volatile status.

Gale A. Yee reflects on the ambiguous treatment of the woman warrior through the female characters in Judges 4. She reconstructs women's military roles in pre-monarchic Israel and examines the metaphor of the woman warrior in the Hebrew portrayal of Deborah and Jael.⁷⁰ The liminality that is associated with the woman warrior produces "a number of opposing interpretations" and "contradictory opinions" that need to be considered along gender lines.⁷¹

Cheryl Exum observes that liminality is not exclusively limited to female figures. She notes how Samson transgresses boundaries, marries a Philistine woman and seems to prefer foreigners to his own kind.⁷² She argues for the unstable status of liminal figures, and the fact that the story must, eventually, reinstate well-defined categories. Samson is a limen, a figure who moves between the Israelite and Philistine worlds. In his own behavior, he acts as liminal, but according to the perspective of the Hebrews and Philistines, he is decidedly set in one category as a Hebrew strong man.

Characters in Judges 19, 4-5, 11, and 13-16 exist as liminal figures in a variety of

⁶⁹ Beth Gerstein, "A Ritual Processed: A Look at Judges 11:40," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Mieke Bal; Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 175-94. See also Mary Ann Beavis, "A Daughter in Israel: Celebrating Bat-Jephthah (Judg. 11:39d-40)," *FT* 13 (2004): 11-25.

⁷⁰ Gale A. Yee, "By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman Warrior in Judges 4," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 99-132.

⁷¹ Yee, "By the Hand," 99.

⁷² Exum, *Fragmented*, 77.

ways, and they create a sense of unease and mystery. These figures pose in liminal spaces, borders, and thresholds like windows, doorways, tents, and trees (e.g. the Levite's *pîlegeš*, Jael, Sisera's mother, Jephthah's daughter, and Samson between the pillars of the temple). They occupy liminal social statuses, life stages, and marriages/relationships (e.g. *pîlegeš*, *bětûlâ*, and *ēšet lappîdôt*). Women often operate between various male characters or groups in their lives. The book of Judges portrays all of these figures as "in-betweeners."⁷³

2. Unhomeliness

The Judges stories I consider demonstrate an interest in the construction and dissolution of families. On the surface, the constant transition between family stories and war stories sets up a dichotomy between public and private events. But a deeper reading demonstrates how this dichotomy breaks down. As will be discussed, Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness articulates the intervening of public affairs into private spaces such that the two are no longer distinct.

The tenor of the book of Judges reflects an Israel dealing with various groups around them and within themselves, coming to terms with their own transitional identity, and trying to understand how women contribute to and disrupt the formation of an Israelite identity. The stories reflect a way in which group identity is formed at both the micro (i.e. family) and macro (i.e. political/"national") levels. Judges narratives on the whole present a constant movement between family life and public life because both have ramifications for Israelite identity. Thus, the interplay between different spheres and the complexity within both "private" and "public" spheres as presented in Judges both reinforces and transcends the private and public dichotomy. The narratives and characters

⁷³ Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 69.

appear complex and ambiguously presented, and theoretical concepts like liminality and unhomeliness shape the way the reader might define this particular experience of identity formation.

a. The Public vs. Private Dichotomy

A commonplace tendency in Western culture since at least the nineteenth century has been to locate men in the public, outside, and common sphere and assume that women operate in private, inside, and domestic spheres.⁷⁴ These “social world distinctions come to be part and parcel of gender distinctions,” and thereby contribute to the near ubiquitous need for clear categorizations and avoiding that which is confusing.⁷⁵

But this sense of clear gender distinctions relating to public and private spheres needs to be reexamined and even problematized.⁷⁶ To what extent are women universally equated with the private realm and men with the public realm, and is that even true?⁷⁷ This is a predominant Western construct, used by Western culture to analyze non-Western cultures and societies, and this gendered dichotomy of men/public and women/private does not consider differences in class and ethnicity, alongside gender, that might impact the associations with private and public spaces.⁷⁸

In Judges, a flat reading might note that many of the women in Judges occupy and act in domestic and private spaces. For example, the Levite’s *pîlegeš* moves or is moved

⁷⁴ Karla G. Bohmbach, “Conventions/Contraventions: The Meanings of Public and Private for the Judges 19 Concubine,” *JSOT* 83 (1999): 83.

⁷⁵ Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 83. See also Mukherji, “Introduction,” xxv.

⁷⁶ See especially the discussions in L.J. Nicholson, “Feminist Theory: The Private and the Public,” in *Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy* (ed. C.C. Gould; Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), 221-230; A. Yeatman, “Gender and the Differentiation of Social Life into Public and Domestic Domains,” *Social Analysis* 15 (1984): 32-49; J. Sharistanian, “Introduction: Women’s Lives in the Public and Domestic Spheres” and “Conclusion: The Public/Domestic Model and the Study of Contemporary Women’s Lives,” in *Beyond the Public/Domestic Dichotomy: Contemporary Perspectives on Women’s Public Lives* (ed. J. Sharistanian; Contributions in Women’s Studies 78; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 1-10, 179-84.

⁷⁷ See Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 84.

⁷⁸ Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 84.

from her husband's house, to her father's house, to a stranger's house, and back to her husband's house, and the reader knows nothing of her actions between or beyond these homes. Jael is associated with and operates in Heber's tent. The private bedroom predominates in Samson's relations with both the Timnite wife and Delilah.

However, all of the women's private/domestic maneuvers in the Judges tales I consider have important political and public ramifications. The Levite *pîleges'* actions in the diverse homes with which she is associated impacts the Levite and sets into motion a tribal civil war. Jael conquers the Canaanite enemy in her domestic space. Both the Timnite wife and Delilah allow Philistine political interests to enter the bed chamber. In this way, there is a recognition in the book of Judges that women impact the public sphere whether they work in private or public spaces. Women have outside, commonplace, and public influence.

It is less the gendered dimension of the dichotomy as the blurring of the lines between public and private that requires analysis. Private, family affairs in Judges are also public. And the private sphere is never safe from invasion by that which is public. It becomes abundantly clear for the reader of Judges that what happens between individual characters, in marriages, and in families reverberates in Israelite communal life and social structures. And this can be a disturbing realization.

b. A Terrifying Condition

The narrator of these Judges stories provides a view into, and the conflation of, both public and private events. This frequently happens by way of focusing on the actions of the female characters of Judges, but also, as we shall see, the maneuvers and experiences of Samson, Sisera, Jephthah, and the Levite in chapter 19. The blending of the public and

private spheres, included in the stories of liminal, odd, and subjugated characters, illustrates a reality within the stories that appears strange and disturbing. Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concept of "unhomeliness" provides helpful language and a useful theoretical framework for articulating what the narrator has the characters experience and what brings about a disconcerting sense of the state of things for the intended reader of the book of Judges.

If liminality denotes a temporarily blurred line, a transitional threshold, and a moving to something or becoming something new, then Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness signifies the realization that presupposed domestic and public lines *have* blurred. Liminality references a rite of passage or movement between two spaces or statuses within one culture, and unhomeliness represents the doubling of cultures at once such that the subject is not fully "at home" in either. Where liminal figures and spaces imply potential threats or danger to the greater community because of the character of their "in-betweenness," unhomeliness is a condition experienced by the individual of being caught between two worlds. Bhabha identifies the condition of unhomeliness as an "invasion" and a blurring of distinctions:

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.⁷⁹

Bhabha focuses primarily on female literary characters in his description of the expression of unhomeliness in literature. This expression is often heard distinctly "in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites."⁸⁰ For

⁷⁹ Bhabha, *Location*, 9.

⁸⁰ See Bhabha, *Location*, 13.

example, the unhomely moment is experienced, when Henry James's Isabel Archer, in the *Portrait of a Lady*, takes the measure of her dwelling in a state of "incredulous terror."⁸¹ This is a moment of realization and articulation of everything that should have been secret suddenly coming to light.⁸² A boundary has been broken. When she brings the public into the private, namely when she makes her domestic space the "perfect cover for gun-running," Aila's reality in *My Son's Story* also displays the condition of unhomeliness.⁸³ These literary examples illuminate the conflation of a variety of related dichotomous pairs including public vs. private spaces, men's work vs. women's work, men's spaces vs. women's spaces.⁸⁴

The convergence and overlapping of the concepts of liminality and unhomeliness can be observed in Bhabha's work and Chaudhuri's chapter in *Thinking on Thresholds*, two unrelated pieces that analyze the character of Bimala in *The Home and the World*.⁸⁵ Bhabha claims that the experience of unhomeliness is present in Bimala's voice through the transgressing of boundaries as she is "drawn forever from...the secluded women's quarters...(and) crosses that fated verandah into the world of public affairs."⁸⁶ Chaudhuri reflects on the context of colonial India wherein traditionally the architecture of homes

⁸¹ Bhabha, *Location*, 13.

⁸² Bhabha, *Location*, 14–15.

⁸³ Bhabha, *Location*, 14.

⁸⁴ These literary examples present women as the ones who experience the condition of unhomeliness. It is true that women in patriarchal societies are the less advantaged subject in the power divisions of the men/women dichotomy. And they are often associated with the private spaces. They are the ones who, in these examples, experience the invasion of the public into the private. But as I've mentioned earlier, the narrator of *Judges* demonstrates that it is not only women who are susceptible to the condition of unhomeliness and the invasion of one sphere into the other.

⁸⁵ See Bhabha, *Location*, 14 and Chaudhuri, Supriya "Dangerous Liaisons: Desire and Limit in the Home and the World," in *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces* (ed. Subha Mukherji; London: Anthem Press, 2013), 87-95.

⁸⁶ See Bhabha, *Location*, 14.

reflect the inner quarters designated for women and outer precincts reserved for men.⁸⁷ In a westernizing bourgeois house that reflects the movement toward modern socialization, women move out into public apartments.⁸⁸ According to Chaudhuri, the main character, Bimala displays a liminal emotional state of “not only private desire but public hope” and also through “the nostalgia she expresses at the start of the novel for a lost way of life (and) the urgency with which she embraces a future that is always out of reach...” She dwells in a liminal physical state as she inhabits “the boundary between inside and outside.”⁸⁹ While he doesn’t use Bhabha’s language (i.e. experiencing the condition of unhomeliness), Chaudhuri does present Bimala’s liminal state as a “transition attended by extreme risk and difficulty” and “marks her with the signs of radical discontent.”⁹⁰ Also, much like the idea of unhomeliness, the liminal state experienced by characters like Bimala represents the break down of “the opposition of inner and outer, home and world.”⁹¹

c. Unhomeliness in Judges

Characters in Judges 19, 4-5, 11, 13-16 experience similar transgressions by public and political affairs into the private and familial situations, such that a sense of blurring occurs. What might be considered “private” infringes on the public affairs. Thus, Bhabha’s idea of unhomeliness helps articulate why the narratives have a constant interplay between family narratives and stories that involve political conflict or battles. Private

⁸⁷ Chaudhuri, “Dangerous,” 88.

⁸⁸ Chaudhuri, “Dangerous,” 89.

⁸⁹ Chaudhuri, “Dangerous,” 92.

⁹⁰ Chaudhuri, “Dangerous,” 89 and 92.

⁹¹ Chaudhuri, “Dangerous,” 95. Chaudhuri repeatedly posits that the process of social modernization creates the possibility for the liminal state Bimala experiences, which could pose a problem in reading this particular kind of liminality (i.e. the threshold between public and private spaces) into an ancient text like the Hebrew Bible. However, the Judges narratives include enough instances of the ambiguous treatment of both men and women occupying public and private spaces such that the breakdown of clearly defined gendered spaces seems to be apparent, even if it is not the result of a modern or westernizing process.

family life and public political conflict become part of each other. This concept, that highlights the disorienting nature of the conflation of all things private and public, adequately reflects the narrator's ambiguous assessment of the time of Judges when there wasn't a king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes or what is evil in the eyes of the Lord.

The realization of unhomeliness is similarly terrifying for those who hold official political power, perhaps those who benefit from clear divisions. The condition of unhomeliness, much like the existence of liminal people and places, "drives home" the reality that as much as dichotomous pairs and categorically clear divisions are ideologically normative or desired for the Israelite narrator, reality is not so clear cut. Such divisions are an assertion of power, wherein one side of the dichotomy holds more power and prestige or usurps the other.⁹²

A deeper reading through Bhabha's postcolonial lens enables a new perspective and way to articulate what is so troubling about the Judges narratives. Neither the narrator nor the characters themselves articulate a sense of experiencing the "condition of unhomeliness." However, the experiences of odd, emasculated, "othered," liminal, or subjugated male characters (Samson, Jephthah, the Levite, and Sisera), as well as numerous female characters in Judges (such as Deborah, Jael, Jephthah's daughter, the Levite's *pîlegeš*, Delilah, Samson's mother, and his Timnite wife), fulfill the experience of Bhabha's unhomeliness.

⁹² "In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.) or has the upper hand" (Derrida, *Positions*, 41).

III. Outline of the Study

As I examine Judges 19, 4-5, 11, and 13-16, I consider how the characters are presented. The chapters address who sees, acts, and speaks, and also when they do so, to what effect and with what kind of power.⁹³ Each chapter follows a similar plan as the main men and women pairs and YHWH are analyzed in regards to their ambiguous and complex identities and portrayals, as well as the narrative's presentation of liminality and unhomeliness. Thus, in each chapter, I use a combination of literary criticism, feminist criticism/gender criticism, and both anthropological and postcolonial theories to illuminate the ideology within the text. The ambiguous treatment of the women, and sometimes men, in Judges reveals insecurities about group identity. Similarly, the presence of liminality and ambiguity can be windows to understanding a subversion of something bigger than the patriarchy within the text. Women in Judges, presented with sympathy and suspicion, and the spaces they inhabit often become the loci through which tensions play out, boundaries become flexible, and the dichotomy between public and private breaks down.

Chapter 2 (*The pîlegeš Caught Between Men: "and her hands on the threshold"*) considers Judges 19 and the Levite and his *pîlegeš*. After a brief introduction and focused reading, the character analysis closely considers the use of anonymity for both characters, the identifiers used for the man and the content of his speech and actions. A similar character analysis of the woman follows and emphasizes hers as a body on the threshold and a body acted upon, but a body that nevertheless speaks. The final portion of the

⁹³ This part of my approach follows an abbreviated version of Mieke Bal's narratological analysis and process of *focalization*.

chapter considers the social and familial institutions at stake in the narrative, as well as the use of ambiguity and the absence and silence of YHWH in the narrative.

Chapter 3 (*"The Mothers of War: "and she came out of her tent to greet Sisera"... "and she peered out of the window"*) examines the prose and poetry versions of the same story in Judges 4 and 5. First, Deborah and Baraq and their fiery and dialogic relationship are examined. Then, the chapter turns to Jael and Sisera's physical relationship and her mothering of the commander. An analysis of Sisera's mother highlights the persisting mothering theme as well as the presence of simultaneity in the poetry. Like Judges 19, YHWH remains apparently silent and distant. However, both the poetry and the narrative versions of the story, in their own ways, depict YHWH as the true judge of the story. The chapter concludes with an extensive discussion of liminality and evaluative ambiguity in the tale.

Chapter 4 (*A bētûlâ Dies by Her Father's Words: "And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with drummers and dancers. She was his only one. He had no other son or daughter"*) analyzes Judges 11 as a story of perpetual liminality. The character analysis focuses on the multiple designations for Jephthah, how he is negatively and positively portrayed by the narrator, and how his words cause him trouble. Similar to the fate of Jephthah's daughter, the silent YHWH becomes bound to Jephthah's words. The anonymous *bētûlâ* daughter speaks the most profound, yet arguably ambiguous, words to Jephthah. Her liminal life stage and ritual receive extensive consideration.

Chapter 5 (*Samson Part 1, When Politics and Home Collide: "And he said to her, 'Look, to my father and to my mother I have not reported, but to you I will report?!'"*) contains the analysis of the first part of Samson's narrative in Judges 13-15. A note on YHWH and the

theme of “seeing” in Samson’s narratives precedes a character analysis of Samson that reveals him as an odd and liminal “hero.” Samson’s mother, in contrast to her husband Manoah, takes center stage and articulates an experience of both liminality and unhomeliness as politics invade her home. A character analysis of the Timnite wife demonstrates a similar invasion of her marriage bed.

Chapter 6 (*Samson Part 2, The Work of Women: “She caused him to sleep upon her knees. She called to the man, then she shaved the seven braids on his head, and she began to overpower him”*) focuses on Judges 16. The chapter begins with a brief interlude in paginal liminality that focuses on the woman in Gaza Samson encounters. This interlude moves the analysis from the first accounts of Samson’s story to his last episode with Delilah. Delilah receives the most attention in this chapter, and she is compared to the Timnite wife. The use of repetition in Delilah’s scene shapes her characterization, and the book of Judges’ mothering theme once again returns in this story. Both the role of YHWH and the theme of sight are treated simultaneously in a reflection on Samson’s experience of unhomeliness in the narrative.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Scholarship in Judges tends to focus on topics like war or the pro-monarchic, anti-monarchic, anti-Benjamin, anti-Ephraim, or pro-Judah agendas in the book,⁹⁴ but little

⁹⁴ These categories reflect a complicated rhetoric in the book. Regarding the monarchy, Noth claims that the Deuteronomist, who had the luxury of hindsight, thought that the rise of the monarchy was of fundamental importance, but also that the monarchy is what led the Israelite nation to destruction (Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 80). Chisholm claims that the book endorses the Davidic Dynasty but it also challenges the dynasty to live up to God’s ideal (Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013], 66-67. See also Satterthwaite, “No King,” 75-88. Satterthwaite argues that Judges 17-21 is “far from being unqualifiedly pro-monarchic” and is to lead the reader to be critical of the future kings of Samuel and Kings (87-88). Regarding the pro-Judah agenda, see Wong’s comments about the

work has concentrated on the importance and workings of families in the book of Judges. In fact, in the time of Judges, i.e. the time without the monarchy, social relationships were based on strong kinship ties, households, families, clans, and tribes.⁹⁵ And thus when the “social structure extended from the family household outward to the tribe,...roles of women in pre-state Israel were significant,” women had considerable power, and there was a significant blurring between domestic and public domains.⁹⁶ The private and public spheres were not yet differentiated in Ancient Israel in the ways that they are now; yet the texts exploit the differentiation. By setting women principally in the domestic sphere, any transgression of proper spheres of influence by one or the other gender, or any conflation of the private and public spheres, itself becomes evidence of the unhomeliness condition.

Thus, my character analysis, exploration of gender roles and expectations, and examination of the ideology within the text highlight the emphasis on and insecurities about the construction and dissolution of families throughout these tales in Judges. When feminist scholars have considered gender roles and the women and men in Judges, they have often come to varying conclusions about the possibility of finding any redeeming value in these deeply problematic patriarchal and violent texts. In my particular feminist perspective, informed by anthropology, postcolonial thought, and gender studies, I suggest a more nuanced perspective on subjugation and domination emerging from these narratives and the overriding concern pertaining to Israelite identity. Comparative studies

seemingly favorable portrait of Judah that completely disintegrates in Judges 15 (Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 106). For a more constructive view of Judah's actions, see Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary: Judges* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 342.

⁹⁵ Yee, “By the Hand,” 110-111.

⁹⁶ Yee, “By the Hand,” 111. See also Carol L. Meyers, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Facets: Fortress Press, 2005).

like this one, which engage a combination of historical-critical, literary, feminist, and postmodern approaches, are still uncommon in scholarship on Judges.

CHAPTER 2

The *pîlegeš* Caught Between Men: “And her hands on the threshold”

I. Introduction

The narratives in the book of Judges demonstrate that political issues begin and end with the family. Politics in the narratives concern not just war but the politics between genders and generations, within and among Israel’s families. While chapter 19 appears at the very end of this violent book, this narrative provides a helpful starting point to assess the significance of family dynamics and relationships in determining the overall perspective and preoccupation of the book of Judges as a whole. It is noteworthy, given the order of the chapters in this project, that Josephus places this story very early in the Judges cycle; in fact, he places the story before the episodes with Baraq/Deborah, Jephthah and his daughter, and Samson. The story of the Levite and his wife is the starting point for the conflict between the Israelite tribes. More accurately, this is the “occasion” that is the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back.” Josephus describes a situation in which the Israelite are complacent in their work for the Canaanites and defiantly ignoring YHWH’s orders. This state of affairs culminates in the story of the Levite and his wife:

But the Israelites, though they were in heaviness at these admonitions from God, yet were they still very unwilling to go to war; and since they got large tributes from the Canaanites, and were indisposed for taking pains by their luxury, they suffered their aristocracy to be corrupted also, and did not ordain themselves a senate, nor any other such magistrates as their laws had formerly required, but they were very much given to cultivating their fields, in order to get wealth; which great indolence of theirs

brought a terrible sedition upon them, and they proceeded so far as to fight one against another, from the following occasion...⁹⁷

Chapter 19's emphasis on one particular family reflects the issues in the greater society and also leads to consequences for Israel. This is a time of great turmoil for Israel, and the unnamed characters, elements of ambiguity, liminality and unhomeliness within the narrative contribute to a general sense of instability and even moral deprivation at the localized level of family and at the larger levels of politics and society.

Whether brought by motive, plot, or character, the stories in Judges, and this narrative in particular, are open to multiple interpretations. Especially in regards to the complicated characters in the narrative, the equivocal elements of the narrative appear intentional by the narrator. Judges 19 is paradigmatic in the way that elements of the narrative lead to complicated evaluations of the main characters and the story itself. Obscure Hebrew terminology, complex textual traditions, and composite portrayals of main characters make it difficult to determine who plays the role of victim, who is the perpetrator of violence or the character worthy of blame, and what, exactly, is most appalling about the narrative's events.

II. Focused Reading of Judges 19

The story begins with a Levite who has taken an unnamed *pîlegeš* under undeveloped circumstances. She leaves him, for reasons similarly undisclosed, and returns to her father's house. The man loads up his donkeys and a servant, pursues his *pîlegeš* to her father's home in order to speak to her. The father gladly welcomes the Levite, provides

⁹⁷ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (trans. William Whiston; Philadelphia: David McKay Publisher, 1960), 158-159.

extensive hospitality, and urges the man to remain day after day. On the fifth night, the Levite refuses to stay another night. He gathers his donkeys and *pīlegeš* and starts on the journey home. As the little group passes by Jebus at the close of the day, his servant requests that they stay there during the night. The master refuses and expresses that he desires to stay in an Israelite city. When they arrived in Gibeah, the man sits in the open plaza and waits for someone to extended hospitality. An old man comes by, inquires about the group's home and their travels and eventually offers his home as shelter. While the men enjoy themselves in the old man's house, a group of men surrounds the house.⁹⁸ They request that the old man send out the visitor so that they can "know" him.⁹⁹ ¹⁰⁰ The old man pleads with the men not to commit this act, and he offers his daughter and the visitor's

⁹⁸ Importantly, Jack Sasson considers letters from Mari to provide a different interpretation for these "wicked" men of cities like Sodom and Gibeah. See Jack Sasson, "Where Angels Fearlessly Tread: Mari Insights on Genesis 19," in *Languages in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 53e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (ed. Leonid Kogan, N. Koslova, S. Loesov, and S. Tishenko; vol. 1; Winona Lake, In: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 1163-1183. Instead of wicked, Sasson calls them "idle" men *bēnê-bēlîya'al* (1164n6). Sasson primarily analyzes a group of Mari letters, but he also notes connections between Genesis 19 and Judges 19. There are similarities in the rape and violence terminology, issues of hospitality, women with ambiguous roles, and the true character and motivations of the people who come to the doors of the houses. He argues that the people of Sodom have "good intentions" and are seeking information about the welfare of two strangers who had disappeared (1181-2). Lot supplies no explanations, instead makes a "baroque proposal" to abuse his daughters, and in general seems "a fool" (1181). "Had all these personalities been recovered from Mari documents rather than from the Bible, we might have read about the people of Sodom trying to ferret out the truth by subjecting Lot to an oath" (1181). Instead, this Hebraic story follows a familiar biblical theme, that God uses the "weaknesses of people (i.e. the men of Sodom and Gibeah) he wishes to destroy" (1182).

⁹⁹ Sasson argues that the verb *yd'* in 19:22 lacks *'et* (Sasson, "Where Angels," 1164n6). The two together form "an idiom that connotes sexuality only in contexts that are obvious" (Sasson, "Where Angels," 1164n6). As in other "innocent passages" (e.g. Gen 29:5), it is possible that these men seek to "know" others and are not seeking illicit sexual activity (Sasson, "Where Angels," 1164).

¹⁰⁰ Many scholars have commented on the similarities between Judges 19 and Genesis 19, and especially on the common themes of hospitality and inhospitality. See Susan Niditch, "The Sodomite Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 365-378; Stuart Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 29 (1984): 37-59; Niditch, "Judges," 192; Block, "Echo," 325-341. Lanoir focuses on similar vocabulary and verbs in the two accounts (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 191-193). Block's article on echo narrative technique within Judges 19 and Genesis 19 demonstrates the way that a story-teller deliberately uses pre-existent accounts or portions of texts to shape the recounting of a new event (Block, "Echo," 325). He claims the opposite of Niditch's article, which argues that Genesis is a simpler theological message and should be viewed as secondary (326). According to Block, the author incorporates a well-known story from the patriarchal tradition in order to make a theological argument about the Canaanization of Israel and her spiritual devolution (335-340). Some argue that such an endeavor, to determine the process of borrowing between two similar stories, is too difficult and it is better to focus on similar themes and motifs used in each story (Olson, *NIB* 2:876).

pîlegeš. The men will not listen, and the Levite takes his *pîlegeš* to the men.¹⁰¹ They rape her all night, and then they cast her aside. The woman gathers enough strength to move her body to the entrance of the old man's house. When the Levite rises in the morning to go home, he finds his *pîlegeš* at the door, with her hands on the threshold. The man tells her to get up so that they can go, but she is unresponsive. He loads her on his donkey, goes back to his home, chops her into 12 pieces, and sends her to the tribes of Israel.¹⁰² The narrative ends with a horrorstruck statement by the ones receiving the woman's body parts.

III. Character Analysis

A. Anonymity

The use of anonymity creates a sense of ambivalence toward the characters. This anonymity also distances the reader from these individual characters and makes their story represent the possible experience of any family or couple in Israel at the time. More precisely, the anonymity acts as a narrative device to reiterate the implicit negative evaluation of Israel's present state when it lacks a king.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ As will be discussed later in the chapter, the text is unclear here. "The man" seizes the woman, but it isn't clear to which man, whether the Levite or the host, the text refers.

¹⁰² Many scholars comment on the parallels between this and 1 Samuel 11:7 in which Saul cuts up a yoke of oxen to muster an army and 1 Kings 11:30 in which Ahijah rips his garment to symbolize the division of the kingdom (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 50). See Lasine, "Guest," 41-43. Judges 19 is a dramatic variation of a league practice that calls up members for the purpose of vengeance (Niditch, "Sodomite," 371). See also Olson, *NIB* 2:878 and Exum, *Fragmented*, 180.

¹⁰³ Amit argues that the anonymity of the characters accentuates the place names mentioned and the tribe of Benjamin so that the reader focuses on the location and tribe, rather than the individual people (Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* [Boston: Brill, 1999], 348).

Adele Reinhartz's work on the anonymity of the characters in the story highlights the contrast between the identification of the main male character as a man and a Levite.¹⁰⁴ His supposed and implicit communal responsibilities as a Levite conflict with the lack of responsibility he shows for his wife.¹⁰⁵ In her opinion, his anonymity and behavior encroaches on the implicit general sense of a Levite's devotion and thus produces a negative evaluation of this character.¹⁰⁶ While it does consider the associations of various labels for the Levite, Reinhartz's analysis fails to adequately take into account the multiple and primarily familial designations this anonymous character receives in the narrative. These other designators, like son-in-law, husband, and master, add another layer to the narrative that demonstrates a preoccupation with family relationships and how familial discord mirrors or impacts greater societal problems.

According to Reinhartz, the anonymity of the woman also sets up the potential of an ambivalent evaluation of her. Her behavior is "anomalous" as this anonymous woman "reverses the life's journey of the ideal biblical wife because she leaves the domain of her husband to return to the domain of her father."¹⁰⁷ As she steps out of the norm, her actions and integrity are open to scrutiny.¹⁰⁸ Her multiple designations put into question both her marital and moral status. Ultimately, Reinhartz argues that the woman's anonymity

¹⁰⁴ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁵ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 80. Reinhartz understands that the negative evaluation of this man corresponds with the apparent overall deterioration of Israel. Reinhartz states, "Anonymity thus becomes a vehicle for the narrator's judgment not only of these men but also of the political chaos in the context of which their actions took place" (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 81).

¹⁰⁷ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 145.

¹⁰⁸ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 145.

emphasizes the authority men have over her.¹⁰⁹ Thus, in some ways, the anonymity serves not only to focus on this woman but also to sympathize with her.¹¹⁰

As suggested, anonymity becomes a vehicle by which the narrator can comment on the present problematic state of Israel. Athalya Brenner argues that the lack of names is an intentionally deployed narrative device so that “nonspecificity distances us from the plot and enlarges the scope of horror told.”¹¹¹ This one anonymous family experiences discord between marriage parties, a man shirking personal responsibility and allowing his wife to be abused, and the violence at the hands of utterly inhospitable and base men in a supposedly friendly city. These experiences provide an illustration of what happens to Israel when it lacks a king.

According to the narrator, this unacceptable political state reflects its dysfunction at the micro and macro levels of society. Judges 19 provides the ideal example of how the experience of one anonymous family can reflect the present state of Israel when it has no king. However, a reverse causation is evident as well as the quality of the state impacts the quality of individual people’s experiences and even actions.¹¹²

The opening line supplies a negative evaluation of the general state of things in Israel, and then the narrator discloses that there evident problems in the union between

¹⁰⁹ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 125.

¹¹⁰ Some feminist scholars argue that the woman’s anonymity gives her a degree of insubstantiality and encourages the reader not to view her as a person in her own right (Brenner, “Introduction,” 12 and Exum, *Fragmented*, 176). Others have noticed the tendency of the narrative to deny the woman’s personhood by denying her name. They have responded by naming the woman; Bal calls her Beth, and Exum names the woman Bath-sheber (daughter of breaking) (Bal, *Death*, 90 and Exum, *Fragmented*, 177). This tendency in some feminist scholarship to reverse her anonymity cannot eclipse, however, the fact that all of the characters in this narrative are anonymous. Thus, studies like Reinhartz’s are more helpful as they highlight how anonymity functions in the entire narrative and with all of the characters.

¹¹¹ Brenner, “Introduction,” 11.

¹¹² Such a world where there is no king in Israel and everyone does what is right in his own eyes is an “inverted world” in which actions are often “ludicrous, absurd and self-defeating” (Lasine, “Guest,” 37 and 43).

the Levite and his mate. Whatever the content of those issues, both characters behave questionably in regards to this union. The familial situation is further complicated by the presence of the woman's father. The narrative, itself, acts as a progression from the problems between a husband and his wife, to the negotiations between two family structures, and finally to the larger societal problems of failed hospitality and complete brutality in a specific city.

This story and the following chapters are helpful in making a theological argument about Israel's depicted state. However, different interpretations are possible. Lapsley claims that the man's actions, his insensitivity to his concubine and his selfishness represents for the narrator a microcosm of the larger community and the relationships that dominate in Israel.¹¹³ The escalating violence coupled with the progressive deterioration of the status of women in the book serve to comment on Israel's social and religious health.¹¹⁴ The nuclear family in this chapter becomes a symbol of the family of Israel.¹¹⁵ The corruption of the time has infected the people of Israel so much that it has spread even to those people who are entrusted with keeping the Yahwistic tradition.¹¹⁶

Lapsley remarks that the narrator rarely provides explicit judgment in this narrative, but subtly shapes the reader's judgments.¹¹⁷ Thus, ambiguity, anonymity and chapter 19's opening statement creates an ambivalent evaluation of the characters and Israel's condition. This story is not necessarily a "mere reflex of patriarchy"¹¹⁸ in which the treatment of the woman should be read straightforwardly as a necessity and without

¹¹³ Lapsley, *Whispering*, 64 and Niditch, "Sodomite," 370.

¹¹⁴ Lapsley, *Whispering*, 64 and Olson, *NIB* 2:872-3.

¹¹⁵ Niditch, "Judges," 190.

¹¹⁶ Danna Nolan Fewell, "Judges," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carole A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 73-83.

¹¹⁷ Lapsley, *Whispering*, 36.

¹¹⁸ Lapsley, *Whispering*, 36.

critique. There exists at least some implicit negative judgment on men's reprehensible and irresponsible behavior.¹¹⁹

B. The Man

1. Identifiers

The main male character in Judges 19 receives multiple designations. These particular identifiers provide evidence for the text's focus on familial relationships. The narrator first refers to the main male character as a Levite (19:1). He receives this identifier only one other time, which is in 20:4. This particular Levite can be compared to the only other identified Levite in Judges. A Levite appears in chapters 17 and 18, and there exist other correlations between these two men, beyond the function of Levite. Both of their stories involve people who originate either from Ephraim or Judah. The Levite in chapter 19 has been sojourning in Ephraim, while the Levite in 17 leaves Judah, where he had been sojourning, and journeys to Ephraim. Both men are depicted throughout their narratives as traveling through and visiting in territories unfamiliar to them. Both Levite narratives also contain themes about family relationships and hospitality.

Prominent contrasts also arise between these two Levites in the book of Judges. In Judges 17 and 18, Micah recruits a Levite to be his priest. This Levite speaks for the Lord.

¹¹⁹ Regarding the attitude of the narrator, Lapsley makes the astute observation that "something more is happening" (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 36). The depiction of the woman and the quantity of violence and sex cannot be taken as straightforward reflections of a patriarchal culture. Eynikel also remarks on how part of the objective of the narration was to provide a critique of the kind of horrific violence the woman suffers, and that this critique has been lost on some feminist scholars (Eynikel, "Appendix," 103). Ambiguities in worldview are present in this narrative. Niditch states, "A most troubling feature of the Israelite version of the tale type is the apparent willingness of the men to hand over their women to violent miscreants. Implicit is a worldview in which women are regarded as disposable and replaceable. On the other hand, the narration that follows implies that the author does not condone the men's behavior. They emerge as cowardly, and their complicity in the rape and murder of the woman is clear and reprehensible violation of covenant" (Niditch, "Judges," 193).

Some Danites convince the Levite to leave Micah and serve the Danites, arguing that it is better to serve a tribe than only one man. The Danites successfully take Micah's idol and his priest.

In contrast to this man in Judges 17 and 18, who acts as priest for Micah and is desired for his religious and communal abilities by an entire tribe, the Levite in chapter 19 appears to be a Levite in title only. The narrative of Judges 19 contains neither actions nor terminology that would indicate he performs any priestly duties. The narrative almost completely lacks any reference to the Lord, and there is no evidence of idols. Chapter 19 is mostly concerned with this Levite as a man who travels, experiences various levels of hospitality, and must negotiate through family issues. Even in 20:4, the narrative reveals a preoccupation with the man's family as it adds the qualifier "the husband of the woman who was slain" to his title of Levite.

Reinhartz highlights the contrast in the character of this anonymous man regarding his cultic responsibilities as a Levite and his familial responsibilities as a man or husband.¹²⁰ While the narrative in chapter 19 mentions "Levite" only once (and twice in the entire episode involving this man), most often the man is identified in gendered or familial terms. He is referenced as a man (*'iš*) in vv. 6, 7, 9, 10, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 28.¹²¹ To the woman, he is "her husband" (*'išāh*) in v. 3 and "her master" (*'ădônēhā*) in vv. 26 and 27. To the woman's father, he is "his son-in-law" (*ḥātānô*) in v. 5. He is also a "master" in reference to his servant (*hanna'ar*) in v. 11. Except for the gendered reference to this anonymous "man," the other identifiers for this main male character reference his connection to people in his family or household.

¹²⁰ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 79.

¹²¹ 19:17 is more accurately "the wandering man." And 19:23 reads, "the one, man who came into my house."

A *ḥātān* is a son-in-law, a young man in relationship to his father-in-law. The first verses in chapter 19 involve a conversation between a father-in-law and his son-in-law, the Levite. We can only speculate about the contents of this conversation. The *pīlegeš* disappears from the scene. The man might be following after her to “speak to her heart,” but contrary to the reader’s expectations, the narrator does not focus on this relationship. Instead, the repeated gestures of hospitality and in-law terminology concentrates on the interaction between the men. The mysterious scene between the men not only raises questions about the men’s conversation, but it reminds the reader that inter-family relations can take precedence over marital relationships.¹²²

Some confusion about the content of the relationship between the man and his wife also exists when one considers the way in which the narrative identifies the man. The man and woman are in some form of a union, and he is “her husband” (v. 3). He becomes “her master,” and “master” over her body in multiple ways, at the end of the narrative (vv. 26 and 27). This term is not typically used in reference to a woman’s husband.¹²³ It is not clear if this term reflects a general patriarchal attitude that assumes a husband is a master over his wife or if this term points to the status of this particular man or woman. Regardless, a striking contrast emerges between the terms that identify this man and his actions. The reader first knows him as a husband and son-in-law who journeys to “speak to the heart” of his *pīlegeš*. This shift from the narrator’s deployment of marital terms like son-in-law and husband at the beginning of the narrative to terms that indicate a difference in social status

¹²² Satterthwaite suggests a building of suspense and anticipation for something to happen once the couple leaves. “We do not know why the father-in-law so urgently wishes to detain the Levite, but simply by dwelling on his protracted and importunate pleas, the narrator suggest that something is going to happen on the way home; and so we read on with a foreboding which turns out to be justified” (Satterthwaite, “No King,” 81).

¹²³ George Foot Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (New York: Scribner, 1895), 419.

between the characters and even ownership of one character by another also demonstrates a narrator's implicit negative evaluation of this man's character and evidence for this family's deterioration.

2. Speech

The man's original intent to "speak to her heart" in v. 3 seems odd when one considers his general pattern of speech and the final words that the man speaks to his wife.

Early in the story, the fateful journey of the Levite begins when he goes after his *pīlegeš* "to speak to her heart." The phrase is used in at least 2 different ways to reference the speech between individuals and between YHWH and people. It is the mode of seductive persuasive speech used by lovers. After extensive descriptions of the woman's apostasy and rebellion, Hosea 2:16 marks a turning point wherein the Lord will pursue and work to rehabilitate his wayward lover, "Therefore I will entice, and lead her through the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart." After Shechem sexually violates Dinah, Genesis 34:3 indicates that he was drawn to the woman, that he loved her, and that "he spoke to the girl's heart." Ruth reflects on Boaz's actions and speech, saying that he has comforted her and spoken to her heart (Ruth 2:13). This phrase characterizes a relationship between a man and a woman and is often found in love language in the Hebrew Bible.¹²⁴ Speaking to one's heart is also a way of providing comfort in military and political contexts. Both David and Hezekiah provide comfort to troops (2 Sam 19:8), Levites (2 Chr 30:22), and the commanders of Jerusalem (2 Chr 32:6). And in a way that conflates the political context with the marriage metaphor that is used so prevalently in the prophetic texts, Deutero-

¹²⁴ See J. Fabry, "*lēb*," TDOT 7:399-437 and W.H. Schmidt, "*dābhar*," TDOT 3:84-125.

Isaiah uses the phrase to call the prophet, “Comfort, comfort my people, speak to the heart of Jerusalem” (Isa 40:1).

And relevant to the Judges 19 narrative, “speak to the heart” is also used in reference to the comfort Joseph gives to his brothers in Gen 50:21. Some scholars argue that his words of comfort to his apprehensive brothers demonstrate the entire story’s family emphasis.¹²⁵ Thus, speaking to one’s heart is used in the contexts of sentimental relationships and familial issues. Perhaps the man seeks to speak to his wife’s heart and woo her; perhaps he also wants to provide her comfort, care and support.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, he goes to speak to *her*. And Boling claims that his desire for reconciliation with her prompts the reader’s respect from the very beginning of the story¹²⁷ Even if this is the case, it remains difficult to continue to respect this figure’s speech throughout the story. This is the first reference to any kind of speech in the narrative, but ironically, the man *never* actually speaks to the woman at her father’s house.

In fact, the main character’s general mode of speech is quite telling. He more often responds to others’ speech rather than initiate speech. The woman’s father speaks first in the narrative, addresses the man, and pleads four successive times to the man to linger at his home.¹²⁸ The narrator never supplies the son-in-law’s verbal response to or conversations with his father-in-law. In the next scene, the narrator again provides the words of someone else (i.e. the Levite man’s male servant) before the storyteller even

¹²⁵ Fabry, *TDOT* 7:417.

¹²⁶ See Lapsley, *Whispering*, 38.

¹²⁷ Boling, *Judges*, 274.

¹²⁸ Lapsley points out that the father’s hospitable words: “strengthen your heart,” a phrase that implies eating something in order to regain strength, serves to reintroduce the word “heart” to the story. The term is a reminder of the Levite’s original, but forgotten, intentions for coming (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 39). More “heart” language is utilized in v.22, again emphasizing that the Levite has forgotten and abandoned his original mission (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 45).

introduces the main male character's voice. After the scene with his servant outside of Jebus, this man's mode of speaking continues at the open plaza in Gibeah. As in the other scenes, the old man in Gibeah begins (and ends) the conversation he has with the traveling Levite man. In these ways, the reader begins to wonder about this man's integrity and status as he continuously and passively permits others to speak before him. He does not speak to the woman's heart, like he sets off to do, and the narrator does not have the man proactively make decisions and initiate speech. Rather, he waits for others, including his servant, to speak before he does. It therefore appears that the man tends to react to others, especially in speech, rather than instigate discourse.

These early conversations in the narrative might illuminate another pattern of the Levite's speech and ways in which he interacts with others. Both the woman's father in vv. 6 and 9 and the man's servant in v. 11 make requests of the Levite. They both add *nā'*, a particle of entreaty or exhortation often translated as "please," to their requests before the Levite. Although the old man in the plaza does not give an explicit "please," his words to the Levite take the form of a fervent request. He says, "Peace to you. All that you lack is upon me – just do not stay the night in the open plaza." The Levite's mode of speech lacks such courtesy. He never initiates a polite request to another character, and he certainly does not use "please."

This evidence, that the man does not speak to the woman's heart, that the man tends to react to rather than initiate speech, and that other characters make polite requests but the Levite man does not, brings into sharp focus the man's insensitive last words in the narrative. Only once does this man speak before he is spoken to, and only once at this same point does he finally speak to the woman. Again, he makes no polite request. When he finds

his beaten *pîlegeš* on the doorstep, he orders, “Up! We must go.” The quality and duration of his speech toward his *pîlegeš* is also different from how he speaks to men. When he responds to both his servant and the old man in the city, his words are extensive and explanatory. Now his words are terse and forceful, even verging on abusive.

The man engages in dialogue with and responds to other men; he orders the woman. The reader might wonder if this is the ultimately degraded farce of the man’s original intentions. Is *this* how he attempts to speak to her heart? Notably, these verbs (*qûmî wěñēlēkâ*) coincide with an idiomatic expression that frequently describes the man’s actions throughout the narrative. The man often “arises to go” somewhere (vv. 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 27). The man’s other actions involve sojourning, traveling, and lodging, as well as eating and drinking. But the phrase that seems to characterize this man is that he repeatedly “gets up to go.” When he initially leaves to speak to the heart of his wife at her father’s house, “he arose and went after her to speak to her heart.” The frequent use of this idiom in the narrative and then its reference through the only words to his wife in the form of forceful imperatives harkens back to the failure of his initial intentions. This man’s original intentions poignantly lack fulfillment through the employment of these useless commands. Not only is the repetition of the verbs a reminder of the man’s original and failed plan, but also this tragic scene points to his utter failure as a compassionate husband.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Lapsley remarks on the same verbs used in vv 3 and 10, but she doesn’t add a connection to v.28. She claims that when he “arose and went” with his saddled donkeys and his wife in v.10, this demonstrates the failure of his self-appointed task from v.3 (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 41). The final repetition in v.28 highlights his ultimate failure to reach his wife in a kind, humane, and rational way.

3. Action

The man's lofty intentions in his speech at the beginning of the narrative are found wanting by the end of the story, creating a complicated character who remains vulnerable to scrutiny.¹³⁰ His actions and speech, especially at the chapter's end, similarly point to the narrator's ambivalent portrayal of this character and the scene in Gibeah. The narrative is not clear regarding who actually seizes the *pîlegeš* and sends her out to the mob. Similarly, it is not clear if (1) the narrator's implicit evaluation accepts the violence against the woman because it would be worse for this violence to happen to a man or (2) the narrator continues an implicit evaluative agenda denoting outrage at the "state of things" and that so many men (i.e. the host, the husband, and the Gibeah mob) could act so violently toward a woman. In the end, the main male character's culpability for the violence against the woman remains uncertain.

When the evil men of the city come to his door, the old man urges them, "do not do this evil/sacrilegious thing" to his houseguest (v. 24), and the old man offers his daughter and the visiting man's *pîlegeš* as possible alternatives. The next verse states, "But the men were not willing to listen to him. The man seized his *pîlegeš*" (19:25). Which of the characters is "the man" who grabs the woman and puts her outside? Reinhartz comments on how this is a case in which it is sometimes hard to distinguish one unnamed character from another.¹³¹ Often, the host in Gibeah receives some sort of qualifier. He is the old man or elder (vv. 16, 17, 20, 22), and he is also "the man" qualified with "the owner of the

¹³⁰ Moore denies that the author brings condemnation to the Levite. Regarding his words in v. 28, it might be true that the man's speech gives the impression of brutality, but the author had no such intention (Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 419). He cites Josephus who "puts the best face on the matter" and claims that the Levite "supposed that the woman was only fast asleep" (419 and Josephus, *Ant.* 5.136).

¹³¹ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 144.

house” (vv. 22, 23). But this is not consistent. The narrator does refer to this host as simply “the man” in v. 16, and masculine pronouns get deployed without clearly designating the characters. With the generic use of “the man” and other gendered pronouns, it would seem that it is the host who had just spoken and was ignored by the mob. So he takes the woman out.

However, the two phrases might reflect a change of acting subject and refer to each of the men in the house, “But the men were not willing to listen to him. The man seized his *pîlegeš*...” The former phrase refers to the man of the house, as he was speaking and was ignored by the men of the city. Regarding “the man” in the second phrase, the grammatical antecedent for *his pîlegeš* should refer to the Levite. The narrator has repeatedly used “the man” to refer to the narrative’s main male character.

Boling argues that it is the main character (the Levite) who seizes his own concubine, but he does recognize the ambiguity in the verse.¹³² Boling similarly makes the observation that other male protagonists in the story receive some sort of title (e.g. father-in-law, old man, or owner of the house).¹³³ Niditch indicts the narrative’s main male character, and claims that he acts only with self-interest when he swiftly and harshly gives up the woman.¹³⁴ The narrator’s ambiguity about which man actually seizes the woman again raises suspicion about the Levite’s care and concern for his wife. Also, the narrator’s ambiguity unites the two men, the Levite and the host, in some responsibility for the violence she experiences outside of the house.¹³⁵

¹³² Boling, *Judges*, 276.

¹³³ Boling, *Judges*, 276.

¹³⁴ Niditch, “Sodomite,” 370.

¹³⁵ Reinhartz makes a similar observation that the Levite and the host are united in their indifference toward the woman and are linked to the mob, especially as they acquiesce to her rape and fail to step in and save her (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 145).

The narrator's evaluation of this action, regardless of which man seizes the woman and sends her to the mob, is not clear. Without explicit editorial comments, perhaps the narrator has decided that no matter who acts, the action itself is acceptable. Moore argues that it is the Levite who seizes the woman and gives her up to save himself. But Moore continues to deny that the author intends to condemn the Levite in any way. He claims, "To us this seems quite as bad as the conduct of the mob in the street; but nothing indicates that the author felt that it merited condemnation or contempt."¹³⁶ There are other instances in the Hebrew Bible where a patriarch surrenders a wife out of fear of harm to himself.¹³⁷ The old man suggests that they take his daughter or the Levite's *pîlegeš*. This proposal insinuates that the act is somehow less offensive when committed against a woman.¹³⁸ The narrator seems to be in line with the old man's evaluation of the situation and gives no explicit indictment of either the host or the husband.

Josephus paints the man of the house as exceedingly hospitable as he doesn't want his guests abused. He offers his daughter to the men outside because "it was a smaller breach of the law to satisfy their lust on her."¹³⁹ Josephus's account makes the men's object of desire completely clear. Having seen her in the market-place and admired her beauty, the men of Gibeah desire the Levite's wife from the very beginning.¹⁴⁰ And rather than the man sending the woman out to the mob, Josephus says that the men of the city take her by

¹³⁶ Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 418.

¹³⁷ Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 418.

¹³⁸ In this scene, the two men are in a terrible predicament (Eynikel, "Appendix," 103). See also Ken Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?" *JSOT* 67 [1995]: 87-107. Actually, all rape would be considered unacceptable. Consider the stories of Dinah and Tamar. But for more on the particularly offensive nature of rape of a man in this context, see Niditch, "Sodomite," 368-369. She argues that homosexual rape threatens Israelite's ordered society and proper family-concepts, including the larger community of Israelites (Niditch, "Sodomite," 369).

¹³⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 5.136.

¹⁴⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 5.136.

force. Thus, both the Levite and the host remain completely honorable in Josephus's account. Women remain objects of lust, and hospitality to a stranger usurps protection of one's own daughter.

However, there is *some* indication that the narrator views this scene, and not just the demands of the mob but also the actual rape of the woman, as outrageous. The violence that the men enact against the woman *is* evil. The narrator's vision intentionally dwells on the violence and supplies the three successive actions against the woman: "they *knew her* and they *dealt with her wantonly* all night until the morning. And they *cast her out*" (v. 25). With these three verbs, the narrator articulates at least a degree of disagreement both with the old man's suggestion to take the women and with the action of "the man" to seize the *pîlegeš*.¹⁴¹ Had the narrator quickly passed over the violence against the woman, one might assume that the narrator's perspective both coincides with the men who operate out of self preservation and supports the societal standard that rape of man is worse than rape of woman. But because the narrator dwells on the atrocious violence against the woman, the reader can recognize the differences in evaluative vision between the narrator and the male protagonists.¹⁴² The narrator has the vantage point of witnessing the violence, while the men remain safely at home. With the representation of the violence, the narrator

¹⁴¹ Klein similarly argues that at this point, "the narrator is no longer objective" (Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* [Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988], 170). We receive the narrative attitude in the narration through the verbs, "knew her, abused her, and sent her away" and this central verb, "abused," is telling (170). The first two verbs can also be read as a hendiadys, and thus read "they abused her sexually." Either way, the narrator accentuates atrociousness of the violence against the woman.

¹⁴² The passage that "uses a string of short, simple sentences" is "startlingly powerful by understatement" (Satterthwait, "No King," 83).

implicitly suggests that it is not acceptable for women, or anyone, to be a recipient of this kind of violence.¹⁴³

Lapsley rightly asserts that the narrative perspective on the ensuing scene is ambiguous, and “The culture may well prefer to sacrifice women instead of men in extreme situations of this kind, but that does not mean that the narrator allows this perspective to pass un-criticized.”¹⁴⁴ Not only is it unclear if he is the man who seizes her and gives her to the mob, it is also unclear how he contributes to her ultimate demise. Is she dead when he finds her on the threshold?¹⁴⁵ Does he kill her with his knife when he divides her into pieces? It seems that he could be guilty of indifference and even callousness, but is he guilty of murder?¹⁴⁶ Both Lasine and Bohmbach argue that the narrator is being deliberately vague about whether she is dead.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Olson claims, “the reader is left wondering.”¹⁴⁸ In this way, the narrator manipulates the feelings of the reader, who

¹⁴³ While the narrator does tell what happens to the woman, Bohmbach argues that the rape is not actually narrated (Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 86). Clearly, at this point in the narrative, the reader does not witness the events from her perspective. While we knew in the beginning of the tale that she traveled back to her own home, perhaps because she was angry, now we know nothing about the woman’s thoughts and feelings.

¹⁴⁴ Lapsley, *Whispering*, 45-46.

¹⁴⁵ Scholars have taken notice. Lasine uses Polzin, who claims “there is little doubt that the reader is meant to conclude that the concubine was dead” (Lasine, “Guest,” 45). Boling’s translation follows the LXX, adds “for she was dead” after “there was no answer,” and claims that this phrase was “lost through haplography due to homoioteleuton in MT” (Boling, *Judges*, 273 and 276). Vat reads “and she did not answer because she was dead,” and OL reads, “she did not hear him but she was dead,” making the woman’s condition more explicit (Niditch, “Judges,” 190). Niditch argues that the MT is more powerful in its implicitness and brevity (190). Mieke Bal claims that Peggy Kamuf relies too much on the “doxa” of the story, i.e. that it is generally assumed that the Levite found her “dead.” But the text does not say this, and such a translation “writes the woman to a premature death” and commits a crime against the woman (Bal, “Body,” 116). See Peggy Kamuf, “Author of a Crime,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 189-203. In fact, we don’t really know when she dies. “She dies several times – or rather, she never stops dying” (Bal, “Body,” 120). See also Lapsley, *Whispering*, 49. It’s worth noting here, as will also be discussed in another chapter, that the depiction and repetition of Sisera’s death also has him dying several times.

¹⁴⁶ When the man recounts his experience in Gibeah in chapter 20, he fails to include how the woman fell into the hands of the violent group of men. He also doesn’t explain how or when she died (Judges 20:5). His testimony successfully leaves out any evidence that could incriminate himself of being guilty of violence toward her. However, he does admit to an act of violence to her lifeless body.

¹⁴⁷ Lasine, “Guest,” 45 and Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 95. See also Exum, *Fragmented*, 180.

¹⁴⁸ Olson, *NIB* 2:877.

experiences horror if she is *not* dead, and outrage if she is. Following these scholars, I argue that this scene is another instance of apparent (and perhaps necessary) ambiguity within the narrative, with the intent of raising questions about the main male protagonist's actions and character.¹⁴⁹

He is designated a man and a Levite, a husband turned master, and a son-in-law negotiating through a complicated family situation. His failed intentions to woo his wife evolves into his reactionary and insensitive speech patterns. And the narrator hints at implicit indictments against this man for maltreatment of his wife. The narrator's ambivalent, and arguably negative, perspective on this man coincides with a general sense that the entire community is in a bad situation. Proper codes of hospitality and familial obligations and relationships seem to be vulnerable and under attack at this time. There is clear corruption of the times when men try to rape men *and* when husbands permit and even perpetuate violence against their wives.¹⁵⁰

C. The Woman

Much like the main male character in this story, the narrator applies multiple designations to the anonymous woman. Like those attached to the man, these identifiers reiterate the narrative focus on familial issues, placing her within a family system and in relationship to the male characters in the narrative. These identifiers not only reference

¹⁴⁹ Lasine points out that surprisingly, until recently, most scholars have assumed that the author does not condemn the Levite, and that while we as modern readers are offended, an ancient audience would not have been offended by his actions (Lasine, "Guest," 38). I agree with Lasine's argument that such a view is a misunderstanding of the story as it is told in the text and that the narrator *does*, at least to some extent, condemn the Levite.

¹⁵⁰ The attempted rape of the men also reflects the depravity of the times, and according to Exum, serves to deflect attention away from the woman as the object of violence (Exum, *Fragmented*, 182). In this way, the concerns of the scene do not have to do with the woman, but about hospitality and codes of behavior (182).

her gender but also her status.¹⁵¹ Her action and speech, or lack thereof, show that she is both a subject on her own accord and an object for men's use. The narrator portrays her in ambivalent ways, at times sympathizing with her and at other times, supplying implicit critique in regards to her actions. She acts, but she is also acted upon. And while the narrator denies her speech, the woman's body provides powerful messages.

1. Identifiers

Most often, the narrative identifies the woman as a *pîlegeš* (vv. 1, 2, 9, 10, 24, 25, 27 and 29) and indicates her relationship to the main male character in the narrative. During the scene at her father's house, she is a *na'ārâ* (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9), and this designation pinpoints her relationship to her father. One time, the man calls her "a maidservant" (*'āmâ*) when he tries to persuade the man in Gibeah to shelter his traveling group (v. 19). This particular term evokes a sense of social status wherein the inferior woman is compared to her husband as superior. The term designates her connection with this Levite. Three times the narrative identifies her as *'iššâ*. Two out of these three instances make explicit reference to her relationship to her husband. Verse 1 supplies, "And he took for himself a wife (*'iššâ*), a *pîlegeš*." Later in v. 27, *'iššâ* can be translated "the woman," but it is immediately qualified with "his *pîlegeš*." Only in v. 26, when the woman acts by herself and on her own accord, does the narrative refrain from qualifying her identity by way of referencing the relationship she has with the male character. Thus, in contrast to the many instances when the narrative refers to the main male character as "the man," only in v. 26 is she simply and solely "the woman" (*hā'iššâ*). The woman's three most frequently used

¹⁵¹ Lanoir makes the same observation in relation to the woman's anonymity. From the outset, the woman is deprived of a name and she is defined by two characteristics: her gender and her social status (Lanoir, *Femmes Fatales*, 184).

identifiers, *pîlegeš*, *na'ârâ* and *'iššâ*, bring awareness to the complicated status of this woman and how the text focuses on her relationships with the men in her life.

a. pîlegeš

All but one usage of *pîlegeš* in the book of Judges references this woman in chapter 19.¹⁵² This term is her primary identifier, as the text utilizes this term more frequently than any other designation. This term is most often translated as “concubine.” Such a term implies a slave-master relationship that may or may not be within the confines of some kind of marriage. Thus, “concubine” is not a plausible translation, especially as the narrative in Judges 19 *does* employ terms related to family law and references the woman’s marital status through the usage of “took a wife,” “her husband,” “father-in-law,” and “son-in-law.”¹⁵³ As Moore points out, “Concubinage with a free woman is a species of marriage, and brings the man into the same kind of relation to the woman’s family as ordinary marriage.”¹⁵⁴ However, there are other instances in the narrative in which the man treats this woman as no more than a servant or sexual object. Because of the complexity implicit in this Hebrew term, I will continue to utilize the transliterated *pîlegeš* rather than “concubine.” When other scholars use “concubine,” I will assume that they refer to the Hebrew *pîlegeš*.

Two consistent usages of *pîlegeš* appear in the biblical text: a *pîlegeš* is used in reference to bearing sons and as a category of marital status that is different but related to being a wife. Seeking a *pîlegeš* is likely prompted by a desire for many descendants, and

¹⁵² The one exception happens in Gideon’s story, as mentioned above.

¹⁵³ Similar observations are made by Fewell, “Judges,” 81 and Samuel Greengus, *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011), 23.

¹⁵⁴ Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 410.

“this appears to be the most important point the OT authors wanted to make.”¹⁵⁵ The central role for a *pîlegeš*, namely to bear sons, consistently appears throughout Genesis (e.g. Jacob and his wives and Sarah and Hagar). Sometimes the sons of the wives are listed separately from the sons of the concubines (1 Chr 3:9 and 1 Chr 7:14).

Often this category of a woman appears alongside the term *’iššâ* (wife) (2 Sam 19:5, 2 Chr 11:21). David had both (2 Sam 5:13). Solomon’s 700 wives and 300 *pîlegeš* (1 Kings 11:3) had a negative influence on him and “turned away his heart.” Similar to *’iššâ*, the biblical text lists a *pîlegeš* in a separate category from queens or damsels in Song of Solomon 6:8-9.

Because of the consistent mention of wives *and* concubines (*’iššâ* and *pîlegeš*), the biblical text implies relatedness but also differences between the two. There is evidence of one or two primary wives and other women (again, Sarah and Hagar and Jacob’s wives and their maidservants).¹⁵⁶ Such observations suggest that a woman designated as a *pîlegeš* likely has a lower status than that of a primary wife.¹⁵⁷ Differences in the status and advantages of various wives/women appear in Middle Assyrian Laws. A distinction is made between a concubine and first or second wives, and this has implications for a concubine’s sons:

If a seignior wishes to veil his concubine, he shall have five (or) six of his neighbors present (and) veil her in their presence (and) say, “She is my wife,” (and so) she becomes his wife. A concubine who was not veiled in the presence of the men, whose

¹⁵⁵ K. Engleken, “*pîlegeš*,” *TDOT* 11:549-551.

¹⁵⁶ Klein makes a similar observation and argues that often a *pîlegeš* denotes a slave girl of a wife who cannot conceive and is given to the husband in order to produce descendants (Klein, *Irony*, 162).

¹⁵⁷ Engleken, *TDOT* 11:550. Perhaps she has a lower status than that of a primary wife, but she is still legally recognized as a wife. There is some discrepancy amongst scholars about this woman’s rank. Lanoir follows Exum and claims, “Il pourrait designer l’état d’une femme légalement mariée mais de second rang” (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 183 and Exum “Fragmented,” 177). Cf. Engleken who argues that lacking the legal protection that a wife enjoys, a *pîlegeš* is vulnerable to the impulses of her husband and possibly his primary wife (Engleken, *TDOT* 11:550).

husband did not say, “She is my wife,” is not a wife; she is still a concubine. If a seignior died (and) his veiled wife has no sons, the sons by concubines become (legitimate) sons; they shall receive a share (of the estate).¹⁵⁸

The law infers that a concubine’s sons are not initially legitimate. They would not inherit from their father unless he had formally raised her status to that of a full wife.¹⁵⁹ The exception is if the father had no other sons born to him by his ranking wives.¹⁶⁰

Even though progeny is often desired from a *pîlegeš*, Abimelech’s story in Judges demonstrates patriarchal ambivalence about the sons of a *pîlegeš*. Gideon had 70 sons from many wives, but Abimelech, the one son from his single *pîlegeš* in Shechem, causes numerous problems for the other sons (8:31). Abimelech convinces his mother’s kinsman to follow him (9:1-3), usurps power from his brothers and kills them (9:5), and becomes king (9:6). Jotham, the one surviving son of Gideon, indicts the people of Shechem and Abimelech’s mother’s kin for rising up against his father, murdering Gideon’s sons, and appointing Abimelech king. Abimelech rules over Israel for three years (9:22), and suffers defeat and death (9:53-54).¹⁶¹

From the list of occurrences of *pîlegeš* in the Hebrew Bible and the evidence of laws in Ancient Southwest Asia, we might understand that the *pîlegeš* in our story of Judges 19 bears a status related to, but not exactly analogous to, that of a wife. Similarly, she might be valuable to this man because of her potential to bear children. However, the text makes no mention of any sons. Neither does the text mention a first or primary wife of the Levite, or any other wives for that matter. Thus, perhaps the text reiterates this aspect of the

¹⁵⁸ A41 of the Middle Assyrian Laws (see James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [2d ed.; corr. and enl. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955], 183).

¹⁵⁹ Greengus, *Laws*, 23.

¹⁶⁰ Greengus, *Laws*, 23.

¹⁶¹ Lanoir argues that the situation of the Levite’s *pîlegeš* seems very different than that of Gideon’s (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 182).

woman's identity for slightly different purposes. It is likely that the usage of *pîlegeš* in Judges 19 highlights this woman's ambiguous marital and social status and her ongoing relationships with both her father and her husband.¹⁶² This equivocal status and relationship with her husband creates the opportunity for implicit narrative critique of the story's main characters.

As a *pîlegeš*, the woman in Judges 19 exists somewhere between the social status of a full/first wife and a servant or sexual object.¹⁶³ Normally, a *pîlegeš* would be like a secondary wife. But Klein speculates that the Levite probably bought the woman for sex or work and couldn't afford the typical price of a wife.¹⁶⁴ Thus, her status throughout the narrative remains questionable. She is treated like both a wife and a slave, and the text employs terminology that indicates her status as both. When the man travels to her father's house to speak to her heart, the man seeks to treat the woman like a wife, and the legal marriage terminology also leads to the conclusion that she is at least like a wife. However, at other times in the narrative, the woman becomes equated with the man's servant and donkeys (vv. 10 and 19). Also, because the text refers to the man as the "husband" and the "master" of the woman, the text emphasizes a complicated marriage relationship that contains slave/master resonances.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² See also Jost's section "Die Frauen: die Nebenfrau und die Tochter" (Renate Jost, *Gender, Sexualität, und Macht in der Anthropologie des Richterbuches* (BWANT 9; Folge, Heft 4; Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2006), 295-303).

¹⁶³ See also Lapsley, *Whispering*, 37. Reinhartz similarly claims that she is a wife who is of servant status. Her designation of *pîlegeš* places her under the Levite's authority, but in some sense, her status falls short of the typified role of wife (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 123). Jost lists a number of scholars (Levinen 1983, Hertzberg 1953, Jüngling 1981) who point to the wealth of the Levite and the woman as an indicator of whether she is a wife or not. Perhaps he is not rich enough to have a wife, or perhaps she is too poor to bring a dowry (Jost, *Gender*, 301).

¹⁶⁴ Klein, *Irony*, 162. She adds that he ignores her in every way except as a sexual object (163).

¹⁶⁵ See also Raphael Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and Middle East* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 43. Patai argues that a concubine could be considered a slave girl and taken for the purpose of sexual gratification (Patai, *Sex*, 41).

Not only does the text raise questions about the woman's social status through the use of *pīlegeš*, it also raises questions about the woman's marital status. The lengthy stay and the interactions between the father and husband indicate that the marriage is still under negotiation. For whatever reason, the woman leaves her husband, returns to her father, and her husband still wants her back. When he arrives at his father-in-law's house, the Levite does not take her back outright. The text assumes that the father may decide *not* to release her. Thus, the text raises questions about under whose authority she falls.

Narrative critique of this marital situation could be implicit in this designation of the woman. *Pīlegeš* yields negative associations when paired with other terms. The linkage of *pīlegeš* with *wattizneh* ("she prostituted") early in the narrative encourages the popular identification of a concubine with a prostitute.¹⁶⁶ Reinhartz makes the point that the text not only contains indistinctness in her marital status, but also uncertainty in her moral status.¹⁶⁷ The combination of these terms also has implications for the narrative evaluation of her later in the story. These two terms have the effect of making her rape read less sympathetically than the rape of a lawful wife.¹⁶⁸ Thus, *pīlegeš* not only raises questions about this woman's social and marital status, it also insinuates a negative narrative evaluation of this character.

b. na'ārâ

Typically, a *na'ārâ* is a "marriageable girl or young woman."¹⁶⁹ The term refers to youth and is often contrasted with either those who are elders or those who are in

¹⁶⁶ However, "prostitution" is neither the appropriate nor the straightforward understanding of the text's use of *wattizneh*, and this will be discussed shortly.

¹⁶⁷ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 123.

¹⁶⁸ Exum, *Fragmented*, 177.

¹⁶⁹ H. F. Fuhs, "*na'ārâ*." *TDOT* 9:474-485.

authoritative roles.¹⁷⁰ The *na'ărâ* is typically in a dependent or servile relationship.¹⁷¹ The designation of the woman as a *na'ărâ* occurs 6 times in Judges 19.¹⁷² Importantly, *na'ărâ* is used less to describe the woman and more to identify her father. In all instances of *na'ărâ* (19:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9), it is used in construct, forming a genitive relationship. *Hanna'ărâ* occurs in all verses, is a definite noun, and supplies the phrase, “the father of the girl” or “the girl’s father.” The same form of the noun, and in fact the same phrase, is used in Deut 22:19, wherein “the girl’s father” receives recompense for the slander of his daughter. Boaz asks of Ruth, “Whose girl is that?” in Ruth 2:5. In both of these instances, the passages indicate that these young women are connected to, even belong to, fathers or other guardians. And in all of these instances, the girl is not the significant subject, but instead the father or man is the focus.

Therefore, *na'ărâ* also points to a complicated marital and familial status for the young woman in Judges 19. “A married woman can be called a *na'ărâ* when the text addresses her continuing relationship with her former family or her father even after marriage.”¹⁷³ She literally exists between two men.¹⁷⁴ This creates a degree of complexity for the Levite and the father of the girl.

c. 'iššâ

The use of woman/*'iššâ* in vv. 26-27 has multiple possible effects. In v.26, the narrative now identifies the woman without reference to the men who have power over her. Lapsley argues that now the woman has more substance, is more of her own person,

¹⁷⁰ Fuhs, *TDOT* 9:480.

¹⁷¹ Fuhs, *TDOT* 9:480.

¹⁷² The only other time this term occurs in Judges is once in 21:12 in reference to the 400 women in Jabesh-Gilead. In this case, *na'ărâ* is followed by *bêtûlâ* and indicates young women who have not yet given birth.

¹⁷³ Fuhs, *TDOT* 9:483.

¹⁷⁴ See especially Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 190.

and is more of a subject at the end of her life.¹⁷⁵ The woman makes her move and her point on the threshold. But without reference to the men in her life, the woman is also more vulnerable and isolated; her male relatives have abandoned her.¹⁷⁶ Lapsley fails to note that v. 27 once again adds the qualifier “his *pîlegeš*” to her reference as “the woman.” The woman returns to being identified with her husband. Only for a brief instance does she exist in the narrative as her own autonomous person. Thus, this term accentuates both her subjectivity and vulnerability, her posturing of power and her inevitable lack of power, and finally, her inextricable connection to the men in her life.

2. A Subject Who Acts and a Body Acted Upon

As a character and subject, the *pîlegeš* possesses memorable, albeit few, actions. She only generates 6 action verbs (3 in v. 2, 1 in v. 3, and 2 in v. 26). She has four actions in the beginning of the narrative. She “prostituted herself against him,” went from her husband, and was at her father’s house for four months (v. 2). Then, when her husband shows up, “she led him in to the house of her father” (v. 3).¹⁷⁷ At the end of the story, the woman “went by herself” and “fell at the entrance of the house of the man where her master was.” In all circumstances, the woman takes initiative and works alone.

Notably, not only does she act independently and take her own initiative, the woman’s actions often initiate the main actions in the narrative.¹⁷⁸ Although other male characters in the narrative complete more action in the story than does the *pîlegeš*, the

¹⁷⁵ Lapsley, *Whispering*, 46-47.

¹⁷⁶ Lapsley, *Whispering*, 46.

¹⁷⁷ Lapsley also notes that she is ascribed agency when she brings her husband into her father’s house (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 38). Bohmbach comments on the difference between the LXX, “when he reached her father’s house” and the MT, “she brought him in to her father’s house.” The MT ascribes her some subjectivity as she steps out to greet Levite and brings together the two men, and this narrative version implicitly affirms her initiative when her father greets the Levite with joy (Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 92).

¹⁷⁸ See Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 89 and 91.

narrative's major movements occur when her actions set in motion her husband's reaction. The woman's departure from her master prompts his quest to retrieve her. The woman's act of moving to the threshold so that her master would find her prompts his final actions and the bloody message he sends across the land. The woman's first and final actions deserve special focus, point to the narrator's evaluation of the main characters, and demonstrate the woman's subjectivity. The woman on the threshold becomes both a testament to her subjectivity and a reminder that she remains an object upon which others act.

a. wattizneh

After introducing the man and his wife, verse 2 begins with "his *pîlegeš* became a prostitute against him/became angry with him" (*wattizneh 'ālāyw pîlagšô*). There is much scholarly debate regarding the implications of this verbal term. These disputes focus on whether this is even the correct term and to what extent the term indicates the woman's sexual promiscuity.¹⁷⁹ The root *znh* in Hebrew occurs with the same meaning in other Aramaic dialects, Arabic and Ethiopic and means "fornicate, be a prostitute."¹⁸⁰ But the translation is not straightforward.

A number of scholars point out that the Greek text supplies "she became angry with him," and this should be preferred because usually *znh* does not take the preposition *'āl*. Driver associates the Akkadian *zenû*, which means "to be angry, to hate," with *zānāh* in Judges 19:2.¹⁸¹ He claims that semantic development created a change from hate to

¹⁷⁹ Scholars disagree about the content of her actions and even the proper verb for the passage (see Olson, *NIB* 2:876 and Niditch, *Judges*, 189). Moore claims that the "text is suspicious" (Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 409).

¹⁸⁰ S. Erlandson, "zānāh," *TDOT* 4:99-104.

¹⁸¹ Erlandson, *TDOT* 4:99.

“become apostate or faithless,” which could have evolved into the prostitute language.¹⁸² But this development might be unlikely since *zenû* is more likely related to *zānaḥ* than *zānāh*.¹⁸³ Moore says that nowhere else is *zānāh* construed with *‘āl*, and so he follows the Greek text.¹⁸⁴ Boling, for similar reasons, follows the Greek text, and in this case, supplies “she became angry with him” instead of “she became a prostitute against him.”¹⁸⁵

Josephus depicts a picture wherein the man is exceedingly fond of his wife, but she does not return the affection. He was:

Overcome with her beauty; but he was unhappy in this, that he did not meet with the like return of affection from her, for she was averse to him, which did more inflame his passion for her, so that they quarreled one with another perpetually; and at last the woman was so disgusted at these quarrels, that she left her husband, and went to her parents in the fourth month.¹⁸⁶

In this scenario, the woman’s anger or hatred for the man prompts her departure.

Moore’s commentary claims that the rest of the story does not imply that the woman was the offender, hence “she despised/spurned him,” and he went to her father’s house to speak to her heart.¹⁸⁷ Niditch and Bohmbach also argue that the Greek “she became angry” should be preferred to the Hebrew “played the harlot.”¹⁸⁸ The charge of prostitution is improbable. It would be odd for her to become a prostitute and then run home to her father.¹⁸⁹ And Bohmbach questions why the father would accept her back and

¹⁸² Erlandson, *TDOT* 4:99.

¹⁸³ Erlandson, *TDOT* 4:99.

¹⁸⁴ G.F. Moore, *The Book of Judges: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1900), 64.

¹⁸⁵ Boling, *Judges*, 271.

¹⁸⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 5.136

¹⁸⁷ Moore, *Critical Edition*, 64.

¹⁸⁸ Niditch, “Sodomite,” 366 and Bohmbach, “Conventions,” 90.

¹⁸⁹ Boling, *Judges*, 273-4.

why the Levite would seek her out if she had prostituted herself or been adulterous without the men's consent.¹⁹⁰

Contrary to this, some scholars argue that the text should be read *with* the prostitution terminology, but that the narrative denotes a form of metaphorical promiscuity rather than actual adultery. The phrase in v. 2 that immediately follows states that "she went from him to the house of her father to Bethlehem in Judah." This emphasis on going to her father's house, denotes a kind of infidelity. However, this kind of infidelity to her husband need not imply an actual sexual betrayal by the woman. Women who dare leave their husbands could be considered guilty of immoral behavior.¹⁹¹ Following this argument, Lapsley links the prostitution phrase and the going to her father's house, and follows the MT. She utilizes the root *znh*, but claims that it is a metaphoric act of fornication and uses "she deserted him."¹⁹² Also focusing on the semantic link between her leaving and prostituting herself, Eynikel argues that the meaning and new term in the MT developed from the Greek.¹⁹³ In other words, the Levite went to his wife to reassure her because *she was angry* with him. But because she left, the Hebrew text indicts her. If she is leaving, she must be guilty, so "was angry" was changed to "fornicated."¹⁹⁴ The verb *zānāh* becomes a pejorative expression for and negative value judgment on women who leave their husbands.¹⁹⁵ In this way, the MT must be interpretive, and the woman committed adultery

¹⁹⁰ Bohmbach, "Conventions," 90.

¹⁹¹ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 123.

¹⁹² Lapsley, *Whispering*, 38. See also Niditch, *Judges*, 191. Also, Stone claims that *zānāh* could actually be preserving the Greek text. "Sexual infidelity and a more general initiative on the part of the woman to remove herself from her husband's domain may be close enough, in terms of their impact upon the male subject, to fall within the same realm of meaning" (Stone, "Gender," 178-80).

¹⁹³ Eynikel, "Appendix," 104.

¹⁹⁴ Eynikel, "Appendix," 104. Cf. Bal, *Death*, 86-88.

¹⁹⁵ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 123. Boling argues that the MT must be interpretive, and the woman committed adultery simply by walking out on the man (Boling, *Judges*, 274).

simply by walking out on the man.¹⁹⁶ The action gives her the negative assessment of an “outsider by sexuality” because she dared to assert ownership over her body and thus commits an offense against the patriarchal system.¹⁹⁷

All of these scholars address the difference between the Greek and MT, raise questions about why she left and evaluate her actions. Was she angry because she was the offended party? Or because she left, and either literally or metaphorically prostituted herself, was her husband the offended party? Or perhaps, both were offended in sequence. She was offended, became angry, left, and by leaving, she offended her husband. The text remains unclear about the exact circumstances and motivations. Cheng comments on this as being one of the obvious circumstances of the multiple kinds of silencing within the narrative; we don’t get the whole picture and we don’t know why she leaves her husband.¹⁹⁸

The questionable term and the discrepancy between the Greek and MT generate cloudiness in the scene and suggests that both the woman and the man are victims and both are at fault.¹⁹⁹ The preferred translation of *wattizneh* in 19:2 should be “she was angry with,” but the interpretation must maintain the uncertainty surrounding the circumstances and emphasize her leaving for her father’s house. Thus, it is my contention that the woman is not guilty of any sexual promiscuity, that the Hebrew term *wattizneh* should be read in the context of her leaving the husband for her father’s house, and that the narrator supplies implicit critique of her actions.

¹⁹⁶ Boling, *Judges*, 274.

¹⁹⁷ Cheng, “Multiplicity,” 121. Exum claims that she eventually gets narrative punishment in the form of gang rape because of her claim of sexual autonomy (Exum, *Fragmented*, 179 and 200).

¹⁹⁸ Cheng, “Multiplicity,” 124.

¹⁹⁹ See Lapsley, *Whispering*, 38.

Leaving for her father's house testifies to a recurring theme in Judges regarding multiple family loyalties and tensions within familial relations. A study of how the narrator of Judges utilizes the verb *zānāh* throughout Judges provides some helpful perspective on what might really be at stake. The idiom that uses the Hebrew root (*znh*), as it appears in Judges, often focuses on "whoring" after other gods (2:17). Gideon makes gold into an ephod, and the people "whored after" it (8:27). In the same way, the Israelites whored after the Baals (8:33). Two prostitutes receive mention in the book of Judges: Jephthah's mother in 11:1 and the woman with whom Samson has a brief encounter in 16:1. In the case of Jephthah's mother, I will soon discuss how the outsider status complicates typical familial inheritance practices. The episode with Samson's prostitute occurs between the stories of the two main women in his life, and the Samson narrative emphasizes the identity of all of these women by way of their questionable relationship to the Israelites, outsider status and/or alliances with Israel's enemies. So, even if *wattizneh 'al* should be read "she got angry with," the semantic development and phrase about going to her father's house provides a link to the more common emphasis in Judges on infidelity because of complex loyalties to different family members or groups. The point remains that she leaves and goes to her father's house, even if she is offended and angry.²⁰⁰ And by doing so, the narrator presents the woman's act of going to her father's house (warranted or not) as a transgression of society's assumed familial and marital arrangements with her husband.

²⁰⁰ See David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 133. See also Tribble who remarks that even when ancient manuscripts disagree on the term, they all agree that she left (Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], 67). See also Exum, *Fragmented*, 178.

b. On the threshold

The woman's last poignant action occurs at the threshold of the host's house in v. 26. The text provides, "The woman went by herself in the morning. And she fell at the entrance of the house of the man where her master was until it was light." Instead of making movements away from her husband, now the woman intentionally moves back toward him. And the text is not clear *why* she makes this movement. Perhaps she returns to the only place available to her for security. Perhaps she makes her final movements as an indictment against her husband and host, as will be discussed in the next section. These actions that "she went" (*wattābô'*) and then *falling* ("and she fell" *wattippôl*) in v. 26 contrasts with the man's repeated actions of "rising and going," as previously discussed.

It is the woman's movement to the threshold that prompts the man's actions at the end of the narrative. "When her master arose in the morning, he opened the door of the house. And he went out to go on his way and – there! – the woman, his *pîlegeš*, fallen at the entrance of the house and her hands on the threshold" (19:27). Some might argue that the man's subsequent actions in v. 29 are in response to the deeds of the evil men of Gibeah,²⁰¹ but the narrative doesn't indicate any indignation by the man at the night's events. In fact, the man seems to be going nonchalantly on his way until he sees her. He would have likely gone on without her, had she not come to the threshold. The woman's movements make it possible that the man will find her battered body. And once he sees her, it is her initiative that sets in motion the man's call to war.

²⁰¹ This is one of the only places in which the narrative's vantage point changes from the narrator's point of view to a character's point of view. For the first time, the reader sees what the Levite sees himself. And his unfeeling response to his crumpled wife becomes all that more contemptible to the reader (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 48).

After the man finds her on the threshold, he loads up his wife and returns home. And for the second time, he seizes his *pīlegeš*.²⁰² In v. 27, he is no longer her husband but the narrative calls him “her master” (*‘ādōnēhā*, vv. 26-27).²⁰³ No longer in a relationship with some degree of mutuality, the power dynamics show that she is not a wife but merely a subject to her master. Any independence that the woman gains by moving to the threshold is shattered when she becomes a female object on the back of her husband’s donkey and a female object divided.²⁰⁴ Several times, the narrative lists her with the male servant and donkeys of the Levite’s other property (vv. 9, 10 and 19). In v. 3, the man takes the lad and 2 donkeys, and then he takes his *pīlegeš* and servant in v. 9. Then the servant drops out and isn’t listed with the *pīlegeš* and bound donkeys in v. 10. In v. 11, the servant makes a request, and demonstrates that males, even the lowly servant, speak in the narrative. But she does not speak. Other men wantonly disgrace her body, and her master divides her corpse and sends it across the land. In these ways, she is an object to be used by men.²⁰⁵

3. A Body that Speaks

In contrast to her master, father, and host, the woman is voiceless in the entire narrative. She never speaks. She might initiate action, but she never engages in persuasion or self-defense. At the scene on the threshold, the man orders the woman to arise and go. This is the only time in the narrative in which someone speaks directly to her, but there is only silence from the woman.

The narrative emphatically states, “There was no answer.” It is notable that the text utilizes a masculine singular participle (*‘ōneh*). Perhaps the Masoretes vocalized it that way,

²⁰² See vv.25 and 29.

²⁰³ See also Klein, *Irony*, 171.

²⁰⁴ See Olson, *NIB* 2:876.

²⁰⁵ Exum argues that we are not supposed to view her as a person in her own right (Exum, *Fragmented*, 176).

but the word could have been vocalized for a feminine singular participle. If the masculine participle was intended, the narrator could be making the response generic and removing any interest in the fact that *she* does not answer. The text could be making a very poignant argument: the Levite is not worth answering. Or perhaps the masculine singular participle erases the woman completely. As a subject, she is utterly removed, even in the language used.

The man's two imperatives require movement, but the narrative does not supply, "And she did not move" or "She did not get up." It claims, "There was no answer," and implies that there was a lack of a speech act (and possibly that she was dead). Thus, even in the imprecision in the gender of the participle, it is here that the narrative highlights the woman's silence. Niditch claims that the woman's lack of voice here and throughout the men's many conversations is a reminder that the tale has to do with relations between men.²⁰⁶ This narrative emphasis on male relationships might be true, but her silence also supplies an implicit critique of men's actions rather than simply pointing to the primacy of men and their relationships. Along this line, Keefe claims that the woman's silence is symbolically telling for the narrative and that "her narrative silence points to the eclipse of any speaking of truth in the midst of this black and bloody comedy."²⁰⁷

Although her voice is silent, her body is not. This *pîlegeš* is a silent subject who acts, but she is also an objectified body that speaks. Her battered figure on the threshold visually testifies to her husband of men's brutality, and her divided body becomes a witness and a

²⁰⁶ Niditch, "Judges," 192.

²⁰⁷ Alice A. Keefe, "Rapes of Women/Wars of Men," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 79-97. See also Kamuf, "Author," 203.

summons to rally men to war.²⁰⁸ Exum nicely remarks, “Surely Bath-sheber’s body is the speaking body *par excellence*” as her dismembered body is used semiotically to call the assembly.²⁰⁹ The woman’s posture on the threshold, “fallen at the entrance of the house and her hands on the threshold,” provides her message. Bal calls these her “speaking hands.”²¹⁰ The *pîleges*’s body becomes her voice.

The man’s imperatives “Up” and “We must go” to the broken woman on the threshold are ludicrous, and contrast her silence. Lasine claims that he is supposed to look absurd and callous in this bizarre inverted world.²¹¹ The effect, claims Lasine, is that the combined dry and factual tone in the narrative with the Levite’s ridiculous actions and speech in the morning “prevents the reader from indulging in ‘tragic’ pity for the plight of the concubine.”²¹² But contrary to this argument, the emphasis in the narrative is clearly on *her* actions, *her* body placement, and *her* location on the threshold. This invites the reader to focus on her unjust treatment and silence, as well as the man’s insensitive words.

Keefe challenges Lasine and claims that the scene is heavy with the violence she has endured and that the stark contrast between the Levite’s insensitivity and her enormous suffering has the rhetorical effect of heightening the reader’s empathy toward the

²⁰⁸ Lapsley claims that the woman is in such an extreme situation and she has no other place to go but back to the old man’s house (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 46). This might be true, but perhaps as much as the woman as female victim seeks refuge at the house in which her master resides, the woman as female agent knowingly seeks to be a visual indictment of her husband’s maltreatment. Also in line with the Levite’s lack of initiative and typical mode of speech (i.e. that of reaction), the witness-speech that is her body prompts the Levite’s final speech to his *pîleges*.

²⁰⁹ Exum, *Fragmented*, 191. Fewell also comments on her silence through the narrative and how her broken body now speaks to all of Israel. However, “what her body says, what the Levite intends for it to say, and what Israel hears...are hardly congruent” (Fewell, “Judges,” 81). The dismembered speaking body has an ambiguous message. Her message is that she has been abandoned and betrayed by all of the men in her life; the Levite’s message concerns his insulted honor, threatened life and damaged property; and the tribes of Israel hear an excuse for war (Fewell, “Judges,” 82).

²¹⁰ Bal, “Body,” 119.

²¹¹ Lasine, “Guest,” 44-45.

²¹² Lasine, “Guest,” 45.

woman.²¹³ According to Keefe, Lasine's argument is predicated on the text being read by men and through the eyes of male characters. Instead, she suggests that the narrative gaze rests on the woman's broken body.²¹⁴ Niditch similarly argues that the scene is filled with pathos and that the author contrasts her vulnerable condition on the threshold with her husband's security in the house.²¹⁵

But hers as a speaking body is also a complicated matter. When her master divides her, she no longer exists as her complete body or a subject able to make her own movements. She becomes 12 unidentifiable parts. Bal makes the comment that these parts of her body become not necessarily *her* message, but the message by her master. Bal writes:

Her body is also subsequently used as language by the very man who exposes her to the violence when he sends her flesh off as a message...she is dispatched as language... as a letter... a piece of writing not containing but embodying a message – and as a slaughtered piece of meat.²¹⁶

At this point, her subjectivity and her objectivity in her speech work together.²¹⁷ The message that her hands and body on the threshold convey, namely as a testament to men's violence, continues in the sending of her parts far and wide. As a subject and object, her body testifies to unwarranted brutality.

²¹³ Keefe, "Rapes," 90.

²¹⁴ Keefe, "Rapes," 90.

²¹⁵ Niditch, "Judges," 193.

²¹⁶ Bal, "Body," 121.

²¹⁷ Bal adds, "The woman can only speak as body. This body will be used to speak, but then it is no longer the woman who speaks" (Bal, "Body," 125). According to Tribble, this woman is the "least" of all characters in scripture because "she is alone in a world of men... without name, speech or power" (Tribble, *Texts*, 80-81). See also Cheng, "Multiplicity," 121. While namelessness might be true, her message is unconventional and inaudible, yet very present.

IV. Other Narrative Elements

In addition to close analysis of the narrative's characters, other elements contribute to a sense that familial relationships are at the heart of this story and impact larger social structures. The scene between the man and father-in-law reveal both a general focus on familial relations in Judges and also specific concerns about inheritance rights, incompatible marriage partners, and the distance that exists between family groups. And the evidence of YHWH's presence and absence also contributes to a complex narrative evaluation of the story's plot and characters.

A. A Family Affair

The narrator's implicit evaluation of the events within the story through the use of familial terminology could point to tensions and conflict related to proper marriage arrangements. *Pîlegeš*, *zānāh*, and *ḥātān/ḥōtēn*, and as well as phrases relating to sojourning, traveling, and foreign cities, contribute to a sense that complex family dynamics occurring over time and space are chiefly at stake in this text. Multiple people, deriving from a variety of places, inhabiting different status levels have competing interests.

After the narrative introduces the main gendered pair of characters, focus shifts from the particular relationship between the man and woman to oblique negotiations that only happen between the woman's father and her husband. A *ḥōtēn* is one who has a son-in-law and refers to the father of a bride or wife.²¹⁸ The repetition of *ḥōtēn* ("father-in-law" in vv. 4, 7, 9), "father of the *na'ārâ*," (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9) and "the house of the/her father" (vv.

²¹⁸ E. Kutsch, "*ḥtn*," *TDOT* 5: 270-277.

2 and 3) reminds the reader that the Levite must negotiate with another man who lives far away and has his own familial and personal interests.

The reader knows that the father-in-law persuades his son-in-law to continue to stay at the house for multiple days, but one can only speculate on the content of their conversations. However, because the woman left her husband for her father's house, and the husband has traveled to retrieve her, it is an educated guess that the conversation between the men involves finding agreement on marital negotiations. Marriage proceedings in Ancient Southwest Asia provide helpful evidence. Westbrook argues that in Old Babylonian marriage law, "The marriage contract is generally between the husband and the bride's father. Its principal terms are performed by the completion of marriage itself...and the benefit and burden of such terms will then pass to the wife."²¹⁹

While the men in her life determine her future, the *pîlegeš* now fades into the background of the narrative.²²⁰ This focus on the negotiations that happen when two families come together demonstrates that the individual couple's relationship and interaction with each other is not the only, or perhaps principal, relationship that needs attention. Larger familial issues are apparently at stake. In fact, Kawashima points out that in biblical Israel, it is the patriarchal household (i.e. the house of the father or husband) and not the individual that is the legal entity.²²¹ "An individual's legal status, then, far from deriving from an abstract universal notion of personhood, was rather a function of one's concrete particular position or role within the household."²²² Even the patriarch is not an

²¹⁹ Raymond Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law* (Horn, Austria: F. Berger, 1988), 85.

²²⁰ Tribble also remarks on how she fades into the background and that the narrative depicts an exercise in male bonding (Tribble, *Texts*, 68).

²²¹ Robert S. Kawashima, "Could a Woman say 'No' in Biblical Israel? On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature," *AJSR* 35 (April 2011): 1-22.

²²² Kawashima, "Could a Woman Say 'No,'" 6.

autonomous individual, as all possession of property is linked through generations, and biblical law is about mutual obligation, duties and claims.²²³

Most likely, inheritance rights are part of these marriage negotiations between the woman's husband and father. The practice appears to be that if a married woman died without offspring, her assets would revert to her natal family.²²⁴ The narrative never mentions that the Levite and his *pîlegeš* have children. And because of the value that a *pîlegeš* often has by way of producing offspring for a man, it is noteworthy that this *pîlegeš* does *not* have children. It is similarly significant that the narrative dramatically portrays her death. The negotiations between the man and his father-in-law serve as ironic forebodings to not only the childless *pîlegeš's* death but also inevitable future complications in terms of familial inheritance procedures.

There is a sense of ambivalence around this woman because she is a *pîlegeš*. Likely sought as a marriage partner in order to produce children, she lacks offspring. Like a wife, yet she is lower status. She is more vulnerable than a first or full wife, and she is treated not only as a wife but also as a slave. The woman maintains some form of relationship with both her father and husband, in a way that indicates that negotiations are still underway regarding her marriage. The term *pîlegeš* also points to her potential foreignness. Engelken notes that a *pîlegeš* is often of non-Israelite origin, and he cites Judges 19:1 and 8:31 as possible examples of this.²²⁵ It is not certain that the woman in 19:1 is of non-Israelite origins, and one should not take this point too far. It is not likely that we are dealing with an

²²³ Kawashima, "Could a Woman Say 'No,'" 6-7.

²²⁴ Greengus, *Laws*, 75.

²²⁵ Engleken, *TDOT* 11:550. Judges 8:31 references Gideon's *pîlegeš* in Shechem who bears Abimelech.

exogamous marriage. The text remains vague about her foreign status, however the mere mention and repetition of her as a *pîlegeš* suggests the possibility of her foreignness.²²⁶

One problem with marrying certain “foreign” people is that distance between families can make such arrangements difficult. The narrator’s emphasis on the distance required to journey and the journey, itself, between the Levite’s and father’s house points to not only spatial distance but also communal and social distance between the two families, even if the woman is not “foreign.” Klein remarks on the impact of this distance:

Because the families are patriarchal as well as patrilocal, difficulties might arise when the daughter-wife belongs to another group. The proximity of the daughter’s family provides support for her should her husband not treat her properly; with distance, the daughter is virtually unprotected. The close blood ties and physical proximity of the bride’s family effectively reduce the threats on both sides.²²⁷

Thus, this marriage is not only threatening to the man but is also potentially problematic for the woman. The woman is caught in between two (or more) men. She must negotiate within the tension that inevitably exists between her father’s house and her new husband’s house. Because she lives far from the protection of her own father’s house, she is vulnerable. She possesses a dual loyalty – to her father and to her husband. An indistinct rupture happens in the marital home, and the woman chooses her father’s house.

The final verdict on the marriage to this *pîlegeš* is clear in the end: she dies violently, with no benefit to the man. He is not good for her. She is not good for him. The union does not end well. The narrator puts inserts numerous clues that this is a problematic union. Klein points to the eventual effects of this problematic marriage, claiming that it results in

²²⁶ A discussion about exogamous marriages or “intermarriage” is beyond the scope of this project, but it useful to note that Judges 3:6 prohibits the practice of taking foreign daughters for wives and giving daughters to foreign sons. This passage reads much like Ezra 9:12. Even though these passages reflect different contexts, a familiar trope exists in the Hebrew Bible that prohibits marriage to certain people or groups.

²²⁷ Klein, *Irony*, 162.

the opposite of fertility: her death, a war that almost eradicates a tribe, and the raping and kidnapping of hundreds of young women.²²⁸

B. YHWH

Whether through the deity's absence or presence, YHWH remains an important character in Judges' stories. Each chapter in this dissertation will consider the impact of YHWH's presence on the particular narrative. Judges 19 is remarkable in regards to the ways in which YHWH remains absent and silent.

There is only one brief invocation of YHWH's name (v. 18), and this phrase is not in all versions and is possibly a later addition to the Hebrew text. The Greek text does not include the phrase about traveling to the house of the Lord, so it is possible that this phrase was an extra gloss in the Masoretic Text.

The narrator supplies an implicit evaluation of the events that unfold in the narrative through the absence of YHWH and as YHWH is invoked by the story's characters. Similarly, YHWH's silence accentuates the narrator's perspective and indictment of the characters and present situation in Israel. YHWH's absence also emphasizes the text's focus on human familial and communal relationships and interactions as these appear to be void of any divine involvement. Perhaps YHWH is so appalled by the circumstances in the narrative that the deity has voluntarily "left the scene" out of disgust. Or, this sorry state of Israel is an indication of how people have thoroughly turned their backs on God so that God is neither invoked nor acknowledged.

²²⁸ Klein, *Irony*, 173.

YHWH's absence becomes most keenly experienced for the reader during the rape scene at the end of the chapter. Shulte and Schneider's article argues that the absence of the deity acts as a sign that key actors in the story do not recognize the true and central victim in the story (i.e. the woman) and that rape is different than other acts of violence.²²⁹ They demonstrate that YHWH is frequently present in other violent scenes in the Hebrew Bible, such that the "absence in biblical rape scenes clearly shows an intentional decision on the part of the narrator."²³⁰ Even in the rape and marriage scene with the women of Shiloh at the end of Judges, YHWH is present in the majority of the narrative but then exits the chapter just before the kidnapping and rape scene occurs.²³¹ This intentional decision by the narrator demonstrates that the biblical authors view rape as a unique kind of crime that "demands observable absence of the Israelite deity."²³² Thus, Schulte and Schneider recognize, as I do, that the narrator supplies implicit critique of the narrative's events and elements.

Following Schulte and Schneider's argument, there arises a more sinister result in the absence of YHWH during rape scenes like Judges 19. The absence of YHWH might serve as a criticism of the male characters, but in a way, it further disenfranchises the already victimized woman. Not only do the men in her life abandon her, but now YHWH does as well. Even if YHWH's absence points to the narrator's implicit critique of rape as well as the men in the narrative and rape, YHWH's absence marks the woman's complete abandonment.

²²⁹ Leah Rediger Schulte and Tammi J. Schneider, "Absence of Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible," in *Presence and Absence of God: Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, Conference 2008* (ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 21-33.

²³⁰ Schulte and Schneider, "Absence," 33. Even ambiguous scenes that could be depicting rape (e.g. David with Bathsheba) follow a similar pattern of the deity barely being present (33).

²³¹ Schulte and Schneider, "Absence," 33.

²³² Schulte and Schneider, "Absence," 33.

V. Conclusion: Ambiguity, Liminality, and Unhomeliness

A. Clarity and Ambiguity in the Final Verse

A mob making unthinkable demands of a man and his guest, the brutal rape of a woman, and her subsequent death and dismemberment all evoke unambiguous terror, but it is still unclear which of these things is referenced in the exclamation, “We have never seen anything like this from the days when the Israelites went up from the land of Egypt until this day. Set yourselves to this. Consult and speak!” (v. 30). The last verse of Judges 19 demonstrates a convergence of the narrator’s evaluation of the events in the story with the vocalized assessment of “anyone seeing” (*kol-hārō’eh*) the woman’s divided body. This final verse supplies the narrator’s disgust through the imperatives of an unspecified group of Israelite men. What has happened is terrible. This unidentified group of recipients collectively expresses the appropriate shock that the narrator hopes to evoke.

However, it is not clear: which of the terrible events is “this thing” (*kāzō’t*) that elicits outrage?²³³ Are the witnesses remarking on the actions of the evil men in Gibeah? Was the troubling offense the fact that the men in Gibeah sought to rape the Levite or that the men, in fact, raped the Levite’s concubine? Are the witnesses outraged at a crime committed against the woman? Or was the crime committed against the man?²³⁴

²³³ Exum asks the same questions, “Was ist mit “solches” gemeint, das noch nie zuvor geschehen ist und noch nie jemand gesehen hat?” (J. Cheryl Exum, *Was sagt das Richterbuch den Frauen?* [Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 169; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997], 65). However, she argues that we can read these signs of discomfort as evidence of a guilty conscience of the narrator (65).

²³⁴ Ellen van Wolde argues that at least part of the narrative’s emphasis in Chapters 19 and 20 is not so much on the sexual act against the woman but more on the social debasement she experiences by being handed over as an object into another man’s hands (E. J. van Wolde, “Does *innâ* denote rape? A Semantic Analysis of a Controversial Word,” *VT* 52 [2002]: 528-544).

Little consensus exists among scholars. For example, Tribble insists that the narrative emphasizes the woman as the victim. The verbal forms and object in v. 30 are in the feminine gender (*lō'-nihēyētā wēlō'-nirē'ātā kāzō't*), and thus “the ambiguity of the grammatical forms serve a particular hermeneutical emphasis: to highlight the woman who is the victim of terror.”²³⁵ “This thing” (*kāzō't*) is in the feminine singular form. However, Kawashima reminds the reader that a woman in this context possesses few rights, and in fact, our concepts of personal rights and the modern legal “subject” do not exist.²³⁶ The victim always remains the father or husband whose claims over the object of the crime (i.e. daughter or wife) have been violated.²³⁷ The divergent conclusions deriving from Kawashima’s assessment of the historical legal situation and Tribble’s analysis of the grammatical forms are testament to the haziness about *what* is so terrible, even if there is unambiguous terror and outrage.

Perhaps the narrator uses the words “anyone seeing” and “this thing” to express disgust with *all* of these events. Her rape and subsequent dismemberment are evidence of the degradation of a society and the problems that occur when “there was no king in Israel.”²³⁸ The narrator leaves open a variety of interpretive possibilities, but what is clear is these events arouse outrage.

²³⁵ Tribble, *Texts*, 81.

²³⁶ Kawashima, “Could a Woman Say ‘No,’” 5.

²³⁷ Kawashima, “Could a Woman Say ‘No,’” 2. Although debated, Kawashima insists that there existed no concept of rape because she was not a legal entity, and there is no issue with her consent (Kawashima, “Could a Woman Say ‘No,’” 21). Exum comments on this narrative ambiguity in another way. She claims that the uncertainty about what is “this thing” and “this evil” demonstrates how the text “criticizes its own ideology” because it is “betrayed by a guilty narrative conscience” (Exum, *Fragmented*, 191). However, I would emphasize that these final evaluative comments are not the result of a newly-formed guilty narrative conscience but are part of a larger narrative tendency to cast doubt on the quality of the Levite’s character, in this story, and the quality of any character in all of the narratives in Judges.

²³⁸ While it might be difficult to determine the relation between literary texts and social reality, Keefe argues, “literary texts present imaginative figurations that articulate and undergird structures within a given society” (Keefe, “Rapes,” 80). Through Judges 19 (along with Genesis 34 and 2 Samuel 13), the reader might draw

B. Liminal Times and Spaces

Much of the narrative's liminal aspects have to do with the woman of the story. The story portrays her as acting (and being acted upon) between various men. The times and spaces in which she moves and dwells are also liminal. She operates in the "in-between" time of the day: at the break of dawn. Her most significant and final independent movement is to the liminal space of a threshold. The events of her story occur in a liminal phase in Israel's history.

The woman in Judges 19 is not only caught between loyalty to her father and her husband,²³⁹ as mentioned in relation to the complex familial dynamics, but she eventually finds herself caught between many other men as well. The old host in Gibeah, a virtual stranger, assumes control over her body (v. 24). Then she becomes the mediating object that appeases the mob and the shield that protects her husband. She is used and violated by many men. Finally, her body becomes divided, and again dispersed between men. The woman never escapes from a life between and betwixt men. One might read and interpret various narrative judgments about the woman's liminal existence. On one hand, the narrative judgment regards this as an inevitable reality for women. Negotiations between the men, namely between a father-in-law and son-in-law. These negotiations often occur without the involvement of the women. On the other hand, the narrator's evaluation depicts her situation as tragic. The violence that she experiences, both at the hand of an

some insight from the woman's rape about the disorder that exists in community life (80). The woman's divided body is a prelude to war, and "illustrates the metonymical meaning of the female body as the social body and the way in which violence committed against that body constitutes an act of 'decreation' in dissolution of all forms of community coherence and sacral meaning" (85).

²³⁹ Lanoir identifies this aspect of her liminal state nicely, "celles (les femmes vierges et jeunes mariees) qui sont dans *une période de transition*, précisément en train de passer de l'autorité paternelle à l'autorité maritale..." (italics mine) (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 190).

angry mob of men and at the hand of another man (perhaps her husband or perhaps the host in Gibeah) who sends her outside, incriminates various men for abuse.

The narrator grants the reader a view of the woman's final movements and the specific time in which she acts. The evil men cast her out "at the rising of the dawn" or "morning twilight." Then, she goes by herself "in the morning" and falls onto the threshold "until it was light." The woman acts in the in-between-time of early morning dawn when it is neither completely light nor completely dark.²⁴⁰ Her master arises "in the morning" to go on his way. He opens the door to leave and finds her battered body. The narrative ceases to report her actions when the men once again become the focus of the action in the narrative. Men operate within categorically clear times of day. She no longer acts when her master finds her in the morning light. She acts only between men's abusive treatment, between the dark of night and the light of morning, between night and day.

This woman's liminal space deals not only with the liminal time in which she acts but also her location on a physical threshold. After the men in Gibeah rape and abuse the Levite's *pîlegeš*, she falls at the entrance of the house where her master is staying. Her location is reinforced multiple times. The phrases "she fell at the entrance of the house" (19:26) "fallen at the entrance of the house" and "her hands on the threshold" (19:27) insist that the reader pay attention to where the woman falls.²⁴¹ She occupies neither a space inside the house nor outside in the street.²⁴² Neither space is safe; a group of men beat her

²⁴⁰ Lapsley claims that this "turning of the morning" and "until the light" adds a tragic poetic quality of desolation and sorrow and evokes the reader's compassion (Lapsley, *Whispering*, 47).

²⁴¹ Cheng agrees that her liminality is actually reinforced by the repeated use of the words like *dalētôt*/doors, *hassap*/threshold, and *petah*/entrance (Cheng, "Multiplicity," 125).

²⁴² Bal also notes her as a liminal figure and an "embodiment of transition" as she occupies the threshold of the house (Bal, "Body," 119). Cheng claims that lying with her hands on the threshold represents the woman's social location in the middle of various forms of oppression and abusive men that surround her on either side (Cheng, "Multiplicity," 125).

outside, and other men betray her from inside the house.²⁴³ As it is unclear whether the woman becomes unconscious or even dead at the threshold, her uncertain physical state becomes accentuated in her body's placement. Bohmbach makes a similar observation about the space she inhabits, "The text leaves us in limbo about her state of being here, just as her spatial positioning is insecure, insofar as her threshold positioning puts her both (or neither) inside and outside."²⁴⁴

The woman's positioning at the doorway, the space between the outside of the street and in the inside of the house, also symbolizes the woman's constant and tragic movement between public and private spaces. The narrator portrays the woman acting in public and external spaces, sometimes in nontraditional ways. She embarks on the dangerous journey to her father's house alone. Then she bridges public and private space as she operates briefly as an intermediary between her father and husband. When she greets the Levite at her father's house, the woman takes on a socially public role, occupies the liminal space of her father's doorway, and invites her husband into the house.²⁴⁵ But public space is not kind to the woman.²⁴⁶ She becomes another piece of the Levite's property when they embark on the journey back home. Completely vulnerable, the woman meets rape and violence outside of the man's house in Gibeah. In fact, the woman has no secure place. Traditional expectations would lead one to think that the private space of a home would be a place of safety and security for the woman, but homes provide little sanctuary for this *pîlegeš*. She becomes lost to the narrative when she invites the Levite into

²⁴³ "Abandoned by her father, betrayed by her husband, raped and tortured by a mob, the woman is trapped in a world of men. She has nowhere to go but back to the husband who threw her out, only to find that the door of hospitality and safety is still closed against her" (Fewell, "Judges," 81).

²⁴⁴ Bohmbach, "Conventions," 95.

²⁴⁵ See also Bohmbach, "Conventions," 92.

²⁴⁶ Similar resonances occur in the Jephthah story when his daughter steps out of her house.

her father's home, she is invisible in the old man's house, and she is ultimately violated and dismembered in her husband's house.²⁴⁷

While one might sympathize with the woman's experience, one must not treat her only as a victim. The narrator intentionally grants her a degree of subjectivity and autonomy in the times and spaces in which she moves. The reader glimpses this in her actions of leaving her husband and then moving her own body to the threshold. While she is still a victim of her circumstances and men's abuse, the narrator willingly grants the woman some amount of choice. And her choices can be understood in a number of ways, both with implicit positive and negative evaluations. While rape might be a horrible offense against men, the narrative perspective does not condone the woman's rape. At the same time, her rape could be read as punishment for her sexual deviance at the beginning of the narrative.²⁴⁸ The woman has no voice, perhaps viewed as quiet and submissive, but her body speaks poignantly of men's abuse.²⁴⁹

In the end, she is a divided body, both divided-up and betwixt-and-between many men. Liminality is supposed to be functional and temporary, and we behold a picture of an abused woman moving toward something. But the tragedy is that she does not make it.²⁵⁰ She remains perpetually liminal. Ironically, this woman as subject moves toward her complete objectification.

If the narrator views her fate tragically, the narrative also has the reverse effect. The utter objectification that is in the process of dividing and dispersing her body desexualizes

²⁴⁷ Bohmbach, "Conventions," 96-97.

²⁴⁸ See Exum, *Fragmented*, 179 and 190 and Klein, "Irony," 171.

²⁴⁹ See Bohmbach, "Conventions," 87-89.

²⁵⁰ "Pour elle le voyage s'était achevé ici, dans la nuit lourde de Gibéa, dans un tumult de désirs et de corps" (Jacqueline Kelen, *Les femmes de la Bible: Les vierges, les épouses, les rebelles, les séductrices, les prophétesses, les prostituées* [nouv. éd.; Tournai: Renaissance Du Livre, 2002], 81).

the woman and diffuses her threat by scattering her parts.²⁵¹ Thus, this woman, who operates in liminal times and places, embodies the ambiguous qualities that liminality connotes. This narrative demonstrates to the reader that female figurations are often represented as the mediating gender, symbolically occupy various kinds of doorways, borders, and in-between spaces, and therefore defy easy definitions and categories in the book of Judges.²⁵²

C. The Condition of Unhomeliness

Another level of meaning can be added to the ambiguity in the last phrase. Perhaps in the phrase “We have never seen anything like this...,” “this thing” that is so appalling and disturbing is not only the violence performed against the man and his *pîlegeš* but also the blurring of lines that divide the public and private spaces of society. It stands, then, that the people are disturbed that this fate would befall a woman and the Levite and that a family conflict could spiral into a national problem. The final verse of chapter 19 is an expression that reflects what Homi Bhabha might call the “condition of unhomeliness.” In the case of this story, the condition of unhomeliness is less about the invasion of the domestic space and more about the “borders between home and world becoming confused.”²⁵³

The narrator associates the *pîlegeš* with houses (vv. 2, 3, 26, 29), and the theme of hospitality *in homes* resonates throughout the episode.²⁵⁴ Though she is associated with the privacy of homes, the actions of and against the *pîlegeš* set in motion public conflict in the form of tribal civil war. Judges 19 becomes an etiology for intertribal issues as they play out

²⁵¹ Exum, *Fragmented*, 191. See also Cheng, “Multiplicity,” 127.

²⁵² See Niditch, *Judges*, 192.

²⁵³ Bhabha, *Location*, 9.

²⁵⁴ See also Lanoir’s section “Trois maisons et un chemin,” (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 179-180).

in Judges 20. Private affairs become public affairs, and private failures not only initiate but also mirror the failures of the community.

As this liminal figure moves toward the old man's home, desperately trying to make it back into the home, perhaps the narrator represents through the woman on the threshold the futility of attempts to erase a blurred reality. It is impossible to redraw the blurred lines between public and private spaces and to recover a dichotomy that never completely existed in the first place. If she had just made it inside, perhaps the boundaries would again exist. But instead, the woman becomes the representation and object of blurring. The memorable image of the story becomes her image on the threshold and brings with it the eerie realization of the imprecise divisions between the spaces that make the home and world. The *pîlegeš*'s hand on the door spatially and literarily evokes both the terror of violence and the pathos that coincides with the condition of unhomeliness.

CHAPTER 3

The Mothers of War:
“and she came out of her tent to greet Sisera” ...
“and she peered out of the window”

I. Introduction

Judges 4 recounts the story of Israel’s deliverance from oppression at the hands of Jabin, King of Canaan. Deborah, a prophetess and adjudicator of Israel, supplies Baraq with the divine command to defeat Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army. She accompanies Baraq in battle and presumably guides him at the opportune moment to enter the fray. Sisera and his army face defeat, scatter and flee. Sisera then seeks refuge at the encampment of Heber the Kenite, a man who has defected from his people and joined an alliance with Jabin. Jael, Heber’s wife, exits her tent and invites Sisera to come in. At first she provides for his needs and comforts the exhausted soldier, and then she kills him with a tent peg through his temple. Eventually Baraq catches up to Sisera. Jael again exits her tent to meet Baraq and shows the Israelite commander the fallen Sisera. This fulfills Deborah’s earlier prediction that “in the hand of a woman, the Lord will sell Sisera.” With YHWH’s backing, the Israelites completely destroy Jabin and the Canaanites, and Israel once again experiences peace. The poetry in chapter 5 includes a similar storyline, but adds an extra scene at the end. In it, Sisera’s mother peers out of her window and anxiously awaits the return of her son. She imagines the spoils that he will bring home.

A character analysis and close reading of Judges 4, with occasional reference to variations, emphases, and complements of narrative elements in Judges 5, reveal carefully

crafted and ambiguously presented characters and narrative elements. Rather than take a position on the primacy of either Judges 4 or 5, it is important to demonstrate the thematic similarity of the chapters and their mutually enhancing character.²⁵⁵

It will first consider the characters of the narrative. The primary scenes in Judges 4 involve two gendered pairs of characters. The woman of many designations, Deborah, necessarily accompanies Israel's divinely appointed military leader, Baraq, in war. Later in the narrative, the woman of complicated allegiances, Jael, benefits Israel by nurturing and then overpowering the Canaanite commander Sisera. The final human character under discussion only appears in chapter 5, but Sisera's mother adds much to the discussion about the ambiguous portrayal of women, particularly mothers, in this narrative.

After unpacking the main actors in the narrative, a close reading demonstrates that the speech and actions of the female characters eclipse those of their male counterparts.

²⁵⁵ Baruch Halpern argues that the historian wrote chapter 4 by using the song (Baruch Halpern, "The Resourceful Israelite Historian: The Song of Deborah and Israelite Historiography," *HTR* 76 [1983]: 379-402). Uwe Becker also argues that Judges 5 is a model for the prose (Uwe Becker, *Richterzeit und Königtum: Reaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Richterbuch* (BZAW 192; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 138. See also Heinz-Deter Neef, "Deborazählung und Deboralied: Beobachtungen zu Verhältnis von Jdc. IV and V," *VT* 44 (1994): 47-59. For more on the tradition history of Judges 3-9, and for an argument on the two chapters indicating independent traditions, see Wolfgang Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch* (BBB 18; Bonn: P. H. Hanstein, 1963). For more scholars that insist on independent traditions for each of the chapters, see Tyler Mayfield, "The Accounts of Deborah (Judges 4-5) in Recent Research," *CBR* 7 (2009): 306-335. Jack Sasson notes scholars' conclusions about the date of the Judges 5 poetry and its historical relationship to the prose, is unconvinced by arguments that give the poem a late date, and remarks that the "historical value of Deborah's Song remains undeciphered," the most we can do with biblical works is assign it before or after the Exile (Jack M. Sasson, "'A Breeder or Two for Each Leader': On Mothers in Judges 4 and 5," in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum* [eds. David J.A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011], 336-338).

Rather than asking "which one came first," Brenner argues that the relationship of the texts is literary rather than historical. She considers the operating structure of the cast of characters and the central imagery in Judges 4 and 5 as a way to understand the two chapters separately and together (Athalya Brenner, "A Triangle and a Rhombus in Narrative Structure: A Proposed Integrative Reading of Judges IV and V," *VT* XI (1990): 129-138. Fewell and Gunn similarly propose that the song of Judges 5 is in continuity with the prose of chapter 4 and is an expression of Deborah and Baraq's point of view (Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4 & 5," *JAAR* LVIII [1990]: 389-411). See also Reis who comments on the synchronicity of Judges 4 and 5 and their similar style of ironic humor and unifying linguistic craftsmanship (Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Uncovering Jael and Sisera. A New Reading," *SJOT* 19 [2005], 24-47). See also Schneider, *Judges*, 84.

However, the narrator's characterization of these women is complicated in regards to their identities, roles, speech, and action. The narrator's perspective never fully appreciates nor fully condemns the women. Ambiguity operates both at the level of characterization and in terms of narrative events.²⁵⁶

Not only do the gendered pairs and Sisera's mother require consideration, but also does the role of the Lord require attention. While other human characters have specific roles and functions, YHWH serves as the true "Judge" in this narrative. A number of verses in chapters four and five contain verses that demonstrate the deity's activity in the midst of battle.

Finally, Deborah, Jael and Sisera's mother hold liminal roles. The women are also often portrayed as operating in in-between locations and allegiances. Women exist as both subjects and objects of war.

II. Deborah and Baraq

A. Deborah: The Nurturing Bee, Prophetess, Judge, and Mother in Israel

The narrator not only assigns one of the story's main female characters a proper name, Deborah, but also the narrator attaches multiple designations and explanatory information about her various roles. She is a woman prophetess, a woman of flames (wife

²⁵⁶ For more discussion on Judges 4 and 5 and the rhetoric of ambiguity, see Christianson, "Big Sleep," 519-548.

of Lappidoth), and she judged Israel.²⁵⁷ The reader learns about the location from which she operates and the way in which she interacts with her people.²⁵⁸

Deborah is the second person in the Hebrew Bible to hold this particular appellation. Rebekah's nurse, who was buried under the oak at Bethel (Gen. 35:8) was also named Deborah. Thus, this Deborah in Judges, simply by association with another female character, carries the connotation of nursing and nurturing. Her name also means "bee,"²⁵⁹ which conveys with it both a connotation of sweetness and honey and a suggestion of swarming and the potential for overpowering and destruction. Psalm 118:12 claims that other nations surround the allies like bees. In Deut. 1:44, the enemy Amorites chase and destroy, much like bees. Bees also appear in Samson's story (Judges 14). As he returns to collect his wife, Samson turns to see his felled lion invaded by a congregation of bees and honey in its carcass. The narrative link between his wife and the bees and honey highlights the ways in which women have the potential of being sweet and nurturing as well as dangerous, destructive and contaminating. As will be apparent in Judges 4 and 5, Deborah's character connotes the same juxtaposition of sweetness and danger, especially in regards to the males that share the same narrative space.

The text calls Deborah "a woman prophetess" (*'iššâ nēbī'â*), which, although it highlights the uniqueness of a woman inhabiting a prophetic role, is redundant since

²⁵⁷ Spronk notices that Deborah is presented in a similar way to Ehud and Jephthah as we get a name and some personal information, but we don't learn anything about her family, and there is a strange reference to her profession (K. Spronk, "Deborah, A Prophetess: The Meaning and Background of Judges 4:4-5," in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* [ed. Johannes C. De Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 232-242).

²⁵⁸ Bedenbender has a similar study in which he analyzes Deborah's various names, "Bee, Torch, Lightning" as clues to form her characterization (Andreas Bedenbender, "Biene, Fackel, Blitz: Zur Metaphorik der Namen in der Deborahgeschichte [Ri 4-5]," *T&K* 76 [1997]: 43-55).

²⁵⁹ See "Biene" in Johann Jakob Stamm, "Hebräische Frauennamen," in *Hebräische Wortforschung; Festschrift zum 80 Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* (VTSup 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 301-339.

prophetess is already in the feminine form. Though women could not hold priestly functions, women could circumvent the limitations imposed by their sex and have direct connection to God by bearing prophetic roles.²⁶⁰ But only Huldah, mentioned in 2 Kings 22:14, speaks the standard prophetic response initiated with “Thus says the Lord” when Hilkiah and his group consult her for a word from YHWH.²⁶¹ As she performs a similar role to Huldah but works against YHWH’s people, Nehemiah 6:14 counts Noadiah as a false prophetess who is hired to intimidate Nehemiah. Typical “prophetic” functions of biblical prophetesses (including Deborah) are mentioned only briefly, and none of these women bear sustained performances of actual prophecy in the Hebrew Bible.

Instead of identifying the typical prophetic function, the Hebrew Bible characterizes some prophetesses primarily by their uniquely female activities. The text refers to Miriam in Exodus 15:20 as a prophetess when she leads women in playing tambourines and celebratory dancing after the defeat of Pharaoh’s army. In Isaiah 8:3, Isaiah reports impregnating a woman he identifies as “the prophetess,” and she bears a son.

Although she does not use the prophetic phrase, “Thus says the Lord,” one could read Deborah in Judges 4 as reporting a divine word in her rhetorical question of 4:6, “Has not the Lord, God of Israel, commanded...” In a similar way, Sasson argues against translations that claim Deborah “summoned” Baraq but instead asserts that she seeks to have him hear a message from God.²⁶² The two verbs, “*šālah* + *qārā*” (literally, “she sent for and she called”), carry a variety of idiomatic meanings. This phrasing in the infinitive could indicate “to order someone to meet someone else,” as in 2 Sam 10:5 and 2 Kings 9:17, and

²⁶⁰ Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1-12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Anchor Yale Bible, 2014), 254-255.

²⁶¹ 2 Chronicles 34:22 gives a similar account of Huldah.

²⁶² Sasson, *Judges*, 257.

with a direct object as in Genesis 41:8 the meaning is “to order the summoning of someone.”²⁶³ In the case of Judges 4:6, the preposition *lě-* introduces Baraq as the indirect object and the meaning is therefore “to convey a message to someone.” Similar usages of the *šālah* + *qārā* and the preposition *lě-* are found in Judges 16:18 and Genesis 27:42.²⁶⁴ In Deborah’s case, this prophetess is the catalyst to have Baraq hear a message from God.

As has been mentioned, Deborah in Judges 4 has multiple roles. She arguably performs the prophetic function of acting as YHWH’s mouthpiece, but she also delivers judgment, practices pyromancy, and is called a “Mother in Israel” (though only in chapter 5). Since there is no reference to Deborah as a biological mother and no reference to any children, Judges 5 identifies Deborah as a metaphorical mother. Pseudo-Philo’s expansion of Deborah’s character in the story in *Biblical Antiquities* accentuates this role of mother when she refers to the assembled people as “my sons” and “my children”²⁶⁵ and orders them to “obey me like your mother.”²⁶⁶ The people also refer to Deborah as a mother when they speak to her, “See now, mother, you are dying and leaving your children, to whom do you entrust them?” and when they mourn her death, “Look, a mother perishes from Israel, and a holy one who carried the leadership...”²⁶⁷ Deborah as a metaphorical mother leads, teaches, nurtures, and protects her people.

The accounts in Judges 4 and 5 seem to be most interested in Deborah’s latter two occupations (i.e. as a pyromancer and a mother). Thus, this prophetess might function

²⁶³ Sasson, *Judges*, 257.

²⁶⁴ In the stories with Delilah and the Philistine chiefs and Rebekah and Jacob, all of the women convey a message to a man or men.

²⁶⁵ *L.A.B.* 33.3

²⁶⁶ *L.A.B.* 33.1

²⁶⁷ *L.A.B.* 33.4 and 33.6

within the typical prophetic role of a divine mouthpiece, but she also has uniquely female roles and actions.

Before discussing the next identifier given to Deborah in 4:4, *'ēšet lappîdôt*, this chapter will consider Deborah's designations as a judge and mother. Deborah is one of the deliverers of Israel, and is in the category of people mentioned in Judges 2:16, "the Lord raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them." In this way, Deborah belongs with Othniel (Judges 3:10), Tola (10:2), Jair (10:3), Jephthah (12:7), Ibzan (12:8-9), Elon (12:11), Abdon (12:13), and Samson (15:20 and 31). But a close look at Judges 4:5 reveals that Deborah operated in a judicial role when people would come to her to judge and decide their cases.²⁶⁸ Although she operates in an actual judicial context, her categorization as "judge" has a different meaning than the other "judges" in this biblical book. She is not named because of her primary military role. Similarly, the narrator does not follow the typical pattern for assigning a judge in Deborah's case, neither indicating that God has selected her to rescue Israel nor that she is filled with the divine spirit. As the narrative progresses, it is apparent that she plays an integral part in delivering Israel from Jabin though she is not the "judge" of the narrative in the sense most often utilized in this biblical book. Because Deborah does not follow the typical role of a judge in the book, the reader begins to question very early who will emerge as the actual judge in this story.

Chapter 5 adds one more designation to Deborah's multi-faceted persona. She arises as a "mother in Israel" (*'ēm bēyisrā'ēl*) in Judges 5:7. The song relates problems for the

²⁶⁸ For a summary of a variety of scholars' views on Deborah's "judicial" role, see Mayfield, "Accounts," 311. See also Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 244.

peasant population until the mother arises.²⁶⁹ This term is not used elsewhere in the biblical text, but similar phrases provide clues for what a “mother in Israel” might denote. This could be a phrase that describes Deborah as caring for her people. Perhaps because of Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah, this name bears associations of nurturing, and thus, perhaps this Deborah similarly nurtures the Israelites. In a similar way, fathers appear to have this role of care and support. Isaiah 22:21 provides that Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, “will have authority and will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.” Job in 29:16 claims, “I was father to the needy and the strife I did not know, I searched them.” Being a “father” to people in these ways include having authority over people and caring for those in need.

A wise woman, who apparently gives people sage advice according to 2 Samuel 20:22, calls to speak to Joab in 20:16-19. This is much like how Deborah, the prophetess who makes decisions for her people, calls for Baraq. In 2 Sam 20:19, the woman states her perspective and loyalty by saying “I am one who is at peace and faithful in Israel.” She then confronts Joab with, “You are seeking to kill the city and a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?” In this way, “mother in Israel” refers to the value and protection to Israel that a city provides.

These examples of similar usage of the phrase demonstrate that Deborah, as a valuable “mother in Israel,” cares for her people, carries some authority over her people, and is concerned with protecting that which comes from the Lord (e.g. namely the inheritance of the Lord). But importantly, Deborah is not the typical mother in the

²⁶⁹ Versions differ as to who assigns Deborah as this “mother in Israel.” The Masoretic Text uses the second person feminine singular with the old ending “you arose,” but both the LXX and Latin supply the third person feminine singular “she arose” (Moore, *Critical Edition*, 33).

patriarchal system; she exists neither for the purpose of producing sons nor for providing Baraq with sexual gratification.²⁷⁰

Before considering the final description of Deborah, a review of her multiple designations is helpful. Deborah's proper name carries both the undertones of the buzzing, swarming, and destruction that bees bring and the associations of nurturing that Rebekah's named nurse conveys. Deborah is a prophetess, a role that few women hold in the biblical text, and she seems to have a direct connection with the Lord. However, her role as a prophetess is not developed in the narrative, she does not explicitly provide a word of the Lord by saying, "Thus says the Lord," and her other designations seem to displace her "prophetic" work. She does not receive the divine appointment or spirit like the other judges.²⁷¹ Her unexpected and *actual* adjudicating role of making decisions for the people (rather than the typical military role of the "judges" in the book of Judges) raises questions for the reader about who will emerge as the *real* judge in the story.²⁷² As the only woman in the biblical text given the title a "mother in Israel," Deborah is a nurturing and protective figure, a valuable authority, and a leader for the Israelites. Not to be forgotten, Deborah is all of these things as a *woman*.

B. The Woman of Torches and the Lightning Man

Immediately following the mention of Deborah as a prophetess and just prior to the statement that she was judging Israel, the narrator supplies the most debated term of Deborah's many titles and calls her an *'ēšet lappîdôt*. The phrase is most often translated,

²⁷⁰ Fewell and Gunn, "Controlling," 397. See also Exum, "Mother," 74.

²⁷¹ The typical refrain formula "the lord raised up a deliverer" is missing, and thus it is hard to know if Deborah is the one being raised up as the deliverer (Amit, *Judges*, 201 and 206).

²⁷² See Olson, *NIB* 2:774.

“wife of Lappidoth,” assuming that she is the wife of this oddly named man.²⁷³ Sasson acknowledges that it is in fact common for women to be cited in connection with their husband, and the construction with *'ēšet* could mean “wife of” and not just “woman of.” Importantly, we know nothing of this “Lappidoth.” We usually find “wife of...” in instances of a well-known man, and if the husband doesn’t appear in the narratives, the narrative at least provides his pedigree and/or profession.²⁷⁴ This is the case in the introduction of Huldah, who is “wife of Shallum son of Tikvah the keeper of the wardrobe” in 2 Kings 22:14 and for Jael, “wife of Heber the Kenite,” in this chapter of Judges. Sasson claims, “Since Lappidoth is not known otherwise, the way Deborah is associated with him is anomalous.”²⁷⁵ Furthermore, “*lappîdôt*” is a feminine plural construction and such a construction for a man’s name is unusual.²⁷⁶ Thus, I follow Sasson and argue that it is unlikely that, in the midst of these various professional titles, Deborah’s status as wife to a particular unknown man would be highlighted.

Instead, Deborah receives the title, “a woman of torches.” When scholars reject that *'ēšet lappîdôt* denotes the “wife of Lappidoth,” some focus on the female sex instead of the male relative and claim that she is a woman somehow related to fire.²⁷⁷ Most of these scholars argue that this is a reference to Deborah’s fiery and charismatic personality. This reference to flames and torches also links her story to two other Judges stories. After

²⁷³ See Boling, *Judges*, 95.

²⁷⁴ Sasson, *Judges*, 255.

²⁷⁵ Sasson, *Judges*, 255. Ackerman similarly claims that her marital status is “ambiguous” (Ackerman, *Warrior*, 38). Guest also argues that translating it as “wife of Lappidoth” demonstrates a “heterosexualization” process since the phrase is ambiguous and could easily be translated as “woman of flames” (Deryn Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics* [London: SCM Press, 2005], 152-53).

²⁷⁶ Sasson, *Judges*, 255. Naboth is another example. Schneider makes the same argument that it can not be the name of a husband because it is an unusual feminine form and only has this one appearance as a proper noun (Schneider, *Judges*, 66). The feminine ending continues the feminine flow of the entire sentence (66).

²⁷⁷ “Woman of Fire” (Niditch, *Judges*, 60); “woman of flames” (Guest, “When Deborah,” 152-53).

hearing about a strange dream and the interpretation of it in Judges 7, Gideon gains inspiration to raid and defeat the Midianite camp. He instructs the army to take up trumpets and torches encased in jars. At his command, trumpets sound, jars break, fire spreads, and chaos circulates in the Midianite army. In a similar use of torches in Judges 15:4, Samson ties torches to foxes tails and sets the animals loose. The foxes destroy the Philistine's stores of grain, vineyards, and olive groves. Along with the reference to bees, this is the second explicit and odd language connection between Samson and Deborah's narratives.

A compelling interpretation emerges that moves beyond a comment on Deborah's temperament and a link to other Judges stories. With this title of *'ēšet lappîdôt*, the narrative provides the reader with one more set of abilities to add to this noteworthy woman's resume. This prophetess who determines judicial decisions for her people also practices pyromancy by interpreting smoke and flames.²⁷⁸ No other personality in the Hebrew Bible is said to be a practitioner of pyromancy. 1 Samuel 28:7 mentions the woman medium of Endor, and this practitioner of necromancy (*'ešet ba 'ălat-ôv*) seems to be the closest parallel to the identification given to Deborah.²⁷⁹ In each narrative, the divination abilities of both Deborah in Judges and the anonymous woman in 1 Samuel operate as helpful and informative resources for the stories' male protagonists. It is possible that Deborah's capacity of interpreting fire informs her other named skills. Deborah's link to the divine enables her to be both a mouthpiece for YHWH and a woman who uses flames to

²⁷⁸ Sasson, *Judges*, 256. We receive most of the lore of divination using flames from Hellenistic times, and there includes a range of ways of interpreting smoke and flames.

²⁷⁹ Sasson, *Judges*, 255-256. Spronk also draws the connection with the medium of Endor and notes how Deborah might have been associated with divination abilities, but Spronk argues that her divination abilities would have created in her a dubious character and her title of prophetess was added to make her more acceptable (Spronk, "Deborah," 238).

predict events and outcomes. Similarly, perhaps her unique abilities with fire draw the Israelites to her for judgment.

In the narrative of Judges 4, Baraq recognizes Deborah's special talent and this prompts him to state emphatically in 4:8, "If you go with me, then I will go. But if you do not go with me, then I will not go." This military leader wants this diviner to accompany him in war so that he will be sure of his army's maneuvers against the enemy. Baraq's interest in Deborah rests neither in her ability as a divine mouthpiece nor her professional capacity of making judicial decisions. Thus, perhaps it is her special ability to interpret flames that reveals exactly when the Lord has determined the right time for Baraq to engage in battle.

Moore argues that early Hebrew readers knew that "Baraq's refusal to go without Deborah" could lead to an unfavorable interpretation of Baraq and thus we have vestiges of an old Hebrew gloss in the Greek sources that tempers any negative evaluation of Baraq.²⁸⁰ The Greek includes at the end of verse 8 what Moore argues is clearly a translation from Hebrew and not part of the original text, "because I do not know the hour in which the angel of the Lord will make me successful."²⁸¹ It is true that this Israelite military man's insistence on a woman accompanying him in war perhaps challenges his manhood and paints him as a coward. This added phrase shifts the emphasis from Deborah's participation in the battle and instead accentuates the Lord's orchestration of military events. But this old gloss could also be an indication of Baraq's acknowledgment of Deborah's unique connection to divine movements and her ability to predict future events. He needs her because *she knows* or *will know* the hour in which the Lord will make him successful. Deborah does not disappoint Baraq. In v. 14, she makes it clear when it is time

²⁸⁰ Moore, *Critical Edition*, 31.

²⁸¹ Moore, *Critical Edition*, 31.

for Baraq to fight Sisera's army, "Arise, for this is the day that the Lord has given Sisera into your hand." With a rhetorical question, she indicates that the battle has already been engaged, "Has not the Lord gone out before you?" Thus, with this title *'ēšet lappîdôt*, the reader gains a greater understanding of Deborah's usefulness to Baraq and the Israelite army.

This designation of "a woman of torches" links Deborah to her male counterpart, Baraq, not just through narrative events but also literarily through the meaning of his name. Some have gone so far as to claim that Deborah, as a woman of torches, is actually wife to Baraq, the lightning man.²⁸² But it is unnecessary to assume that the two are in a marital relationship. Theirs is a literary relationship. The woman of torches/fire accompanies Baraq, the man of lightning, as the two elements (i.e. fire and lightning) are inseparable in other places in the Hebrew Bible.

To understand how Deborah and Baraq are linked, it is necessary to consider the meaning and usage of Baraq's name. Baraq's name means "lightning" and can refer to the lightning that accompanies terrifying storms (2 Sam 22:15). God issues this lightning, and it represents both God's reign and God's startling abilities to make the earth tremble.²⁸³ Lightning is God's tool, and can be used to scatter God's enemies (Psalm 144:6). At times, the Hebrew text uses this term to describe an actual instrument of war. A "flashing sword" or *bēraq ḥarbî* in Deut 32:41 (also Ezekiel 21:10, 21:15, 21:33), a "glittering spear" or *bēraq ḥānîṭ* in Nahum 3:3 (also Habbakuk 3:11), and an "arrow that will go out like lightning" in Zechariah 9:14 are instruments in God's cosmic battle. They are deployed in anger against

²⁸² See Sasson, *Judges*, 255. The idea that Deborah is wife to Baraq is a rabbinic idea. See *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, Chapter 10, 48-49. See also Rabbi Kimchi who notes that Baraq and Lappidoth are one and the same person.

²⁸³ See Job 38:35, Psalms 18:15, 77:19, 97:4, Jeremiah 10:13, 51:16.

rebellious and enemy nations. In many of these verses, the cosmic battle includes the tumultuous activity of the heavens and various bodies of water, as well as lightning. Much of the terminology used in Judges 5:20-22 to describe the cosmic battle that YHWH wages against Sisera's army (e.g. "from the heavens, the stars fought...the wadi Kishon swept them away...") is reminiscent of the battles cited in the other biblical verses listed above in which lightning also occurs. Lightning is not absent from the cosmic battle in Judges 5, but instead, the military commander, Baraq, becomes God's instrument of war along with the heavenly and aquatic elements.

While the cosmic battle elements are not as poetically emphasized in Judges 4, Baraq is still the divine lightning instrument that complements and enters war with his fire-bearing female counterpart. Sometimes *bārāq* and *lappîd* are used as synonyms and interchangeably to describe the light emitted from the storm components of thunder and lightning. Exodus 20:18 utilizes *lappîd* to name the phenomenon of "thunder and lightning" *et-haqqôlôt w'et-hallappîdim* (or, "the sound/thunder and fire"). A similar phrase in Exodus 19:16 uses *bārāq* instead of *lappîd* and has *qôlôt ûb'ērāqîm* ("the sound and the lightning") in reference to "thunder and lightning." Bedenbender's study also references the relationship between Deborah and Baraq and points to the phrase *lappîdê 'ēš* "torch of fire."²⁸⁴ He lists Daniel 10:6, which uses the terms in a form of poetic parallelism, "...his face was like the appearance of lightning (*bārāq*) and his eyes were like torches of fire (*k'elappîdê 'ēš*)."²⁸⁵ This being's voice also booms like a multitude of people, much like the sound of thunder. In similar parallel arrangement, Nahum 2:5 uses the terms in reference

²⁸⁴ Bedenbender, "Biene," 51-52.

²⁸⁵ Bedenbender also lists other examples of *lappîdê 'ēš* "torch of fire" in Gen 15:17 and Zech 12:6 (Bedenbender, "Biene," 51-52).

to battle, “The chariots act madly in the streets, rushing to and fro in the plazas; they appear like torches (*kallappîdim*), they run fast like lightning (*kabbērāqîm*).” In Ezekiel 1:13, it seems that the flaming torches serve as the source for the bright effect of the lightning:

And the likeness of the living creatures had the appearance of coals of fire, burning like the appearance of torches (*hallappîdim*), and she (the fire) moved to and fro between the living things. And the fire had a brightness, and lightning (*bārāq*) came out from the fire.

These examples demonstrate that the terms *bārāq* and *lappîd* often accompany each other in the biblical text, are used in parallel, can be exchanged for one another, and perhaps demonstrate that one (*lappîd*) serves as the initiating source for the other (*bārāq*). Thus, it is no coincidence that Deborah, the woman of torches, and Baraq make a perfect pair.²⁸⁶ She initiates Baraq’s action, and he insists that she accompany him. And like divinely ordained cosmic forces, they participate together in the battle that YHWH wages against Sisera’s army. Literarily, the two are inextricably connected; the lightning does not exist without the fire.²⁸⁷

If Deborah and Baraq are to be a pair, then Baraq’s words in 4:8 are even more nebulous and ripe with possibilities for interpretation than scholars have previously argued. Baraq could be doubting Deborah, her words, and her abilities as a prophet. Perhaps his request for her presence is a way of testing her, and he could be displaying his own insecurity. As this chapter argues, Baraq is likely indicating that he needs her divination abilities to know the best time to enter battle.²⁸⁸ But considering the linguistic

²⁸⁶ This linkage is a helpful hypothesis for the purpose of this story, but it is not explicit in the Judges text.

²⁸⁷ See also Spronk, “Deborah,” 239.

²⁸⁸ Olson emphasizes the ambiguity in Baraq’s request for Deborah’s presence, but there is no explicit evaluation of his statement and thus, the reader is left wondering about his motivations (Olson, *NIB* 2:780).

connection between *bārāq* and *lappîd*, Baraq's statement might not be about the intention of *going* but instead references the necessity of both Deborah and Baraq being present, as a pair, in the battle. In other words, he could be saying, "If you, the woman of fire, are there, then I, the man of lightning, will be there. But if you aren't there, I won't be there." Essentially, "It is not possible for me to be fully present and effective without you." Thus, the narrator could be having Baraq implicitly state that in this divinely designed cosmic battle, the lightning and torch, as the Lord's instruments, are inseparable. In this way, the narrator has Baraq's words insinuate that this is the Lord's battle and that the Lord is the deliverer. These two characters are not the real "judges" who deliver Israel. YHWH is the ultimate Judge.

This pairing of characters and the connotations of their names should not be ignored. But before this chapter moves into discussing these elements of the dialogue, it is necessary to briefly return to the implications of this aspect of Deborah's name. While the meaning of *'ēšet lappîdôt* might best denote Deborah as a "woman of torches" rather than the "wife of Lappidoth," this appellation carries a troublesome connotation. As a woman potentially linked to pyromancy, the narrative once again highlights (as with her location of judging and her role as a prophetess) that this woman operates outside of typical and approved Yahwistic practices. She could easily be met with disapproving scrutiny. Yet, the narrative does not criticize her divination abilities. Instead, Baraq, the male protagonist in the narrative, unquestionably makes use of her gifts in order to benefit Israel. He expects

Deborah's response is also ambiguous (780). "The narrative is intentionally drawing the reader in to ponder the ambiguous possibilities in the statements of these two characters...ambiguity is part of a larger narrative strategy that builds suspense..." (780).

that she will interpret smoke and flames and tell him when, where and how he should enter battle. She enters into the masculine world of warfare.

She holds an ambiguous, and arguably unconventional, relationship to this male. This relationship, as well as her designations, lead to questions about Deborah's "proper" and expected place as a woman (according to androcentric standards). The reader continues to wonder: To what man is Deborah connected? Is she married? And if she is "a mother in Israel," she is no legitimate mother at all without a son or husband by her side. The text might not explicitly criticize this very public woman who has divine powers and authority over her people, but she is still implicitly suspect as she functions outside of expected gender roles.²⁸⁹ This patriarchal subtext within the narrator's implicit evaluation impacts the narratological perspective on her words and actions.

C. A Dialogical Relationship

The narrative scenes that involve Deborah and Baraq highlight the primarily dialogical relationship between the two characters. The character analysis above has already mentioned some of the discourse between Deborah and Baraq, but special attention to their conversation demonstrates the power and authority of women's voices in Judges 4 and 5 and shows how the women interact and contrast with their male counterparts. The dialogue in the scenes with Deborah and Baraq not only establishes Deborah's vocal authority, but also subtly destabilizes her authority, thus rendering ambiguous impressions of Deborah.

²⁸⁹ Christianson comments on how the book of Judges is "riddled with anxiety over construction of gender;" Baraq is militarily summoned by a woman and Deborah as judge and summoner of Baraq is all but dressed in men's clothes (Christianson, "Big Sleep," 532).

A quick overview of speech in the scenes of Deborah and Baraq demonstrates Deborah's primacy in the narrative. Deborah is first to speak in the narrative, and she speaks three separate times: twice in reporting YHWH's message (vv. 6-7 and 14) and once in response to Baraq's request (v. 9). Baraq speaks only once, very briefly, and his words are in response to Deborah's message (v. 8). Deborah's speeches are generally long, and she indicates her knowledge of YHWH's actions by providing two rhetorical questions beginning with *hālō'* (vv. 6 and 14). Deborah directs Baraq by relaying a divine message in vv. 6-7 and making it clear when it is time for Baraq to fight in v.14. In both cases, she supplies justification for her named roles of prophetess and pyromancer (*'ēšet lappîdôt.*).

1. Verse 9: 'epes and Irony

Deborah's response in v. 9 to Baraq's request, "If you go, I will go" in v. 8, is rich with potential meaning. Brenner argues that Deborah's words in v.9 are self-deprecating and potentially subverts her power and authority.²⁹⁰ Perhaps this is true, but more can be said about her words. Deborah's response warns Baraq of his loss of glory; it foretells the future; it notes the importance of women in this battle; and it is ironic in ways of which even Deborah is unaware. She responds, "Surely I will go with you, *but/however* it will not be that you will have your glory on the way that you are going. Rather, in the hand of a woman the Lord will sell Sisera."

Many scholars read Deborah's words as a consequence for Baraq's request of her presence in v. 8.²⁹¹ In this way, Deborah claims that if a woman joins Baraq in battle, then a

²⁹⁰ Brenner, "Triangle," 131.

²⁹¹ Webb seems to think that the prophetic word of YHWH comes through Deborah to summon Baraq to fulfill the unambiguous role of "savior," but in the end, he "can only stand and stare" and receive his punishment for trying to manipulate Deborah (Webb, *Judges*, 134 and 137). Thus, Baraq was supposed to be the savior, but loses this honor to Jael because he misuses YHWH's prophet. Yee argues for gender differences in an honor/shame system such that "Baraq is shamed by Deborah in his refusal to go into battle without her" and

woman will take the glory that should be intended for him. The Hebrew connecting word *'epes* links the two parts of Deborah's response in v.9. It appears that with the use of this linking word, Deborah connects the two phrases. There will be unfavorable consequences that are listed in the second phrase (i.e. that Baraq will not receive the glory and a woman will) if the first phrase (i.e. that Deborah goes with Baraq) takes place. The Greek text does not reflect this strange Hebrew word, and thus offers a different nuance of meaning.

Instead of the equivalent of *'epes*, the Greek text includes the Greek imperative *ginōske*, "Know." This Greek text lacks the consequence that is in the Hebrew version when the linking term, "however/but," is not present. And thus, Deborah's words could be read as two independent and unrelated statements. First, Deborah says, "Of course I will go with you." But then she supplies extra information for which Baraq may not have been aware, "Know that it will not be that you will have your glory on the way that you are going. Rather, in the hand of a woman the Lord will sell Sisera." It is not necessarily a consequence that a woman receives the glory; this is simply another element of the divinely ordained unfolding of events. And if one understands that Deborah and Baraq make an inseparable pair and they necessarily go together in the Lord's cosmic battle, then, again, 4:8 need not be read as Deborah giving Baraq a consequence for his request but instead her divinely inspired knowledge of the events that will unfold.²⁹²

Beyond Deborah's ambiguous statement, as either an indictment against Baraq that he lacks in heroism and causes his own glory to suffer *or* as simply another indication of

then again shamed by Jael when he confronts the reality that Sisera was killed by the hands of a woman and not by his own (Yee, "By the Hand," 115). Similarly, Bal argues that the story is a reflection on what it means "to be or not to be a man" (Bal, *Death*, 118). Mayfield describes Baraq as "a frightened frail character in a story dominated by a woman," the true warrior and real judge of the story (Mayfield, "Accounts," 370).

²⁹² Niditch also argues that Baraq's actions are not cowardly. He "is wise to know that victory comes with the presence of God's favorite" (Niditch, *Judges*, 65).

Deborah's divine knowledge, Deborah's words are also preminatory and ironic. Because the narrator has not yet introduced another woman into the story, has highlighted Deborah's multiple talents, and has indicated that she will accompany Baraq in war, the reader has every reason to think that Deborah *would* be the woman in whose hands the Lord will sell Sisera. Neither she nor the reader knows that another woman will enter the picture. When the reader encounters Jael, the irony becomes apparent. Deborah's words are completely correct but she is not the woman in whose hands the Lord will sell Sisera. Unbeknownst to Deborah, Jael will be the woman to finally defeat Sisera.²⁹³

Deborah's statement in v. 9 also reveals another element of irony within her character's preminatory abilities. She does not realize the full meaning of her relayed divine message. On one hand, Baraq would not have any glory or recognition at all if it wasn't for her (i.e. Deborah). On the other hand, Baraq's glory is incomplete and threatened because of another woman (i.e. Jael). Both women in the narrative, Deborah and Jael, impact Baraq's glory.

Much like the potential multiplicity in meaning of Deborah as the *'ēšet lappîdôt*, the potential of Deborah's response in v. 9 is wholly and fruitfully ambiguous. Murray argues that there is a sense in which both Deborah and Jael are the woman of v.9: "Deborah, by 'subjugating' Baraq, effectively achieves the victory over Sisera's forces; Jael by achieving the victory over Sisera, effectively subjugates Baraq."²⁹⁴ As a consequence, Deborah's words challenge a man's heroism and contend that a woman can threaten a man's glory.

²⁹³ Deborah's ambiguous words correspond with her character as she utters a prophecy which is fulfilled by Jael's actions in the last part of the narrative (Elie Assis, "'The Hand of a Woman': Deborah and Yael [Judges 4]," *JHebS* 5 [2005]: 1-12). So, the comprehensive description of Sisera's assassination by Jael is meant to demonstrate the attainment of Deborah's prophecy and to focus on the prophetic nature of her character (Assis, "Hand," 11-12).

²⁹⁴ D.F. Murray, "Narrative Structure and Technique in the Deborah-Baraq Story, Judges 4:4-22," in *Studies of the Historical Books of the OT* (ed. J.A. Emerton; vol. 30 of VTSup; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 155-189.

Her words also highlight her special abilities, note the impact of women participating in war, and argue that the Lord orchestrates and participates in human events and battles. Her words also bear more meaning than is immediately obvious (to Deborah, Baraq, and the reader).

2. Whose hand?

Greater confusion in meaning exists in Deborah's words to Baraq. In verses 6-7, Deborah begins with a rhetorical question about the Lord's command and ends with a promise to Baraq, "I will deliver him into your hand (*ûnětattîhû bëyādekā*)." It has already been made apparent that Deborah's next words, her response to Baraq in v. 9, claim, "In the hand of a woman the Lord will sell (*yimkōr*) Sisera." When Deborah gives the second rhetorical question and instructs Baraq to enter battle, she includes, "For this is the day the Lord delivered (*nātan*) Sisera into your hand." The question then is, "Into *whose* hand will Sisera fall?" Is Deborah wrong or confused, or is she simply giving a complicated account of future events? If the latter is the case, then is there a noticeable difference between the verbal roots *mkr* and *ntn*? For it seems that Sisera will be *sold* (*mkr*) into a woman's hand (i.e. Jael's hand) but *delivered* (*ntn*) into Baraq's hand.

Early in Judges, these terms are used together in parallel form. Judges 2:14 contains, "The Anger of the Lord kindled against Israel, and he gave them (*wayyittēnēm*) into the hand of plunderers and they plundered them. And he sold them (*wayyimēkrēm*) into the hand of the ones hostile to them from all around..." As is indicated by this parallel form, the two terms can be used interchangeably as a way of demonstrating how the Lord permits or orchestrates the Israelites to fall under the power of enemy rulers. That an item, individual, or a group of people could be "given" or "delivered" (*ntn*) to someone or into someone's

hands occurs much more frequently than does the “to sell” (*mkṛ*) in the Hebrew Bible in general, and in the book of Judges specifically. A sampling of various items that are “given/delivered” throughout the book of Judges includes land (1:2), property (1:15), women/daughters (1:12, 3:6, and 21:7), people in general (2:23), Israelites (2:14), enemies (1:4 and 3:28), and even items like milk (5:25), horns and empty jars (7:16), bread (8:5), earrings as booty (8:24 and 25), money (9:4, 16:5, 17:4 and 10), honey (14:9), and sheets/clothes (14:12, 13 and 19). The most frequent usage in Judges clearly has to do with delivering a group of people (whether Israel or her enemies) into someone’s hands.²⁹⁵ And most often the Lord is responsible for this transaction. Thus, it is not surprising that *ntn* would be associated with the Israelite commander Baraq. In this way, Baraq seems to execute the typical pattern of deliverance in Judges by a military leader. He functions as the narrative’s “judge” much like the other judges in the book. Deborah indicates that if Baraq executes the command of the Lord, then he can expect to receive the anticipated reward from the Lord, the deliverance of the enemy commander Sisera into his hand.

But Deborah’s apparently contradictory statement that “In the hand of a woman the Lord will sell (*yimkōr*) Sisera,” challenges the expectation that Baraq will be the story’s recognized hero. Consideration of the use of the root *mkṛ* throughout the Hebrew Bible and the book of Judges renders the necessity of a close look at Deborah’s sudden interjection that Sisera will be sold into a *woman’s* hands.

The root *mkṛ* carries similar connotations to *ntn* throughout the Hebrew Bible. The term often has to do with selling slaves (Deut 15:12), YHWH selling his people and often

²⁹⁵ 1:4, 2:23, 3:28, 4:7, 4:14, 6:1, 6:13, 7:2, 7:7, 7:9, 7:14, 7:15, 8:3, 8:7, 9:29, 11:9, 11:21, 11:30, 11:32, 12:3, 13:1, 15:12, 15:13, 15:18, 16:23 and 24, 20:13, 20:28 all include reference to delivering one group to the enemy.

the selling of YHWH's people entirely into their enemies' power, selling of possession/property/land, and women sold in marriage (Gen 31:14-15). *Mkr* is also used in a similar way to *ntn* throughout the book of Judges, though with less frequency than *ntn*. The parallel usage of the terms in Judges 2:14 is listed above. In Judges 3:8, YHWH became angry and sold (*wayyimkĕrēm*) the Israelites into the hand of a foreign king so that they served this king for 8 years. Although YHWH's anger is not mentioned, the narrator's introduction claims that "the Lord sold them (*wayyimkĕrēm*)(the Israelites) into the hand of Jabin, King of Canaan" in 4:2. Then the narrator provides Deborah's words in 4:9, "In the hand of a woman, the Lord will sell Sisera." Judges 10:7 contains the last example of the root *mkr* in Judges. The Lord's anger returns and the Israelites are sold to the Philistines and Ammonites. Thus, on the surface, it seems like the roots *mkr* and *ntn* follow similar usages and meaning throughout Judges and the Hebrew Bible.

Although similar usages and meanings of *mkr* and *ntn* are used throughout Judges and the Hebrew Bible, gender differences in the utilization of *mkr* should be noted. As has been stated, both *mkr* and *ntn* sometimes refer to the passing on of women or daughters into marriage arrangements. Women very rarely "sell" anything; they are often objects to be sold.²⁹⁶ Nevertheless, a few exceptions exist. "Naomi, the one returning from the country of Moab, is selling/sold (*mokĕrā*) the portion of the brother Elimelech's land" in Ruth 4:3. In 2 Kings 4:1-7, a poor widow comes to Elisha when creditors threaten to take her sons for slaves. Elisha uses all that she has, namely a pot of oil, and multiplies the oil. In 2 Kings 4:7, "She came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go and sell the oil and repay your debt, and you and your children will live on the remainder." Both Naomi who has neither

²⁹⁶ Leviticus 25 references the processes by which men sell property, but women are entirely excluded from participating in commerce in this way.

husband nor son and the poor woman whose husband is dead and whose sons face slavery are women who sell property in extraordinary and dire circumstances. While the conditions might be unusual, the woman's survival requires the selling of their items. These women use what they have to make a way out of no way. This "selling" is about immediate survival and ensuring future survival.

The Hebrew Bible also portrays both exceptional and questionable women participating in commerce even outside of seemingly dire circumstances. The wife of noble character in Proverbs 31 gives to the poor, has an important husband, and sells her items. Proverbs 31:24 uses *mkr* and *ntn* in parallel form with, "She makes a linen garment, and she sells (*wattimkōr*) it, and she gives (*nātēnâ*) a belt to the merchant."

While some women sell property in extreme and desperate circumstances and others are noble women who participate in legitimate commerce, the Hebrew bible also reflects some negative appraisals on the ways in which women "sell." Nahum 3:4 provides, "Because of the multitude of fornications of the harlot, (who is) pleasant with grace, a mistress of sorcery, the one who sold (*hamōkeret*) nations with her fornications and clans with her sorceries." In this case, a woman's participation in commerce links her directly to prostitution. This verse also demonstrates that a woman's questionable business can have political ramifications; she has the ability to overpower entire nations and clans with her problematic practices. Thus, the few instances in which women participate in "selling" items yield complicated evaluations of women's participation in commerce. When in desperate situations or in proper circumstances, women may sell. But if there exists a hint of indecent proceedings or some sort of potential threat, the text might look upon women "selling" with suspicion.

In all of these cases, women complete the act of “selling.” Never is something sold to a woman; never do women receive the sold item. But in the case of Deborah’s statement in 4:9, the Lord sells Sisera into the hand of a woman. When typical gender relations expect that women are sold in marriage to a man, here a *man* is sold into the hand of a woman. In terms of politics and war, the selling of Israelites, enemies, groups or nations remains a matter settled by men and the Lord. Thus, in Judges 4:9, the reader experiences a strange blending of associations of *mk* related to gender-specific arrangements and political maneuvers.

Another related point about Deborah’s confusion about the “hands” that will receive Sisera deserves mention. As Judges 2:14 demonstrates that *mk* and *ntn* can be used interchangeably and in parallel usage, it can be argued that rather than deciding if *either* the woman about whom Deborah unknowingly speaks (i.e. Jael) or Baraq will receive the recognition, perhaps *both* of these characters will share the recognition for Sisera’s defeat. Furthermore, Deborah’s words indicate that she might understand *her* hands to be the ones in which Sisera is sold. Thus, the narrator’s use of Deborah’s seemingly confused, contradictory and ironic statement about the “hands” that will receive Sisera underscores how all three of these characters participate in Sisera’s defeat. All three act, to some extent, in the typical role of judge for the story.²⁹⁷ But, in fact, none of them is the true judge. Ultimately, this is YHWH’s battle, and Deborah, Baraq, and Jael are willing participants in the unfolding divine drama.

Deborah’s words are pregnant with potential meaning and destabilize expectations. Perhaps the narrator gives her intentionally vague words, so that the reader might witness

²⁹⁷ Olson similarly argues that they are all judge-like figures, but none stand alone in delivering Israel (Olson, *NIB* 2:774 and 780). See also Mayfield, “Accounts,” 311.

the irony unfold. Also, Deborah's words may reveal more than she actually knows.²⁹⁸

Deborah's words hint that multiple characters will participate in the role of judge, highlighting that humans are merely instruments for the true divine Judge. Most notably and unexpectedly, Judges 4 and 5 establish that women can be integral to YHWH's work in battle. And men can be sold into women's hands.

III. Jael and Sisera

As will be explained in this next section, Jael joins the ranks of the women in the Hebrew Bible who experience dire circumstances. In her own complicated way, Jael embodies both the positive and negative connotations carried by various women associated with *mk̄r*. While she exists amongst complicated alliances and loyalties to various groups, this woman is in a difficult situation and must carve out her own way out of no way. The narrative perspective treats her as both desirable (i.e. a woman who benefits Israel) and potentially treacherous (i.e. a woman who enslaves a man with her wiles). Jael's portion of the narrative follows Deborah's prediction; roles between the male and female characters are reversed as the Lord orchestrates a way to "sell" Sisera into the hand of this woman. A woman, in grim circumstances, gains possession of a man. She becomes responsible for him like a mother is to a child. Jael and Sisera constitute the second gendered pair of the story.

Unlike Deborah and Baraq's primarily dialogical interactions, the scene with Sisera and Jael focuses on physical action and only contains a small amount of dialogue.²⁹⁹ In this

²⁹⁸ See Boling, *Judges*, 96.

²⁹⁹ Deborah's voice and Jael's action dominate the narrative (Sasson, "Breeder," 342). The dominant speaking voice of the poem belongs to a woman and is female oriented, but this is in contradistinction to the prose

scene, Jael dominates Sisera and overpowers him in nurturing and violent ways. Before the narrative introduces Jael, the reader gains knowledge about the enemy commander.

A. The Powerful Canaanite Commander

Sisera is an unknown name and his place of association, *ḥārōšet-haggôyim*, is also unknown.³⁰⁰ The same name is given as the commander of Jabin's army in Hazor in 1 Samuel 12:9. All of these enemies are viewed as Israel's oppressors sent by the Lord because the Israelites have sinned and, in the case of 1 Samuel, have served Baal and Asherah. A similar usage and reference to oppressors is provided in Psalm 83:10 when "Sisera" is used in, "Do to them as in Midian, like Sisera, like Jabin, at the Wadi Kishon." Sisera is a name included in a list of the children going into exile in Ezra 2:53 and Nehemiah 7:55.

While his actual name might not provide much information, the narrator includes important information about Sisera as a character in the narrative. He participates in the oppression of the Israelites as the commander of Jabin's army. Even though kings were heads of armed forces, they often had commanders who reported directly to the king in the case of large empires and specialized warfare.³⁰¹ The narrative twice repeats a comment about the commander Sisera's vast army. In 4:3, the reader learns that Sisera has 900 chariots of iron. This dwarfs Pharaoh's still very impressive army that had 600 chariots.

(Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes, "Mothers and a Mediator in the Song of Deborah," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 110-115.

³⁰⁰ Moore claims that *ḥārōšet-haggôyim* probably preserves the memory of an older invasion, is a foreign name that has been distorted, and is the name of a particular people or tribe (Moore, *Critical Edition*, 30). Sasson suggests that *ḥārōšet-haggôyim* is likely a garrison area only mentioned here (Sasson, *Judges*, 253). Sisera's name seems to be non-Semitic (unlike Jabin), but "ssr" does appear on an Aramaic seal (Moore, *Critical Edition*, 31). Sasson argues that it is hard to know what kind of name Sisera is, even though people try to connect it to languages or ethnic groups (Sasson, *Judges*, 254).

³⁰¹ Sasson, *Judges*, 253.

The narration of events repeats the emphasis on Sisera's 900 chariots of iron in 4:13. Importantly, these chariots can do much damage. And the impressive numbers contrast Baraq's meager army. This stark disparity highlights Israelite success as a divine victory for YHWH. Only divine powers could enable such a small human coalition to defeat such a vast and powerful army. The power behind Sisera, represented both in the backing by King Jabin and the impressive military resources, also juxtaposes the vulnerability and isolation experienced by his his female counterpart, Jael.

B. The Woman of Profit and the Wife of Heber

Jael's name means "mountain-goat" or "Steinbock/Capricorn," and the root *yā'al* from which her name derives means "profit, avail, and benefit."³⁰² But *yā'al* is most often used in a negative sense or in a question implying a negative outcome. Often the root is used in reference to that which is *unprofitable*, especially regarding the worship of idols or false gods.³⁰³ The use of *yā'al* in Isaiah 47:12 does not contain a negative term, but the context of enchantments and wickedness is obviously negative. Much less frequently does the term refer to general gain or profit (e.g. Job 21:15 and Job 35:3). Isaiah 48:17 has, "Thus said the Lord your Redeemer, 'The Holy One of Israel: I the Lord am your God, teaching you for profit (*l'ḥû'îl*), leading you in the way you will/should go.'" Thus, Jael's name carries a degree of ambiguity. Her name clearly has connotations of profit and benefit, yet the root used to form her name is most often used in a negative sense. One is left wondering to what

³⁰² See Stamm, "Hebräische Frauennamen," 329. See also Psalm 104:18, 1 Sam 24:3, Job 39:1.

³⁰³ For examples of negative usages of the root, see 1 Sam 12:21, Job 15:3, Job 30:13, Proverbs 10:2, Proverbs 11:4, Isaiah 30:5 and 6, Isaiah 44:9 and 10, Isaiah 57:12, Jeremiah 2:8, Jeremiah 2:11, Jeremiah 7:8, Jeremiah 12:13, Jeremiah 16:19, Jeremiah 23:32, and Habakkuk 2:18.

extent is this woman really profitable? Who benefits or gains profit from this woman and her actions?

When Jael is introduced in 4:17, the reader learns that she is Heber the Kenite's wife. In a brief digression from the main storyline involving Deborah and Baraq, the narrative introduces Heber the Kenite in 4:11. The Kenites are mentioned throughout the Hebrew Bible, within a list of people groups (Genesis 15:19), in connection with the Amalekites (Numbers 24:21 and 1 Samuel 15:6), and in reference to their territory (1 Samuel 27:10 and 1 Samuel 30:29). According to 1 Samuel 15:6, the Kenites demonstrate *hesed* to all of Israel, and passages in Judges (1:16 and here in 4:11) seem to indicate that the Kenites are a group descended from Moses' father-in-law and have been in an alliance with the Israelites. Importantly, this particular Kenite has chosen to "divide from" (*niprodd*) the other Kenites and pitch his tent near Kedesh. The impetus for this division is never provided, but the reader begins to understand the political ramifications and building complication of the story when it is later stated that there existed a covenantal relationship between Jabin the King of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite in 4:17.

This "division" from the Kenites, and subsequently the Israelites, deserves consideration in light of Heber's name. "Heber" is mentioned three times in this story. In 4:11, the narrative scene shifts to focus on Heber, a Kenite who leaves his alliance and sets up camp near Kedesh. Then, the narrator introduces Jael, his wife, and the reader learns of a new political alliance Heber has with Jabin (4:17). Heber receives mention one final time when Jael, who is named as his wife, takes a tent peg with the intent to kill Sisera in 4:21. Heber's name means "to unite," as one might join together with another or form alliances. Related words imply "accompaniment" and "association." It is therefore ironic that a Kenite

man, who has a long-standing alliance with the Israelites and whose name means “united,” would be characterized in this story by his name’s antonym “to divide” (*pārad*). Much like the vague connotations regarding profit in Jael’s name, one might wonder how reliable is this “uniting” man who so quickly divides from his own people? In a matter of three words, *wēḥeber haqênî niprođ* (“and Heber the Kenite was dividing”), instability surrounding this character is quickly established.

Heber’s name and action follows a pattern in the Hebrew Bible that frequently links the juxtaposition of “uniting” and “dividing.” Union and division can be demonstrated in vivid images. Ezekiel 1:11 uses the same roots *ḥābar* and *pārad* to describe winged heavenly beings, “...And their wings were divided/spread out (*pērūdôt*) from above, for each (creature) had two (wings), uniting (*hōbrôt*) to each other, and two were covering their bodies.”³⁰⁴ Synonyms to both *ḥābar* and *pārad* are also used interchangeably in the Hebrew bible in order to highlight the contrast between unions and divisions. Job 40:30 uses *ḥābar* and *hāṣah* (to divide) in parallel form in, “Will the partners/companions (*ḥabbārîm*) trade over it? Will they divide (*yehšûḥû*) it between the merchants?”³⁰⁵

Often, verses that make use of *ḥābar* and *pārad* link themes related to political deceit, religious idolatry, and sexual or familial infidelity. Hosea 4:14 provides, “I will not punish your daughters when they prostitute, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go aside (*yēpārēdû*, perhaps “make a separation”) with whores, and sacrifice with temple prostitutes, thus a people without understanding will be thrust down.” Later, Hosea 4:17 indicates that Ephraim is joined (using *ḥābûr*) to idols, and thus the rest of Israel should leave him alone (or let him alone). Daniel 11:23 depicts an

³⁰⁴ See Ezekiel 1:9 for another image of wings touching or joining together.

³⁰⁵ See also Job 41:9 where *dābaq* (to cleave/keep close), instead of *ḥābar*, contrasts *pārad*.

alliance that falls into subsequent division because of deceit, “And from the uniting (*hītēḥabbērūt*) with him, he did treachery/deceit...” Similar themes relating to political alliances and familial relationships run throughout the book of Judges, and often these themes become intertwined. The book of Judges continues to raise questions about an individual or group’s political or familial loyalty, and movements between unity and division occur throughout the book. Thus, as Judges 20:11 indicates with “all of the Israelites gathered against the city, knit together as one man” the book is very interested in alliances and separation, coming together and separating apart, and how alliances *should* work versus how they *actually* work. Heber’s character, perhaps intentionally by the narrator yet unbeknownst to the characters, continues the union and division contrast while also perpetuating themes involving both political and familial relationships.

Heber’s questionable political alliances bear implications for his marital relationship. Jael, identified twice as Heber’s wife in 4:17 and 4:21, takes action in light of her husband’s political maneuvers.³⁰⁶ However, it is important to note that when Jael exits her tent to come out and meet the men who are not her husband (i.e. Sisera in 4:18 and Baraq in 4:22), the narrator only names her as “Jael” and does not identify her as the “wife of Heber (the Kenite).” In a subtle nod toward her autonomy, the reader can treat Jael on her own terms. After all, in terms of the poetry, Heber is not known at all except in reference to Jael. She receives the first mention, and then he is briefly referenced. The narrator does not comment on Jael’s ethnic status or to what group she might hold loyalty. As the wife of a man who recently broke from his traditional alliance with the Kenites and Israelites and made an alliance with Israel’s enemy, Jael might still have ties to the Kenites

³⁰⁶ She is also identified as “wife of Heber the Kenite” in the poetry of 5:24. Moore claims that this phrase is a gloss from 4:17 and completely destroys the balance of the poetic verse (Moore, *Critical Edition*, 37).

or Israelites. Or, Jael's allegiances could follow her husband's and 4:17 could indicate that Heber's entire encampment supports Jabin. If this is the case, one might expect in 4:17 that Heber's tent will serve as a refuge for the fleeing commander Sisera. But Jael does not act in accord with Heber's current loyalties. She could be acting in defiance of her husband's political alliance and might be maintaining her traditional Kenite/Israelite loyalties.³⁰⁷ Perhaps she exemplifies Israelite loyalty, regardless of her ethnic status. But with the defeated Canaanite commander on her doorstep, and the victorious Israelite army not far behind, Jael could simply be concerned about her own safety. Jael's motivations and allegiances remain unclear.³⁰⁸

C. A Physical Relationship

The scene in Jael's tent focuses especially on the physicality of the events, thus highlighting the defeat of a powerful commander at the hand of an unlikely woman. Much like how the dialogical interaction between Deborah and Baraq demonstrates the power and authority of women's voices in this narrative, the *limited* amount of dialogue between Sisera and Jael yields similar results. But the actions of and between the characters of Jael and Sisera most clearly articulate a reversal of expected power dynamics. Also, just as the narrator provides a complicated evaluation for Deborah, the narrator leaves the reader with mixed feelings about the character of Jael.

³⁰⁷ For a discussion on the ambiguity of Jael's motivations see also Niditch, *Judges*, 65-66 and Olson, *NIB* 2:782.

³⁰⁸ No matter the political or economic alliance between her husband and the defeated commander, it is clear that Jael is a woman caught in the middle (Fewell, "Judges," 75). Niditch argues that Jael is a twist on the traditional motif of the woman who hides the soldiers (e.g. Rahab in Joshua 2 and Ahimaaz in 2 Samuel 17:17-20) (Niditch, *Judges*, 65-66). "The 'helper' turns out to be an assassin in an artful transformation of the 'the woman who hides and saves' into the motif of 'the iron fist in the velvet glove'" (66).

Slight differences exist between the descriptions of events in Jael's tent in chapters 4 and 5, but Jael's actions still overshadow Sisera's actions. She takes initiative in chapter 4, and the narrator contrasts her with Sisera, who has limited action and becomes like a child. In chapter 5, Sisera initiates the action in the scene, but Jael still overpowers him, and his subsequent activities are only in response to her actions. When Sisera is in her tent, Jael exhibits two patterns of behavior that completely contrast one another. In both chapters 4 and 5, Jael commands the scene and operates as a nurturing mother and then suddenly and violently kills Sisera.

1. Nurturing a Child

Jael's initiative and movement towards control juxtaposes Sisera's yielding of control. As Sisera concedes his power, he activates Jael's capacity to control. In 4:18, Jael comes out to meet Sisera before he approaches her tent. She also speaks to him before he has a chance to make a request. The same pattern is repeated when Baraq approaches her tent. She comes out to meet Baraq and she speaks to him before he has a chance to say anything. Jael's first words to Sisera mark the contrast between how one might treat a commander of an army and how Jael eventually treats him. She first exhibits much deference when she requests Sisera to "turn aside" (*sûrâ*) to her. She calls him "my Lord," which is a sign of total respect. But she follows these imperatives with another, "Do not be afraid" (*'al-tîrâ*). This phrase betrays a lack of respect, for a military commander would not display fear.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ Assis remarks that her request is fraught with ambiguity, and it isn't clear if she is showing hospitality or a promise of sexual encounter (Assis, "Hand," 9).

Jael's assertion of power at first looks much like a mother caring for a child.³¹⁰ She covers him, and essentially "tucks him in." It isn't exactly clear what this "blanket" (*šēmîkâ*) is in v. 18, and versions of the text *and* scholars disagree.³¹¹ One Greek version uses *epibolaiō*, and thus gives the general idea of a "throwing or laying on" or "that which is laid on."³¹² Other Greek versions have *peribolē*, coming from *paribolē/perbolaion* "anything which is thrown round, a covering." Euripedes uses the term for "corpse-clothes;" Clericus suggests a "wrapper/mantle," which could be a square piece of cloth worn as an outer garment.³¹³ It could also be a covering for sleep, like a bed-covering.³¹⁴ Some scholars go so far as saying that Jael covered Sisera with herself, as in a sexual advance.³¹⁵ Sexual imagery might be present, but the narrative focuses much more on mothering themes than sexual themes.³¹⁶ A motherhood theme runs strongly throughout the versions of the tale in both chapters 4 and 5. Thus, the way in which a mother might cover a child in a blanket or piece of cloth represents the best option for an explanation of *šēmîkâ*.

Jael's act of covering requires more attention than the actual material that she uses to cover. 4:18 first claims that Jael covers Sisera, and then 4:19 seems to repeat the action.

³¹⁰ See also Fewell and Gunn, "Controlling," 393. Sasson draws a parallel in the OB version of the Gilgamesh Epic wherein the woman Shamhat mothers the adult male Enkidu and leads him into the human world (Sasson, "Breeder, 344).

³¹¹ Boling says the word is unclear and could be a "fly-net" (Boling, *Judges*, 97).

³¹² See *peribolē* in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 624. See Moore, *Critical Edition*, 31.

³¹³ See Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 624; Moore, *Critical Edition*, 31 and "*šēmîkâ*," BDB 971.

³¹⁴ "*šēmîkâ*," BDB 971.

³¹⁵ Reis insists that Jael's defeat of Sisera is about sex and a woman's sexual dominance over man, and claims that the unknown *hapax legomenon* is not a blanket or rug but Jael's body (Reis, "Uncovering," 25 and 28). See Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 37-38. Klein argues that Jael tires out Sisera with sex. See also Assis, "Hand," 10. Christianson identifies Jael as a "femme fatale" as she is dangerous in her deception and deviance, but she also represents pleasure in that which is exotic and sexualized (Christianson, "Big Sleep," 535-536). Kelen also highlights Jael's cunning and fearlessness but calls her "soft and graceful (*souple et gracieuse*)" (Kelen, *Les femmes*, 126). Cf. Brenne for a discussion that focuses more on the mothering elements of the scene than the sexual flavor of Sisera's death scene (Brenner, "Triangle," 133).

³¹⁶ See Fewell and Gunn, "Controlling," 392.

In fact, Jael does not cover Sisera twice. This is one example of a narrative tendency to slow down and reiterate actions in a scene.³¹⁷ After 4:18 states that Jael covers Sisera, v. 19 *goes back* to the scene's event and explains what she did before she covered the commander. Thus, v. 18 jumps ahead, and then v. 19 gives an account of all that Jael did before covering the man. This "covering" brackets the other "mothering" element in this scene, namely Jael's provision of milk. With this slowing down of the scene brought about by the repetition of Jael's covering of Sisera, the reader is forced to evaluate the *kind* of behavior she exhibits. The narrative never explicitly states, "And Jael acted like a mother to Sisera," but a device like this, that forces the reader to pay attention to her actions, leads the reader to come to such a conclusion.

To further contrast Jael's sudden lack of respect for the military man, Jael's imperatives stand out against Sisera's polite request for water in v. 19. He says, "Please give me (*hašĕqînî-nā*) some water for I am thirsty." While he might be displaying impeccable etiquette, a man of power need not demonstrate such niceties to this woman. Instead, *she* ought to give *him* due respect. Similarly, to further emphasize that her behavior is like that of a mother, Jael provides milk instead of the requested water.³¹⁸ One typically does not provide milk to quench thirst, and in fact, milk is most often provided to children for a drink.³¹⁹ Jael treats Sisera as a child, not the powerful military commander that he is. Brenner argues that when Jael offers milk, the narrator transfers symbols from male symbolism into female symbolism.³²⁰ Water is often construed as a "male" symbol (i.e. as a

³¹⁷ This was a helpful insight provided by Jack Sasson who demonstrated how the story employs the use of replay to depict and focus on the scene's actions.

³¹⁸ See also Van Dijk-Hemmes, "Mother," 112.

³¹⁹ Boling also comments on the soporific qualities of milk; in both accounts "she duped him and doped him" (Boling, *Judges*, 98).

³²⁰ Brenner, "Triangle," 132.

male waters the “female” ground), and thus Sisera asks for the masculine symbol of water but receives a female substitute.³²¹

When Sisera requests that Jael, “Stand at the entrance of the tent. If a man comes in and asks and the man says, ‘Is anyone here?’ Say, ‘No,’” the reader can presume that this great man is frazzled. The imperative that Sisera uses in the Hebrew is a masculine singular imperative (*ʾāmōd*), “Stand.” Various Syriac and Targum manuscripts correct this and supply the appropriate feminine singular imperative form. Moore states, “The masculine imperative addressed to a woman is anomalous.”³²² The incorrect form in the Hebrew could be an inadvertent slip or scribal error, but this error could also be intentionally ambiguous and difficult to reconcile. Even in his speech, Sisera surrenders his dominant position and manhood and ascribes it to this woman. Perhaps he is so exhausted that he doesn’t know what he is saying. It is also possible that the narrator recognizes the irony of this slip of the tongue. Consciously or not, Sisera’s words acknowledge the reversal of power and that the woman treats him like a child. And he is no longer a captain, but a scared kid asking a woman to keep guard over him.

Chapter 5 both continues and digresses with some of the themes in the narrative version of the tale. In contrast to chapter 4, Sisera rather than Jael initiates the scene’s action in 5:25 when he asks for water. Also in contrast to his display of deference and Jael’s sudden shift that displays a lack of respect in chapter 4, Jael continues to show respect to Sisera in the poetry of chapter 5. Chapter 5 contains no circumstance in which Jael shows respect and then tells Sisera, “Do not be afraid.” And he makes no request of Jael to watch at the entrance of the tent. She provides Sisera milk, namely curdled milk, in a chalice of royal

³²¹ Brenner, “Triangle,” 132.

³²² Moore, *Critical Edition*, 32.

things. Sisera never lies down in this scene. In this brief scene, Sisera maintains his dignity and is treated like a king.

However, in continuity with chapter 4, Jael's first actions in chapter 5 continue the feminine imagery specifically through the mothering theme. By providing milk for the commander despite his request for water, she cares for Sisera much like a mother would care for a child. Also, the way in which Sisera dies by Jael's hand in chapter 5 also continues the narratological use of feminine symbolism intermixed with masculinized violence.

2. Overpowering a Man

In both chapters 4 and 5, the scene with Jael and Sisera quickly shifts from a tone of nurturing and care to one of violence and murder. In this second part of the scene, Jael's actions continue to dominate the frame. After Sisera makes his request of Jael to stand at the entrance of the tent and deny his presence, it seems clear that Jael has no intention of obeying Sisera's command and stand at the threshold. She refuses to guard, refuses to obey, and has her own agenda in mind. In 4:21, Jael again takes initiative. She takes a peg, puts a hammer in her hand, quietly goes to Sisera and thrusts the peg into his temple. As the peg descends into the ground, Sisera sleeps. He becomes faint and then dies.

Chapter 5 relates a similar scene, though with different notable emphases. 5:26 provides:

Her hand reached for the tent peg³²³ and she cast her right hand to the workman's hammer. And she smote Sisera, she shattered his head, she crushed and she split through his temple. Between her feet, he bends down, he drops, he sprawls between her feet. He bends, he drops, where he bends, there he fell, crushed.

³²³ The Masoretic text actually contains the third person feminine plural form "they sent her hand to the tent peg." Many commentators say that this should be feminine singular (Moore, *Critical Edition*, 37).

This is all the more remarkable than chapter 4 since in chapter 5, Sisera has not been covered and does not appear to be lying down.³²⁴ Reaching for the peg and grabbing the workman's hammer must have been an impressively swift move by Jael with Sisera standing in the tent. The same verbs are used to describe the beating of horses' hooves in v. 22 (*holmû*) and Sisera's demise in v. 26 (*wěholmâ*). Also, Jael's violent actions are highlighted with the increasingly violent verbs (smote, shatter, crush, split).³²⁵ Sisera can do no more than succumb to Jael's aggression. One might read the last line of 5:26 as an unnecessary repetition of Sisera's final movements. Moore states that this "is an accidental repetition" which is lacking in other sources.³²⁶ However, it is very plausible that this is another instance in which the narrator employs a literary device to focus the reader's attention on a particular narrative element. The language "...he bends down, he drops, he sprawls...he bends, he drops, where he bends, there he fell, crushed" repeats the violent events as if the reader watches the scene like one might see a scene depicted in a movie.³²⁷ The motion gets replayed again and again in different speeds and from different vantage

³²⁴ Sasson similarly asserts that Sisera "takes the mortal blow standing up" (Sasson, "Breeder," 345). See also Fewell, "Judges," 76.

³²⁵ Taylor argues that the descriptions of Jael in the poetry evokes recollections of the Canaanite goddess Athtart as both are "crushers of the skull" (J. Glen Taylor, "The Song of Deborah and Two Canaanite Goddesses," *JOT* 23 [1982]: 99-108). Taylor cites the cognate evidence *tdrky* in the war cry of v. 21c and *drkt* for "dominion," and thus provides an immediate context that coincides with the Ugaritic text in which Yamm challenges Baal's dominion and Athtart is summoned to be a head crusher (102). He also cites more tentative parallels as Athtart is associated with hunting and wild goats, and Jael's name similarly implies a mountain goat (103).

Ackerman draws more parallels with Canaanite deities and argues that Deborah parallels Anat, and Jael is a character conceived "in the vein of Anat." This is because Anat is a warrior goddess and both Deborah and Jael are associated with general exploits of war (Ackerman, *Warrior*, 59). See also S. G. Dempster. "Mythology and History in the Song of Deborah," *WTJ* 41 (1978): 33-53. However, Ackerman argues that there is also a connection between Aqhat and the Jael/Sisera episode. In Aqhat's tale, he sits in his tent eating when Anat's henchman, Yatpan, swoops down and kills Aqhat by hitting him on the head (Ackerman, *Warrior*, 58-60).

³²⁶ Moore, *Critical Edition*, 38.

³²⁷ See also Sasson, "Breeder," 345.

points.³²⁸ This part of the poem is an “oddly dreamlike flashback that replays the narrative’s most decisive moment in slow motion, lingering on its violence.”³²⁹ Thus, while the actions of killing Sisera are reiterated in chapter 5 and the narrator of chapter 4 repeats the “covering” of Sisera, there is a narratological strategy in both accounts to slow down and focus on the violent action in Jael’s tent.

The poetry also twice repeats “between her feet” (*bên raglêhā*) in v. 27, and some scholars argue that this phrase carries much sexual meaning.³³⁰ Similar to the “covering” repetition in chapter 4, this repeated phrase does not bear a sexually suggestive posture but instead has the imagery of a baby dropping. At this time, women often bore children from a standing position, and thus newborns “fall” from the mother. Sisera falls between Jael’s feet much like a newborn.³³¹ In this way, chapter 5 continues the use of feminine symbolism, and adds birthing imagery to the range of gender-specific images.

In summary, a reversal of expected power relations constitutes the scene between Sisera and Jael. Sisera is a powerful man of a mighty army who is killed by a woman. “Jael” derives from a root meaning “profit,” but the term is often used to refer to that which is *not* profitable. Her husband highlights the juxtaposition between unions and divisions that exists in the Hebrew bible in general, and the book of Judges, specifically. The woman first

³²⁸ Here, again, I am in debt to Dr. Jack Sasson for his insight into the repetition into this scene.

³²⁹ Christianson, “Big Sleep,” 530. See also Fewell, “Judges,” 76.

³³⁰ Reis argues that Sisera falling between her legs/feet refers to intercourse (Reis, “Uncovering,” 41). See also Susan Niditch, “Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 43-57. See also Olson, *NIB* 2:788. In contrast, Boling makes no mention of any sexual connotations or situations in the scene. Rather, he claims that the terms used for Sisera’s demise reflect terminology for a military defeat (Boling, *Judges*, 115).

³³¹ See also Dijk-Hemmes, “Mothers,” 112. Sasson writes that “it could also be a portrayal or parody of birthing. 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” (Sasson, “Breeder,” 345). This latter sentence is especially relevant for my argument about the simultaneity between the Jael and Sisera’s mother scenes. See also Jost, *Gender*, 125 and Fewell and Gunn who say that Sisera becomes “an aborted fetus” (Fewell and Gunn, “Controlling,” 404).

shows great respect to Sisera. When that respect disappears, it becomes apparent that Sisera will relinquish his power to the woman and allow her to nurture him like a mother cares for a child. In a sudden turn of events, the mother figure kills this man. Fewell and Gunn aptly state, "Sisera's womblike asylum has become his deathbed."³³² Jael ultimately defeats Sisera and brings disaster to his people and ruler (e.g. in chapter 4) and also his family (e.g. in chapter 5).³³³ Although she causes disaster for this man, Jael brings victory to the Israelite people.

In the end, the implicit narrative evaluation of Jael is positive but carries with it a degree of suspicion. It is not clear if she is guilty of sedition to her husband's alliance, is fiercely loyal to the Israelites, or simply kills Sisera for her own protection. In one brief instance, Jael calls Sisera "Lord" and then quickly denies him respect by saying, "Do not be afraid." Jael holds the attributes of both a mother and nurturer *and* a violent murderer. An ambiguous evaluation of awe and appreciation, suspicion and threat surround this woman.

IV. Sisera's Mother

In order to highlight and argue more convincingly for the very explicit motherhood theme in chapter 5 (and arguably in chapter 4 as well), it is necessary to mention the final woman in the narrative. This chapter has already mentioned Deborah's role and how Judges 5 calls her "a mother in Israel." Similarly, the previous section discussed the mothering elements in Jael's portion of the narrative in both chapters 4 and 5. Now the chapter briefly turns to Sisera's mother who is mentioned only in the poetry of Judges 5.

³³² Fewell and Gunn, "Controlling," 405.

³³³ Brenner comments on the dishonorable nature of a warrior's death by the hands of a woman (Brenner, "Triangle," 132). See also Yee who says that the killing scene is a reversal of rape wherein the potential rapist becomes the victim and the "penetrator becomes the penetrated" (Yee, "By the Hand," 115-116).

This woman's brief mention serves an important role in Judges 5, and in fact, Sasson argues that the entire chapter points directly to this mother.³³⁴

The narrator does not give the mother of Sisera a name. Her anonymity presents her as the polar opposite of the other "mother" in Judges 5, Deborah, the "mother in Israel."³³⁵ Typical of many anonymous mothers, this anonymous woman is known only in relation to her adult male son.³³⁶ Thus, the anonymity not only designates her as Deborah's opposite but also draws the reader's attention to her named son, his fate, and its impact on Israel.³³⁷ Unnamed women like this mother allow the reader to determine how the woman fulfills or negates the role by which she is defined.³³⁸ To what extent does Sisera's mother fulfill mothering roles, and namely, in what ways is she nurturing? The poetry presents Sisera's mother's portrayal as a "nurturing" mother in ironic and ambiguous ways both through the narrative device of simultaneity and the acknowledgement of mothers' participation in war.³³⁹

³³⁴ The entire chapter is awash with a mothering theme. Sasson makes an astute observation about the order of the 10 tribes that are included in chapter 5 and the matriarchs associated with those tribes. The tribe order is Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, Issachar, Reuben, Gilead, Dan, Asher, Zebulun (again), and Naphtali. Rachel was the mother of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Machir, and no other roster of tribes begins with Rachel (Sasson, "Breeder," 349). This unique listing that highlights Rachel not only bolsters my argument that chapter 5 is concerned with a "mother" theme, but it also provides a useful foundation to begin speculating on composition, redaction, historical/chronological perspectives, etc. The list, among other things, underscores the role of Northern tribes and could indicate that the text derives from the time that the order of eponymous birth had become fixed (Sasson, "Breeder," 350).

³³⁵ William J. Urbrock, "Sisera's Mother in Judges 5 and Haim Gouri's *'Immo*," *HAR* 11 (1987): 423-434. Vincent similarly argues that Sisera's mother, as an object of cruel mocking, is intended as a contrast to the other "heroines" of the poem (Mark A. Vincent, "The Song of Deborah: A Structural and Literary Consideration," *JOT* 91 [2000]: 61-82).

³³⁶ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 102.

³³⁷ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 102.

³³⁸ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 102.

³³⁹ See also Urbrock, "Sisera's Mother," 423-425.

A. Simultaneity

While not explicitly stated, it can be inferred that the scene with Sisera's mom occurs around the same time as the previously described scene, i.e. the incident between Sisera and Jael in Jael's tent. Sisera's mother waits for her son while he is off at war, and the reader might imagine the simultaneity of her at her window while he is in Jael's tent. Judges 5:28 provides, "Through the hole in the wall, the mother of Sisera leaned over and she fretted through the window screen, 'Why is his chariot delayed in coming? Why does the sound of his war-chariots tarry?'" According to BDB, *yābab* indicates that Sisera's mom laments or "cries shrilly," but in fact, she does not yet know what fate has befallen her son.³⁴⁰ She is less likely to wail or lament than to anxiously wait and worry.³⁴¹ The simultaneity in scenes highlights the readers' privileged perspective, as the reader is aware of what has just happened to her son.³⁴² The reader knows that Sisera's mother's anxiety is justified and that lament is appropriate. One "mother," Jael, metaphorically "births" a dying Sisera, while his actual biological mother anxiously awaits his return.³⁴³

Sisera's mother not only waits for him but also expects the spoils of war in v. 30, as her son falls. His mother's vocabulary harkens back to the scene in Jael's tents, heightening the association of the two scenes. In 5:30, Sisera's mother expects rich stuff/garments to return as part of the booty that Sisera collects, and these items of wealth are of great value much like the chalice in which Jael serves milk to Sisera in 5:25. The biological mother expects the spoils and riches of war; the impersonator mother serves disaster in a valuable

³⁴⁰ "*yābab*," BDB 384.

³⁴¹ She is "fretting" (Sasson, *Judges*, 309). See also Sasson, "Breeder," 345-346.

³⁴² Schneider similarly notes the irony that she wonders about the location of her son, and the reader has just read about his violent death (Schneider, *Judges*, 94).

³⁴³ Sasson claims that the events between Jael and Sisera need not explicitly happen simultaneously with Sisera's mother's fretting scene. But "pathos is increased if we imagine that events overtaking mother and son were synchronous" (Sasson, "Breeder," 346).

vessel. The simultaneous scenes highlight the utter defeat of both Sisera and his mother. The actual defeat of the man kills him, and at the same time, kills her expectations. The effect of the defeat becomes amplified, and the poem treats the account as a complete and holistic defeat of the enemy. The commander and troops are not the only ones defeated; the communities and families of the Israelite enemy wait at home and also suffer from defeat. But again, the reader possesses this knowledge, and Sisera's mother remains ignorant.

B. Irony in the Way Mothers Participate in War

As she stands at this opening in the wall, Sisera's mother is a powerful queen mother. From this vantage point the reader gains some access to a woman's perspective. However, it is the words of Deborah's song that mention Sisera's mother. The reader only has access to Sisera's mother's scene from Deborah's perspective. Neither the narrator nor Sisera's mother interpret the scene. And this song is also filtered through an Israelite male perspective. In this way, the song paints the mother of the enemy in a particular way. Nevertheless, she depicts a mother who exhibits the expected anxiety of a woman whose son is at war.³⁴⁴ The motherhood and nurturing elements might seem at odds with the violence experienced in war, but unexpectedly and ironically, these elements demonstrate that all of chapter 5 anticipates the final scene with Sisera's mother. This culminating scene reminds the reader or grants the reader a new awareness of how some women, and namely mothers, participate in war. Women stand at the window and anxiously await the return of

³⁴⁴ Reinhartz makes a similar point when she argues that Sisera's mother shows two opposing stereotypes. Sisera's mother is on one hand the enemy, and her sorrow is Deborah's triumph. On the other hand, her anxiety for Sisera's welfare shows the emotion typical of mothers (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 112).

their men. And as Sisera's mother discloses, these mothers might perceive the enemy's women merely as "wombs," specifically commodities, for the winning army.

When Sisera's mother lists the spoils that Sisera must be collecting, thereby accounting for his delay in returning, she appears concerned with two items: valuable garments and women's bodies. She anticipates, "They must be finding and dividing the spoil, one womb (*raḥam*) and two wombs for each leader" (5:30). The word *raḥam* indicates a woman's womb and is a crude and demeaning way of speaking about a woman.³⁴⁵ The term indicates that a woman is good for only one thing: that is, producing offspring. Sasson's translational choice of "breeder," which he claims is "less refined," is especially helpful as it emphasizes the reproductive impetus in this wartime practice of taking the defeated army's women.³⁴⁶ "Breeder" therefore conveys the vulgarity that the Hebrew term carries.³⁴⁷

Sisera's mother does not view these women as people, but instead as items for profit and valuable prizes of war. Sisera's mom desires luxurious fabrics returned to her and hopes that men might enjoy sexual exploits as their spoils of war. Thus, implied in Sisera's mother's words is the promotion of the subjugation of the enemy through the rape of other women. As "breeders," these women will carry the children of the conquering army. Eventually, those children will likely become slaves. This word of hope by Sisera's mother exhibits no empathy for other women who similarly await the results of war. In fact, it is

³⁴⁵ See Olson, *NIB* 2:789.

³⁴⁶ Sasson, *Judges*, 310.

³⁴⁷ Any sympathy the reader might have for this mother quickly goes away with the "mother's words that make the blood run cold" (Fewell, "Judges," 76). Exum also raises questions concerning the reader's sympathy. We don't sympathize with Sisera's mother and her ladies when they envision the rape of women, but can we sympathize with Deborah who is directly involved in warfare and is likely witnessing or perpetuating that kind of violence against women? And what do we do about the male narrator who seems to treat this rape as a given (Exum, *Was sagt*, 29-30)?

ironic and problematic that a mother who worries about her son wishes for this particular fate for other women and mothers.³⁴⁸ Fewell and Gunn name another element of irony in the mother's words. Instead of Sisera capturing a womb, a womb captures him; and it is not a womb that he seeks to capture, but it is a womb that he trusts.³⁴⁹

Sisera's mother's anonymity heightens this ironic contrast in her character. Following Reinhartz argument about anonymous mothers in the Hebrew Bible, Sisera's mother's individualism emerges as her named role as mother conflicts with the behavior and words she exhibits; in turn, her personal identity redefines the boundaries set by her designated role as "mother."³⁵⁰ The reader witnesses through Sisera's mother, that mothers are not necessarily nurturing, but can have a sinister side as they advocate for violence (even against other women and potential mothers). In this way, nurture and violence characterize the two "mother" figures of the story, Jael and Sisera's mother. And again, Sisera's mother contrasts with the victorious named "mother in Israel," Deborah.³⁵¹ Yet, all three women paint a clearer picture of how women participate in war and articulate power.³⁵² If this narrator teaches the reader anything, it is that women, and namely mothers, cannot be pigeonholed. The narrator proposes that somehow women/mothers contain within themselves the antagonistic realities of nurture and violence. And, thus, the

³⁴⁸ Sisera's mother and her ladies sound arrogant and greedy (Olson, *NIB* 2:789). See also Bal, *Death*, 208.

³⁴⁹ Fewell and Gunn, "Controlling," 408.

³⁵⁰ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 113.

³⁵¹ Dijk-Hemmes argues that she is the "opposite of the mother in Israel" because she lacks vision, adopts a misogynistic view, and demonstrates her ignorance about what is going on (Dijk-Hemmes, "Mothers," 111-112). Urbrock also argues that Sisera's mother is the polar opposite to Deborah (Urbrock, "Sisera's Mother," 425). See also Webb, *Judges*, 143.

³⁵² Ackerman identifies Sisera's mother as "a queen mother serving in her son's royal court and...as wielding the same kinds of political, economic, and religious authority that queen mothers commanded elsewhere in the biblical world" (Ackerman, *Warrior*, 7 and 128-162). However, this woman still experiences some "powerlessness" as she watches from the window, hoping her son will return from war (7).

narrator's evaluation views mothers with both reverence and suspicion, as possessing power but still existing with a degree of powerlessness.³⁵³

V. YHWH as Judge

The ambiguity in Judges 4, and to some extent chapter 5, regarding which character is the "judge" in the story becomes further complicated when the reader considers YHWH's role in the narrative. Much like the way YHWH operates in the rest of the book of Judges, the Lord often remains silent and distant in this story. However, a few verses in chapters 4 and 5 highlight the Lord's activity in the midst of battle and the characters' recognition of the Lord's involvement in human events. Chapter 5 emphasizes the cosmic and divine elements of the battle.

A. *The LORD in Battle*

Deborah says, "Arise for this is the day that the Lord gave Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" (4:6). Deborah's use of perfect verbs, which imply completed action, and her rhetorical question highlight the work that the Lord *has already done*. She claims that the battle has already been engaged, that the Lord has already started it. The text emphasizes this as a divine victory and YHWH's intervention in history as Sisera's impressive army is confused and scattered.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Jost designates a section on the "Power of Women," and focuses on Deborah and Jael's autonomy but also their cooperation with each other and with YHWH (Jost, *Gender*, 126-132). Urbrock makes the distinction that Deborah and Jael as "mothers" operate in the poem's schematic arrangement of blessing, while Sisera's mother is outside of the poem's structure of blessing and is doomed (Urbrock, "Sisera's Mother," 426-427).

³⁵⁴ And this becomes a topos in Gideon's wars.

The narrator reiterates this point about the Lord's intervention in verses 4:15 and 23. In 4:15, the narrator claims, "The Lord confused Sisera...before Baraq," thus highlighting the deity's actions during a specific battle. 4:23 similarly highlights God's work in the overall defeat of Israel's enemies and contains, "And God overwhelmed Jabin, king of Canaan, on that day before the Israelites." 4:24 follows with the work of the Israelites, "And the hand of the Israelites continued to go harder upon Jabin King of Canaan until they destroyed Jabin King of Canaan." At first glance, it might seem that v. 24 simply repeats an account of Jabin's defeat that is provided in v. 23. But, the fact that YHWH's actions precede human work should not be overlooked. Thus, it is possible that vv. 6, 15, and 23 imply that the deity orchestrates the events before humans take the scene. In this way, 4:24 states how the Israelites pick up the work that the Lord has already begun.

B. A Cosmic Battle

Chapter 5 emphasizes the Lord's work in the battle against Israel's enemies in a very different way than chapter 4. While chapter 4 gives little detail on the actual human events in the battle, chapter 5 describes the battle in cosmic terms. Verses 20-21 show this battle to involve elements of creation. 5:20 provides, "From the heavens did they fight, the stars, and from their courses they fought Sisera." And 5:21 reads, "The wadi Kishon swept them away, the primeval wadi, the wadi Kishon." The heavens and ancient waters are part of the battle. Humans do not fight at this level of creation; this is a divine battle.³⁵⁵

Deborah functions in a judicial role and is the Lord's mouthpiece when she instructs Baraq. Baraq operates in the militaristic role characteristic of the judges throughout the

³⁵⁵ Amit argues that the battle lacks realistic elements, which are replaced by God's participation (Amit, *Judges*, 209). See also Niditch, *Judges*, 77 and Olson, *NIB* 2:787.

book. And another woman's hand, Jael, ultimately defeats the enemy commander.³⁵⁶ Each of the other characters has a function in the unfolding drama. But YHWH works throughout the entire episode, going before humans and engaging in a cosmic battle. In this way, the narrator implicitly states that YHWH is the story's true "Judge."³⁵⁷

With YHWH in the role of true Judge and orchestrator of events, God enables the complicated gendered spaces and roles, the gender complications and the apparent role reversals. Namely, YHWH utilizes women in ways that both support and frustrate the patriarchal norms created by humans, and both break and reestablish the public and private dichotomy that organizes human understandings of gendered spaces. Both accounts of the tale show the ability of God to work effectively and use whomever YHWH desires in complex political systems and situations where one centralized leader is nowhere to be found.³⁵⁸

VI. Conclusion: Ambiguity, Liminality, and Unhomeliness

In the previous chapter, a complicated portrait of the woman in Judges 19 reflects a narrator's vague, and potentially negative, evaluation of the narrative's main male character. Judges 4 and 5 also contain ambiguous evaluation as they focus more on women while downplaying the male characters and their actions. The male characters are almost

³⁵⁶ Kelen links Jael's hand with the hand of God: "Sisera ne se reveille point: il était mort, cloué en terre par une main féminine qui s'était appesantie sur lui comme la main de Dieu" (Kelen, *Les femmes*, 101).

³⁵⁷ See Brenner, "Triangle," 134 for how God is at the apex of the story and initiates the action, albeit in different ways, in Judges 4 and 5. "The savior was God and human heroes played a limited part," (Amit, *Judges*, 210 and see 213-216).

³⁵⁸ Olson, *NIB* 2:783.

completely eclipsed by the women in Judges 4 and 5.³⁵⁹ They serve as circumstantial pawns: Sisera is the defeated enemy commander and Baraq shares in the role of the story's "judge" with the more accentuated females, Deborah and Jael.³⁶⁰

The narrator of Judges 4 and 5 gives all of these women ambiguous evaluations. The liminal aspects of these women and the condition of unhomeliness that the women either experience or provoke in the reader aid in summarizing the narrator's complicated portrayals of Deborah, Jael, and Sisera's mother. These women exist in in-between locations, roles, and allegiances. They also demonstrate how women exist both in and between the spaces of subject (i.e. perpetrator) and object (i.e. victim) of violence.

A. Ambiguity

These women are complicated and perplexing figures. They exist in multiple roles and divided allegiances. They display both nurturing and violent traits. All three women, Deborah, Jael, and Sisera's mother, emphasize the tale's focus on women as mothers. All three women also participate in or advocate for military action and violence. Their persons and actions bear consequences for and reflect implicit insecurities about both familial and political realities.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Kelen aptly describes the time, "Il fut un temps où les femmes parlaient, et les homes les écoutaient. Un temps où les femmes prophétisaient, et les homes ne se gaussaient point. Un temps où les homes ne s'étaient pas arrogé l'exclusivité du Verbe puissant..." (Kelen, *Les femmes*, 126).

³⁶⁰ Murray comments on the "fateful parallel position between Baraq and Sisera...and (the) irony of their essentially similar destiny" by noting the syntactical and verbal parallelism (Murray, "Narrative," 171). Although they might be on opposite sides, Baraq and Sisera are "united in a tragic fate: ignominious subjection to the effective power of a woman" (173).

³⁶¹ Klein argues that the women in the story "are honored (even though they break implicit rules of biblical sexual politics)" (Klein, *From Deborah*, 39). Exum phrases the narratological evaluation slightly differently: "there is affirmation of women, which undermine and temper patriarchal assumptions and biases" (Exum, "Mother in Israel," 74). Both scholars point to the positive evaluation of Deborah and Jael, yet they supply a caveat. The honor and affirmation these women receive goes hand in hand with the fracturing of something within the patriarchal system by these women who transgress their expected gender roles. And thus, the

There is a sense of desperation in Jael's story and the reader might feel sympathy for her plight. She is utterly on her own and acts on her own, dwelling in a marriage of marginality and failed allegiances. Her actions, regardless of her motivations, benefit Israel. And she was likely not a Hebrew. She has no authority, and she acts in ways that "are forbidden but effective to save the people."³⁶² She is lauded, but at the same time, there exists a palpable fear concerning that of which women are capable. While Jael might appear desperate, justified, and even a hero for Israel, and the story acknowledges women's roles of caring for the vulnerable, Jael's nurturing wiles successfully turns the mightiest of warriors into a scared child. Lest one forget the power of a woman, this is an act that a woman commits against the strongest of men! Similarly, Sisera's mother advocates for violence against women. At the same time, hope is expressed for the community by the presence of a woman involved in military exploits. In this case, Deborah, the prophet and diviner, informs and guides the Israelite commander and ensures Israelite success and posterity.

B. Women in In-Between Locations, Roles, and Allegiances

Many women in the Hebrew bible are identified by the spaces in which they function and inhabit. Most women are connected to the domestic sphere in some way, but often there are elements of functioning in other spaces. In Judges 4 and 5, Deborah's liminality is characterized both by her location and by her operation, especially in relation to typical Yahwistic activities. She is not a woman who is entirely "out of bounds" of

women will likely cause discomfort for those who benefit from the patriarchal system. In a similar argument about the evaluation of these characters, Lanoir notes that these women and the narrative discomfort with them also reverberates in the Samson story (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 113-114).

³⁶² Klein, *From Deborah*, 39.

acceptable practices for a woman, but she is peculiar. She has an extra-domestic job, and she is not identified in relation to a man. As a prophetess, she operates in a role typically occupied by men.

The narrator makes a point to identify the location from which Deborah administers judgment.³⁶³ In the hill country at Mt. Ephraim between Ramah and Bethel, Deborah operates beyond the designated priestly centers. Because people come to this place “for the decision” (*lammišpāt*), Sasson wonders, “Is this the narrator’s sly comment on God’s capacity to empower other than those at palaces and temples?”³⁶⁴ It seems that this is very likely and is intended to evoke controversy and perhaps conflicting interests.

Deborah sits under a palm tree to deliver judgment. This is a partial shelter that is neither fully exposed nor fully enclosed. A number of cultures associate women with trees.³⁶⁵ Trees often represent thresholds, and thus a woman associated with trees is “tantamount to an identification of woman with an Axis Mundi.”³⁶⁶ Thus, Deborah is a threshold figure, a woman operating in a unique role and in a unique place. Her work is both extra-domestic and outside traditional Yahwistic worship. Despite not being a mother and functioning outside of the domestic sphere, she is still called “a mother in Israel.” Because Israelites come to her for judgment and because of her powers, she is not entirely outside of acceptable communal practices. She might not be part of the official Yahwist

³⁶³ Moore argues for redactional activity in 4:5. He says that this verse is by a different hand and is an expansion of a post-exilic author/editor. However, the idea of her particular “judging” (i.e. deciding cases) is the same in both verses 4 and 5. The Targum goes further and provides an additional long account of Deborah’s residence and possessions, “She dwelt in the city Ataroth-Deborah, being supported by her possessions; for she had palm-trees at Jericho, orchards at Ramah, oil-bearing olives in the Valley, irrigated fields at Beth-el, white earth on the King’s Mount; and the Israelites went up to her for judgment” (Moore, *Critical Edition*, 30).

³⁶⁴ Sasson, *Judges*, 256.

³⁶⁵ Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 45 and 69.

³⁶⁶ Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 69. A tree is synecdochic to garden, land and earth, and women under trees, then become identified with the nontranscendent and imminent (69). Women as dwelling at trees sit on the threshold, the meeting point of heaven, hell and earth (45).

worship system, but her divine prophetic and pyromancing abilities are still utilized by the people. As a pyromancer, Deborah joins the ranks of shamans and witches and becomes a threshold figure and mediator between the divine and human worlds.³⁶⁷

When she accompanies Baraq to war as a military advisor, the narrator reinforces her liminal state. It is neither unprecedented nor forbidden for a woman to occupy the roles and spaces that Deborah holds. However, she is an unwed and childless woman whose sexuality is inconsequential as she operates in a man's world in multiple ways (e.g. as a judge, prophetess, public servant, and military leader). And this is certainly rare.

Jael dwells in a tent, and she operates within a domestic setting, yet she performs an act that has positive military and political (and thus public) implications for Israel. Jael's liminal location can be identified in multiple ways. Her liminal physical location informs and raises questions about her allegiances. Heber's tent, in which Jael dwells, itself has been moved away from one identifiable group, since the text claims, "Heber the Kenite had divided from the other Kenites." As a Kenite, Heber already dwells beyond Israelite circles, but now he has further separated himself from both his people and the Israelites. And yet, Heber has not moved his tent into Hazor's settlements. He has removed himself from one group, but has not entirely joined himself to another. He, himself, is a liminal figure in transition, being characterized by complicated loyalties. Because of her husband's new alliance, Jael's actions reflect her liminal social and political loyalties. She is caught between her husband's new loyalties and the loyalties of the Kenites and/or Israelites. In the end, Jael's choice to kill Sisera does little to answer the question about her true allegiances. Does her allegiance fall with the Kenites/Israelites and does she intentionally work for the

³⁶⁷ See Aguirre, Quance and Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds*, 69.

benefit of Israel? Or is she merely taking advantage of the situation and protecting herself by killing the winning army's enemy?

The scene concentrates on Jael in her tent. Known by her associations with tents and women (5:24), both of which bear liminal connotations, Jael becomes the wild card in the narrative. And much of her operations relate to her movement of crossing the threshold of her tent. She comes out of her tent to greet Sisera, takes on a public role of hospitality and fulfills the foretelling of Sisera's demise. This same enemy requests that she stand at the threshold, i.e. the entrance of her tent, keep guard, and act as a mediator between him and the potential threat of the outside world. She denies this request and kills Sisera with a tent peg. Jael determines when she will inhabit the threshold of her own tent. In the end, she crosses the entrance of her tent in order to go out and greet Baraq. It is in this part of the narrative, when Baraq views the fallen Sisera with a tent peg in his temple, that the characters and the reader realize the entire meaning and correct prediction of Deborah's words. Jael's final crossing of the threshold of her tent enables the convergence of all three scenes of the Judges 4 narrative (i.e. the encounters between Deborah and Baraq, Sisera's military advances and retreat, and the scene involving the tents of Heber and Jael).

Thresholds, like doorways and windows, are utilized repeatedly in the book of Judges, and especially in chapters 4 and 5, in order to identify the liminal spaces in which women operate. Sisera's mother peers from the opening in the palace wall. In typical poetic Hebrew parallelism, 5:28 twice stresses her liminal position on a threshold. She leans over through the hole in the wall hoping to glimpse her returning son. For the modern reader, windows are made of glass, and glass represents the first degree of opacity.³⁶⁸ Sisera's

³⁶⁸ Mukherji, "Introduction," xxi.

mother does not peer through glass. However, the poetic parallel phrase supplies that the woman worried “through the window screen.” The NRSV provides “lattice.” Like glass, the window screen or lattice supplies a small element of obscurity, indicating that she tries to see and know, but true sight and knowledge elude her.

The woman at the window is on a “type of threshold, both physically and metaphorically”³⁶⁹ and it represents the unhomely moment that is the breakdown or blending of the private and public realms.³⁷⁰ The window “becomes the focal point of feeling,” especially in the mother’s moment of fretting.³⁷¹ This scene embodies the “enticement of what lies just out of reach, the reality of the barrier as well as the possibility of stepping across, the permeable but nonetheless inalienable difference between inside and outside.”³⁷² As she looks from inside the confines of the domestic sphere, she first frets about her son’s tardiness and then imagines the public and violent scenarios in which men, and namely her own son, operate. Sisera’s mother looks out of the opening in her home, but military and political maneuvers occupy her thoughts. And thus, the woman becomes torn between the private and public spheres: her body inhabits one space but her mind envisions another.

³⁶⁹ Mukherji, “Introduction,” xxi.

³⁷⁰ See *Thinking on Thresholds* for more on the symbolism of windows in literature (Gillian Beer, “Windows: Looking In, Looking Out, and Breaking Through,” in *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces* [ed. Subha Mukherji; London: Anthem Press, 2013], 3-16). Windows are a “framed space... the liminal connection between inner and outer... (an) aperture that reveals a scene beyond or scene within... (an) impermeable membrane... security against weather and intruders... (a) source of replenishing light... Windows relate the outside world to the interior... they also suggest spying and seclusion... (Beer, “Windows,” 3).

³⁷¹ Mukherji, “Introduction,” xxvi.

³⁷² Mukherji, “Introduction,” xxi.

C. Women as Both Subjects and Objects of War

There is a sense in these narratives that there exists a complicated acceptance and discomfort with women working in public and political roles. While many narratives in the Hebrew bible and the book of Judges, including Judges 19, focus on women as the victims of war and violence, one cannot be too quick to judge women as strictly objects of violence in the book of Judges. Sometimes, female characters actively participate, support, and advocate for war. Deborah accompanies Baraq into battle. Jael executes Sisera with a tent peg. Sisera's mom imagines and anticipates the spoils that her son will bring home.

Gale Yee argues that both Deborah and Jael model the metaphor of the woman warrior in Judges 4.³⁷³ She defines the woman warrior as a liminal figure, neither male nor female, sharing qualities of each.³⁷⁴ The woman warrior assumes the characteristics of the male gender as an aggressive conqueror but still remains female and therefore relates to nurturing and cooperation.³⁷⁵ She is an anomaly who is meant to elicit ambiguous reactions by both exciting the imagination and filling the reader with anxiety and dread.³⁷⁶ The woman warrior is disruptive and can serve to threaten or legitimate the patriarchal social order.³⁷⁷

As women warriors, the women in Judges 4 and 5 reflect the reality of the simultaneous reinstatement and breaking of gendered spaces and roles in the patriarchal order. A new role emerges for mothers and lovers in patriarchy as these "objects of procreation and pleasure" become "instruments of agony and death."³⁷⁸ The role reversals

³⁷³ Yee, "By the Hand," 99-132.

³⁷⁴ Yee, "By the Hand," 99 and 105.

³⁷⁵ Yee, "By the Hand," 104-106.

³⁷⁶ Yee, "By the Hand," 99.

³⁷⁷ Yee, "By the Hand," 105 and 108.

³⁷⁸ Fewell and Gunn, "Controlling," 405. See also Niditch, "Eroticism," 51-52.

in the figure of the “woman warrior,” and more precisely in these complex women in Judges, become evident when women participate in war and “are but the surface of a more complex picture of women acting in a patriarchal world.”³⁷⁹ Thus, perhaps the roles were never actually *reversed*, perhaps there never was a strict patriarchal dichotomous model of gendered domestic and public roles. But instead, Judges 4 and 5 provide the reader with a complicated picture of women’s work and women’s involvement in war, family, and all political relations. Following this, Yee states “that the liminal figure Deborah’s participation in war was permitted *because* domestic and public spheres were fluid” (emphasis mine).³⁸⁰

It follows, then that women characters can be both an active participant and a passive victim of war. This can happen simultaneously. Jael exists in a precarious position, torn between her husband, the Kenites, the Israelites, and the enemy of Jabin. She is an object of and subject to men’s affairs and alliances. Yet, she successfully kills the enemy commander. Sisera’s mother supports violence and advocates for war so that her son might have victory. But unbeknownst to her, her son’s, and thus her own, destruction occurs as she frets at her window and hopes for her son’s return.

This story produces a sort of reverse unhomeliness wherein the terrifying realization for the ancient male reader (and male narrator) does not necessarily come in the breach of the domestic space by the public sphere (as it typically does for women or other marginalized persons). Instead, the unhomely realization occurs when previously conceived domestic affairs and people break into public, political, and militaristic matters. This goes hand in hand with the use of *mkr* in Judges 4:9 where it is predicted that Sisera will be sold into the hand of a woman. In this patriarchal system, the “selling” of enemies is

³⁷⁹ Fewell and Gunn, “Controlling,” 391.

³⁸⁰ Yee, “By the Hand,” 112.

a man's prerogative. That a woman could participate in this represents a disturbing reality for the male narrator. It could be named as a male-oriented "unhomely" moment. Moreover, a woman kills the vulnerable Sisera. Baraq requires Deborah's presence in his military efforts. Sisera's *mother*, from the vantage point of her home's window, seems to be the most sinister promoter of masculinized violence of all. In these characters, preconceived ideas of gendered roles and gendered spaces are simultaneously reinforced (in the discomfort they produce for the ancient male reader and narrator) and problematized (in the recognition of their inadequacy for representing reality). There is evidence in the tales of trying to correct this reality and ease the patriarchal discomfort. For example, the reference to Deborah as a "mother in Israel" could indicate the narrator's attempt "to reinscribe a very public woman into the domestic sphere."³⁸¹ This tale likely reflects a historical reality wherein women participate in both public and private spheres and in politics at every level. The tale also exposes a historical ideology of patriarchal bias that is at once sympathetic to and suspect of women operating in all spheres of influence.

³⁸¹ Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, "The 'Mothers' Who Weren't: Motherhood Imagery and Childless Women Warriors in Early Jewish Literature," in *Motherhood in the Jewish Cultural Imagination* (Jewish Cultural Studies 5; Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, forthcoming).

CHAPTER 4

A *bētûlâ* Dies by Her Father's Words:
"And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with drummers and dancers.
She was his only one. He had no other son or daughter"

I. Introduction

The story of Jephthah and his daughter continues to interest interpreters and scholars, not simply because of its tragic nature but because of its perplexing and ambiguous narrative elements. The vow Jephthah makes is not straightforwardly clear and neither are his intentions in making the vow. Similarly, the fulfillment of the vow and what happens to the daughter lacks clarity. Esther Fuchs argues that the ambiguity surrounding the sacrifice of the unnamed daughter is typical of the ambiguity that resides in the entire story.³⁸² While few scholars argue that the narrative implicitly or explicitly critiques Jephthah's character, many demonstrate how he is presented in very ambivalent ways.³⁸³

³⁸² Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (eds. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 116-130. But Fuchs argues that this ambiguity functions as an apology and justification of Jephthah's behavior, showing that he is a sympathetic character (116-117). Exum claims that she finds greater ambiguity in the presentation of both the father and the daughter than Fuchs presents (Exum, *Fragmented*, 18). This chapter will argue that the ambiguity within the story serves to portray Jephthah in tragic and perhaps sympathetic, but mostly unfavorable ways.

³⁸³ See Olson, *NIB* 2:825; Bal, *Death*, 44; Tribble, *Texts*, 94 and 101; Phyllis Tribble, "A Meditation in Mourning: A Sacrifice of the Daughter of Jephthah," *USQR* 36 (1981): 59-73; Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives (Judges 6-12)* (VTSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 192. Some scholars argue that the narrative puts Jephthah in an ultimately favorable light. Niditch claims that there is no value judgment on him (Niditch, *Judges*, 134). Only DeMaris and Leeb's social scientific study focusing on issues of honor and shame argues for Jephthah's unambiguously high honor at the end of the story. They claim that the sacrifice of his daughter restores honor for himself and his daughter (Richard E. DeMaris and Carolyn S. Leeb. "Judges – [Dis]Honor and Ritual Enactment. The Jephthah Story: Judges 10:16-12:1" in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* [ed. Philip F. Esler; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006]: 177-190).

With some of these narrative elements (i.e. Jephthah's character, his vow, and the nature of his daughter's "sacrifice") in mind, this chapter will attempt a thorough consideration of the ambiguity within this narrative and will demonstrate that this is, in fact, a story about perpetual liminality.

In contrast to the other stories studied thus far in which women hold a prominent position in the narrative, the narrative in Judges 11 focuses much more on the male character of Jephthah than his female counterpart, the daughter. However, unlike the narrative in Judges 4 and 5 in which the male characters, Baraq and Sisera, become eclipsed by the words and actions of the women in the story, Deborah, Jael, and Sisera's mother, the daughter in Judges 11 is not *completely* outshone by her father.

The interaction between these two characters, the father and daughter, is the focus at the end of the story. Like the main events in chapters 4 and 5, the drama of the story plays out not in battle but at home between the gendered pair, Jephthah and his daughter, and the impact that his vow has on her.³⁸⁴ In the case of Judges 11, the war with the Ammonites serves as the backdrop of a story mostly concerned with familial relations. Thus, this narrative continues to demonstrate a tendency in the book of Judges to conflate that which is political and public with specifically familial and private concerns.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ See Olson, *NIB* 2:830; Schneider, *Judges*, 176. Fuchs highlights the contrast between the military victory and the private tragedy (Fuchs, "Marginalization," 123). Webb also argues that once the vow is introduced, "it takes over," dominates the entire episode (Webb, *Judges*, 63 and then again on 73). "The victory over the Ammonites receives only summary treatment, its chief interest being that it creates the conditions in which Jephthah will be obliged to fulfill his vow" (63). Contrary to the general scholarly consensus that the battle is merely a backdrop for the focus on Jephthah's personal tragedy, Assis claims that the main subject of the story is the national tragedy of Israel under Jephthah (Assis, *Self-Interest*, 210).

³⁸⁵ Niditch makes a similar assertion that Jephthah's episode contains themes that conflate political and familial issues, like kinship, gender, leadership, and group unity or disunity (Niditch, *Judges*, 130). Also, see Boling, *Judges*, 210.

The narrative describes Jephthah in positive, negative, and intentionally ambiguous ways.³⁸⁶ As will be discussed, the seemingly “positive” elements of Jephthah’s character do not always receive an entirely positive evaluation in the narrative. Similarly, the elements that contribute to Jephthah’s negative portrayal do not always place judgment on him, but instead portray him tragically and somewhat sympathetically. The ambivalent and negative elements of his character create situations of social insecurity for Jephthah, and he relies on his verbal prowess to manipulate situations so as to reinstate his own social security. Focusing on the impact of Jephthah’s words in the narrative is not a new endeavor.³⁸⁷ But in this new reading of the narrative, this discussion will examine his words to others and his vow (before his daughter ever enters the narrative picture) so as to pinpoint the final narrative evaluation of Jephthah and how Jephthah has problematically “opened his mouth.”

The narrative portrayal of the daughter constantly wavers between demonstrating her dependency and submissiveness on the one hand, and her gendered ritual independence and assertiveness on the other. The narrator portrays her as both an object of sacrifice and an active subject. Jephthah’s use of words contrast his daughter’s use of ritual, and the story centers around family and inheritance issues.

³⁸⁶ See also Michaela Bauks for the treatment of Jephthah as an ambiguous character (Michaela Bauks, “La fille sans nom, la fille de Jephté,” *ETR* 81 [January 1, 2006]: 81-93).

³⁸⁷ For more on this, see Michael J. Smith, “The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 1: Jephthah,” *BSac* 162 (July-September 2005): 279-98. See also Boling, *Judges*, 207; David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1986), 50; Niditch, *Judges*, 133; Fewell, “Judges,” 78. Smith argues that the theme of the spoken word connects all episodes in the story and it illustrates a downward progression for Jephthah (Smith, “Failure, Part 1,” 295). Exum’s chapter, “On Judges 11,” tracks the use of speech throughout the narrative and demonstrates how words kill when Jephthah opens his mouth (Cheryl J. Exum, “On Judges 11,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* [ed. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 131). Bal calls him a “failing focalizer” and says he is “a character who speaks too much and sees too little, who is unable to match speech and action through the mediation of insight” (Bal, *Death*, 44).

Like the other Judges chapters, YHWH plays a major role. The silence and uncertain presence of YHWH contributes to a sense of unsettledness and unfulfillment within the text. Also, Judges 11 contains numerous liminal aspects in order to show that this story ultimately eludes a sense of social fulfillment for its characters. The use of liminal spaces and the focus on the daughter's liminal life stage demonstrates how the narrative locks its characters into a state of perpetual social transition such that no person within this family finds security.

II. Character Analysis

A. The Character of Jephthah and his Word

The narrative describes Jephthah in noble ways as a great military and community leader who is endowed with the Lord's spirit. However his background, name and words indict him. The narrator provides clues that the external influence of his improper mother leads to an unstable family situation. Jephthah's character becomes circumscribed to exile, social insecurity, constant transition, and the lack of offspring. His words are his one tool that he attempts to use to his advantage. Related to this, Jephthah's name has everything to do with his character. His name, *yiptah*, comes from the root *pth* and is the verbal form "he opens" that could be shortened for "YHWH opens." Along with referring to the opening of simple objects like a door (Judges 3:25 and 19:27), a sack (Gen 42:27), a skin of milk (Judges 4:19), or a grave (Ezekiel 37:12 and 13), the verb has implicit connotations to situations in which a deity opens a womb (Genesis 29:31 and 30:22) or the mouths of poets

or prophets (Ezekiel 3:27 and Psalm 38:14).³⁸⁸ The Hebrew Bible repeatedly uses this verb to describe utterances, declarations, or the speech of people. Jephthah frequently speaks so as to influence the words and actions of others, and the full implications of the words of his mouth come full circle in his exchange with his daughter.³⁸⁹

1. The Narrator's "Positive" Portrayal of Jephthah

In many ways, the narrator seems to describe Jephthah in positive terms. Jephthah's reputation extends beyond the confines of this biblical book. 1 Sam 12:11 recounts a time in which idolatry permeated Israel and "the Lord sent Jerubaal, Bedan, Jephthah, and Samuel and delivered you from the hand of your surrounding enemies, and you dwelt in security." Notably, different versions of this verse vary regarding the list of the Lord's representatives. While the LXX *does* correspond with the MT and contains: Jerubaal (Jeruboaam), Baraq, Jephthah and Samuel, another Greek manuscript adds Simson/Samson. The Syriac lists Debora, Baraq, Gideon, Jephthah, and Simson. The Targum contains Gideon, Simson (although another Targum manuscript has Bedan), Jephthah, and Samuel. Thus, Jephthah seems to be the only consistent name in all lists. Clearly, and for whatever reason, Jephthah persists as a noteworthy character in multiple traditions and manifestations of the text.³⁹⁰ The narrator provides Jephthah with a few descriptors that make apparent why Jephthah remains a memorable biblical character. This section will note how the narrator

³⁸⁸ Sasson, *Judges*, 419.

³⁸⁹ Lanoir also comments on Jephthah, "celui qui ouvre," and the fact that he references the vow he makes to YHWH by telling his daughter that he opens his mouth to YHWH in v.35 (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 156). This kind of opening of the mouth is odd as it usually does not refer to making a vow but instead refers to eating or swallowing (156).

³⁹⁰ Because of this positive reference in 1 Samuel and Hebrews 11:32, Alice Logan finds it difficult to follow other scholars who negatively evaluate Jephthah (Alice Logan, "Rehabilitating Jephthah," *JBL* 128 [2009]: 665-685). Contrary to the argument in this chapter and the evidence in the Judges 11 narrative, she reads Jephthah as "an able negotiator, accomplished statesman, and articulate defender of ethnic pride – as well as deliverer and respected judge" (Logan, "Rehabilitating," 666).

calls Jephthah a *gibbôr hayil* (“a mighty man of valour”) and a judge, and how Jephthah receives the spirit of the Lord. But a closer reading of these positive attributes of Jephthah reveals a blurry, perhaps even negative, evaluation of this character.

a. Gibbôr hayil

Judges 11:1 introduces Jephthah as a *gibbôr hayil*, namely a man of rank or a “mighty man of valour.”³⁹¹ This term carries mostly positive connotations and refers to a man with wealth, a rich landowner, or an able man. Boaz (Ruth 2:1), Kish (1 Sam 9:1), and Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:28) are each referenced as a *gibbôr hayil*. The denotation could also refer to men with military might or prowess (e.g. Naaman in 2 Kgs 5:1 and the men in Jeroboam’s army in 2 Chr 13:3). In all occurrences of corresponding terms from the Ancient Near East, the emphasis of *gibbôr* is the noteworthy characteristics of the particular man’s power, strength, and superiority.³⁹² In a few instances, a *gibbôr* can be a violent man or an evildoer (e.g. Ps 52:3-5 and 120:2-4).³⁹³ While Jephthah might be a *gibbôr hayil* by reputation, in this narrative he has yet to demonstrate his military ability. Similarly, if a *gibbôr hayil* represents a wealthy man or rich landowner, the reader quickly discovers that Jephthah has been ousted from his inheritance. Thus, a narrative expectation or premonition, or perhaps even implicit irony, might reside in this designation of Jephthah. How will (or *can*) Jephthah fully realize this positive label?

b. Judge

Although it doesn’t occur in this chapter, Jephthah receives the important designation of a “judge” at the end of his entire episode. 12:7 contains, “Jephthah judged

³⁹¹ “*gibbûr*,” BDB 150.

³⁹² H. Kosmala, “*gābar*,” *TDOT* 2:367-382.

³⁹³ H. Kosmala, *TDOT* 2:374.

(*wayyišpōt*) Israel 6 years.” Thus, Jephthah assumes the same title of other “judge” characters in the book, namely Othniel, Deborah, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Tola, and Samson. He is further linked to Othniel and Samson, because all three of these judges receive the spirit of the Lord. Othniel and Samson are named as “deliverers” of Israel (along with Tola, Ehud, Shamgar, and Gideon), but the narrative does not designate Jephthah as a deliverer (*môšîa’*). By giving this man a name and calling him a “judge,” the narrator labels Jephthah as one of the book’s characters deserving of special consideration. But Willis points out that even the meaning and function of this title is dubious: does it summarize or complement what precedes in the narrative?³⁹⁴ In other words, was Jephthah considered a “judge” before (or perhaps *in spite of*) what he did and said? Or was he named a judge *because of* what he did? While it is a title of leadership, Jephthah dwells in a list with other “judges” who have both heroic and questionable actions and narrative presentations.

c. The spirit of the Lord

As has been noted, Jephthah receives the spirit of the Lord in v. 29. This spirit is described throughout the Hebrew Bible. Saul and David receive it (1 Sam 10:6 and 1 Sam 19:9). Zedekiah gets it in order to speak a word from the Lord (1 Kgs 22:24). The spirit comes upon groups of people (2 Chr 20:14) and individuals (Isa 11:2), blows over grass to refresh it (Isa 40:7), gives rest (Isa 63:14), and carries people off (2 Kgs 2:16). God’s *rûah* sustains and renews human life throughout the biblical text.³⁹⁵ Using much of the same terminology in the Judges’ narratives, Micah 3:8 describes the impact that the spirit of the Lord has on him. “But as for me, I am filled with strength, the spirit of the lord and

³⁹⁴ Timothy M. Willis, “The Nature of Jephthah’s Authority,” *CBQ* 59 (1997): 33-44.

³⁹⁵ H.-J. Fabry, “*rûah*,” *TDOT* 13:365-402.

judgment and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.”³⁹⁶ In summary, the spirit of the Lord rushes over people and gives power to Samson, David, and Saul. And it helps David, Zedekiah, and Ezekiel speak. These examples demonstrate that the bestowal of the divine spirit is a positive aid and guide for those who receive it.

But while this spirit seems to denote divine approval and aid, it can also represent a malevolent spirit from the Lord and could have negative consequences for people. An evil spirit from the Lord descends on Saul in 1 Sam 19:9. And in Hos 13:15, the spirit from the Lord does not enable life but makes fountains parched and springs dried up. Thus, the spirit of the Lord in the Hebrew Bible does not necessarily ensure good tidings for God’s people in general or the bearer of the spirit specifically.

A similar pattern of ambivalence surrounding the bestowal of the divine spirit occurs in the book of Judges. For all those who are said to receive the spirit in Judges,³⁹⁷ the spirit seems to function as a sign of approval by the Lord. The judges who receive the Lord’s *rûah* are charismatic leaders who are singled out by YHWH to perform certain functions for the community.³⁹⁸ But the spirit often comes upon dubiously presented characters and bears negative results for the recipient. God sends an evil spirit between Abimelech and the people of Shechem (9:23). Chisholm claims that “while the spirit empowered recipients for physical conflict, it did not insulate the recipient from foolish

³⁹⁶ Micah 3:8-9 utilizes very similar vocabulary to the Judges 11 narrative. Verse 8 contains *rûah*, *mišpot*, and *gēbûrâ*. Verse 9 is also concerned with *mišpot* and references the heads and chiefs of Jacob and Israel (*rô’s* and *qâšîn*).

³⁹⁷ Namely, Jephthah, Othniel, Gideon, and Samson.

³⁹⁸ Fabry, *TDOT* 13:390. Each judge story in which the person receives this spirit possesses its own verbs for the coming of the spirit, making a strong case that the notion of God’s spirit coming upon these figures is original to each individual tradition and was not part of any redaction (Fabry, *TDOT* 13:392). Samson’s stories utilize the root *slh* to indicate that the spirit “rushed” upon Samson (14:6 and 19; 15:14). Both Jephthah and Othniel’s narratives contain “and the spirit of YHWH came upon...” (*wathî ‘âlāyw* in 3:10 and *wathî ‘âl-yiptāh* in 11:29). The Spirit of YHWH “clothes” Gideon (*lābēšâ*) in 6:34.

behavior” and cites Gideon as an example.³⁹⁹ He demonstrates that with leaders like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, the spirit can become ineffectual and ultimately dangerous and destructive in the extreme.⁴⁰⁰ In Jephthah’s specific case, he receives the spirit and then he immediately opens his mouth to pronounce a vow that causes irrevocable damage to himself and his daughter. The spirit might help facilitate his military achievements, but these are quickly overshadowed by his personal loss. Thus, the implications of the spirit of the Lord on Jephthah are riddled with uncertainty. One need not necessarily read that Jephthah’s endowment with the Lord’s spirit means that this spirit will ensure positive consequences for him.

2. The Narrator’s “Negative” Portrayal of Jephthah

While Jephthah’s so-called positive attributes actually contain equivocal evaluations of his character, Jephthah’s negative associations demonstrate his profound insecurities within his community. This section on the negatively evaluated attributes of Jephthah demonstrate that the mother’s compounded status as an *’iššâ zônâ* and an *’iššâ ’aḥeret* leads to complications for Jephthah’s identity within the community. Namely, Jephthah’s outsider mother provides an excuse in the narrative to elicit suspicion about his upbringing and raise questions about his inheritance rights. His mother’s status and these communal identity and inheritance obstacles create Jephthah’s insecure social standing, which becomes evident in the narrative through his exile in the Land of Tob and being surrounded by men of ill-repute.

a. ’iššâ zônâ and ’iššâ ’aḥeret: Jephthah’s Mother

³⁹⁹ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “The Ethical Challenge of Jephthah’s Fulfilled Vow,” *BSac* 167 (October-December 2010): 404-22.

⁴⁰⁰ Chisholm, “Ethical,” 412. See also Olson, *NIB* 2:831.

In a single statement, the narrator describes Jephthah as a *gibbôr hayil* and notes that he is the son of a harlot (*'iššâ zônâ*).⁴⁰¹ This latter designation, in its description of Jephthah's mother, tells the reader less about the woman's sexual behavior and more about her threat to communal inheritance procedures and social interactions between men.⁴⁰² To put it simply: Jephthah's mother as a *zônâ* does not accord with the description of a legitimate wife. This line of argumentation is bolstered by Jephthah's designation by his half-brothers in v. 2 that he is "the son of another woman" (*'iššâ 'aḥeret*).

Both designations of Jephthah's mother serve as a mark against him, but first the term *zônâ* requires close consideration. *Zônâ* relates to promiscuity, adultery, and prostitution and, while the sale of sexual favor was not something applauded, "it did not bear the moral opprobrium or the sense of sin that it obtains in our culture."⁴⁰³ When the Hebrew Bible portrays women as threatening and, more precisely, detrimental to the identity of the Israelite community, the threat posed by these women becomes linked to and even identified as "prostitution." Prov 6:26 warns against both a prostitute and another man's wife but claims that a prostitute is comparatively benign as she only has a small fee (i.e. a loaf of bread) while the wife of another "stalks a man's very life." The "wife of another" who seduces and has offspring with a man outside of proper marital

⁴⁰¹ Sasson argues that harlot is a better choice than "prostitute" because "it is less specifically associated with a paid profession" (Sasson, *Judges*, 420).

⁴⁰² Schneider stresses Jephthah's potential foreign status and claims that mention of Jephthah's father is vague and could refer to a person or a tribe, and also that the emphasis on the mother leaves some question about whether she is Canaanite or Israelite (Schneider, *Judges*, 162). If she were Canaanite, Jephthah would be another Israelite leader of mixed lineage, and "his relationship to Israel would be even more peripheral than the previous cases since his father's identity is so clouded" (162). However, there is little evidence in the narrative to think she is Canaanite, and it isn't necessary that Jephthah actually be foreign or of mixed lineage. What is important is that according to his half brothers, Jephthah is considered an outsider in relation to the rest of the family.

⁴⁰³ Sasson, *Judges*, 420. Sasson mentions Lev 19:29 where Hebrews are prohibited from turning their daughters into *zônâ*, yet the *zônâ* Rahab had an important role in her community and achieved the status of a heroine (420).

relationships could threaten the man's legacy. In surrounding verses, Proverbs similarly warns about evil women (6:24), the tongue of a foreign woman (6:24), and the neighbor's wife (6:29). In Prov 23:27, a harlot is called an "outsider" (*nokriyyâ*) and means that she is either outside the marriage bond or outside the covenant community.⁴⁰⁴ In the prophetic material of the Hebrew Bible, whoring becomes the descriptive term for Israel's idolatry.⁴⁰⁵ But even the emphasis of these terms resides less in the actual acts described and more on the effects such acts might have on the community. Just as children born out of improper communal marital covenants threaten inheritance procedures and ultimately the make-up of the community, so does idolatry threaten the practices and loyalties of the people in the community.

Zônâ is clearly a complicated and contested term. Erlandson argues that it is "impossible to be certain whether *'iššâ zônâ* in Judg 11:1 for example, means a woman from another people (cf. Judg 11:2, *'iššâ 'aḥeret* – another wife/woman) or a woman who has had extramarital relationships."⁴⁰⁶ And thus, *zônâ* can denote prostitution, extramarital relationships, or an outsider status. This ambiguous term opens up the possibility for the argument that the real concern in this text is about Jephthah's mother's "otherness" and outsider status in regards to his brothers' perspectives. Thus, this term is almost certainly less about illicit sexual relationships than it is about familial inheritance issues and continuity in communal identity and practices.

The connection between a woman who is a *zônâ* and the complications this brings for a community and its inheritance practices are not difficult to imagine. Israel was likely

⁴⁰⁴ Erlandsson, *TDOT* 4:100-101.

⁴⁰⁵ See Ezek 16:30, 23:44; Hos 1:2. Similar usages are used in Judg 2:17 and 8:27, 33.

⁴⁰⁶ Erlandsson, *TDOT* 4:101.

intolerant of prostitution especially because the paternity of a prostitute's children is likely uncertain. Thus property and status rights which were normally inherited patrilineally would also be uncertain.⁴⁰⁷ Goodfriend similarly remarks, "A society which valued the patrilineal bloodline so highly would logically have a real abhorrence of children with no known paternity and of the mother who bred them."⁴⁰⁸ While his father Gilead might be known, to be born by such a mother would automatically create communal and especially familial disdain for Jephthah.

Jephthah, in the narrative, represents an actual threat to familial lineage in general and to his brothers' inheritance specifically. The narrator first introduces this threat by calling Jephthah's mother an *'iššâ zônâ*. The narrator supplies a second term which reinforces the negative evaluation of Jephthah and his mom. Verse 2 recounts, "And the wife of Gilead bore to him sons. And the sons of the wife grew up and they cast out Jephthah and they said to him, "You will not inherit (*lō tinḥal*) from the house of your father for you are a son of another woman (*'iššâ 'aḥeret*)." It is in this verse that the threat Jephthah poses, by way of his mother, becomes abundantly clear. Sasson argues that the brothers justify their action of divesting Jephthah of his inheritance because Jephthah's mother is an *'iššâ 'aḥeret* and not because she is an *'iššâ zônâ*.⁴⁰⁹ This phrase is used elsewhere in 1 Chr 2:26 for the secondary wife of Jerahmeel, who was from a clan that was absorbed by Judah, and the phrase might emphasize "intrusion from beyond the tribe."⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ Elaine Adler Goodfriend, "Prostitution," *ABD* 5:505-510.

⁴⁰⁸ Goodfriend, "Prostitution," 5:506.

⁴⁰⁹ Sasson, *Judges*, 420.

⁴¹⁰ Sasson, *Judges*, 420.

This is clearly an issue in the book of Judges and is evident also in the story of Abimelech and his mother.⁴¹¹

It is the force of *both* of these indicators that emphasize Jephthah's mother's questionable and outsider status. The designation *'iššâ 'aḥeret* isolates the specific connotation that *zônâ* holds in this case. And the very negative associations that *'iššâ zônâ* bears makes the threat of this particular "other woman" even more severe. Her status as an *'iššâ zônâ* and an *'iššâ 'aḥeret* mark her and Jephthah as being beyond the tribe.⁴¹²

Jephthah's mother, her outsider status, and the legitimacy of her relationship to Gilead raises questions about Jephthah's inheritance and rights to primogeniture. Was her relationship to Gilead constituted by a legitimate marriage? If it was a marriage, was Gilead simply married to an arguably foreign or outsider woman? Do the brothers hold enough cards against this other wife of their father to deny Jephthah his inheritance and secure the inheritance not just for their family but for "Israel's" people? It is possible that the firstborn could lose his right to primogeniture as a consequence for a very serious transgression, but does the questionable status of a mother constitute a serious enough transgression?

b. Inheritance Practices: Jephthah and His Brothers

In regards to inheritance practices, the brothers explicitly claim that he will not inherit from the house of his father because Jephthah comes from another woman. By denying his inheritance, this statement demonstrates that Jephthah theoretically *does* have rights to his father's inheritance according to his brothers. The verb *nāḥal* references that

⁴¹¹ Abimelech's mother is connected to Shechem and does not share Gideon's background (Sasson, *Judges*, 420).

⁴¹² Brenner argues that many female figurations (over one third) in Judges possess some sort of outsider status, and there are many warnings against such "liminal" or "outsider" women (Brenner, "Introduction," 14). "The warnings are directed especially against potential connections Israelite men might form with outsider women" (14).

which Jephthah should receive because of his father. The verb of this legal term means that an heir receives his portion by succession, and the noun refers to the portion received.⁴¹³ In Judg 11:2, the Qal of *nāḥal* means “come into possession of a *naḥalâ*” and the associated accusative refers to the allotted property, either land or property/inheritance.⁴¹⁴ Both the narration and his brothers explicitly acknowledge that Jephthah shares the same father, and thus the same rights to transferable property, as his brothers. The only reason Jephthah loses his rights, according to his brothers, is because of his mother’s problematic status. Lipiński argues that, “Both clan solidarity and common law insisted that this property must not be alienated or at least that it remain within the family.”⁴¹⁵ According to the law, the brothers might have a legitimate case to deny Jephthah inheritance rights if his mother was an outsider or foreigner and not of the proper family. However, they could also be using the questionable status of his mother to make an erroneous excuse to remove Jephthah from the inheritance picture.

Not only is the reason for Jephthah’s loss of inheritance rights somewhat vague, but the brothers (and narrator) also fail to clarify the specifics of this lost inheritance. Generally, only legitimate sons have the right to inherit, and we have already discussed in reference to the *pîlegeš* of Judges 19 that sons of a concubine only become legitimate if the veiled/legitimate wife has no sons.⁴¹⁶ The narrator does not state that Jephthah’s mother is (or is not) a *pîlegeš*, but that Gilead’s legitimate wife bore legitimate sons is implied, and these men explicitly stake claim to their father’s inheritance (11:2). The brothers argue that because his mother is *’iššâ ’aḥeret*, Jephthah will not inherit. But the question remains,

⁴¹³ E. Lipiński, “*nāḥal*,” *TDOT* 9:319-335.

⁴¹⁴ Lipiński, *TDOT* 9:322.

⁴¹⁵ Lipiński, *TDOT* 9:327

⁴¹⁶ A41 of the Middle Assyrian Laws in Pritchard, *Ancient*, 183.

could she be a ranking, perhaps secondary, wife? If she is, Jephthah would have rights to his father's inheritance and his brothers are being unjust.⁴¹⁷ The woman's first designation as *'iššâ zônâ* further complicates the matter. MAL indicates that "a harlot must not veil herself."⁴¹⁸ This would make her a legitimate wife. As an *'iššâ zônâ*, and namely as a harlot, Jephthah's mother would not have the right to become a legitimate wife, and this implication would thus remove Jephthah from the inheritance proceedings.

In the book of Judges, an "inheritance" (*naḥalâ*) exclusively refers to land, and specifically the land that Israelites are supposed to possess.⁴¹⁹ According to Judges 11 and 21, women have an important role in fulfilling inheritance rites and securing households. In chapter 21, because the Benjaminites acquire for themselves women as wives and can therefore establish homes, they return to their inherited land, rebuild their cities and live in them. In chapter 11, because Jephthah is the son of "another woman" or perhaps the son of a harlot (or both), he fails to inherit any land from his father.

c. The Land of Tob and Jephthah's Questionable Companions: Jephthah in Exile

His loss of inheritance and his insecure social position lead Jephthah into exile, into a transitional and ironically named land, surrounded by questionable people. Verse 3 states that Jephthah flees from his brothers into the land of Tob. This is a good and beautiful land, but it is neither the land of Jephthah's upbringing, nor is it the place of his final residence. This is a liminal place in which Jephthah bides his time, perhaps waiting for a chance to reacquire the inheritance he lost. In the land of Tob, he is in exile: not where he belongs and

⁴¹⁷ Lipiński writes, "The sons of the first marriage collectively receive two-thirds of the patrimony, the sons of the second marriage only one-third. This regulation gives the children of the first marriage the privilege otherwise associated with primogeniture (Lipiński, *TDOT* 9:322-7).

⁴¹⁸ A40 of the Middle Assyrian Laws in Pritchard, *Ancient*, 183.

⁴¹⁹ See Judges 2:6 and 9, 18:1, 20:6, 21:23-24.

not where he will (hopefully) end up being.⁴²⁰ This land is also ironically named “good,” since the land or property that would *really* be good for Jephthah (i.e. the land to which he has rights) is the land that his brothers have taken away from him. Perhaps this land of transition lives up to its name; perhaps Jephthah needs a space to regroup and set a plan to make a strategic move. The verse reveals that in this “good” place of transition, Jephthah is no longer alone. “Men of emptiness” (*’ānāšîm rēqîm*) gather around him.⁴²¹ These sketchy characters lack purpose, much like Jephthah, because they lack place and status. They are outcasts and wanderers, perhaps mercenaries. When these terms are used in 9:4, Sasson describes these men as “rootless and reckless.”⁴²² The men carry with them a sense of impoverishment and utter lack of social security, and they tend to rally around a leader in the Hebrew Bible.⁴²³ The “men of emptiness” represent the same kind of instability and transition that constitutes both Jephthah’s life and the land of Tob in which they all dwell.

3. Jephthah’s Words

While Jephthah’s life is riddled with social insecurity, the narrator demonstrates time and again how Jephthah quests for security with the one tool in his possession: his ability to use words for his benefit. Jephthah’s complicated character portrayal, problematic mother, loss of inheritance, questionable people around him, and lack of stable land leaves him to hone one unique skill on which he can rely. DeMaris and Leeb’s social scientific article states that issues of honor and shame constitute this social insecurity and surround the puzzlingly figure of Jephthah.⁴²⁴ They repeatedly argue that Jephthah’s words

⁴²⁰ Bal urges that this vaguely named place should be read as a transitional space that is “good” for Jephthah (Bal, *Death*, 199).

⁴²¹ Abimelech, who also has major issues with his brothers, gathers the same kind of men around him in 9:4.

⁴²² Sasson, *Judges*, 421.

⁴²³ B. Kedar-Kopfstein, “*ryq*,” *TDOT* 13: 479-484.

⁴²⁴ DeMaris and Leeb, “Judges – (Dis)Honor,” 180.

are rightly conceived and that his vow and subsequent sacrifice are necessary ritualized actions performed in order to restore his honor.⁴²⁵ On the contrary, his words might work to Jephthah's benefit and demonstrate that he is a competent negotiator, but ultimately his words bind him, cause him trouble and facilitate his negative portrayal in the narrative. Jephthah appears as a master manipulator.⁴²⁶ Jephthah carefully uses his words to constrain people and God. Starting with an arbitration involving the elders of Gilead in v. 6, the narrator sustains a consistent focus on Jephthah's words and culminates in the implications of his vow to God.

a. The Gileadites

First, it is important to briefly mention Jephthah's aptitude with words before he proclaims his famous vow. Jephthah presents verbal arguments before the elders of Gilead and the King of Ammon. Both episodes demonstrate his ability to manipulate situations and people. The discussion with the elders is especially helpful to this chapter's discussion regarding Jephthah's quest for security.

When he is before the elders of Gilead, Jephthah negotiates his future role and title should he defeat the Ammonites on behalf of the Gileadites. In 10:18, the leaders of the Gileadites announce that whoever leads them in an attack against the Ammonites will be the head (*rôš*) over all who live in Gilead. In the very next verse, Jephthah enters the scene. After the narrator's digression by way of Jephthah's introduction, the elders from Gilead seek this able *gibbôr hayil* in Tob to lead their army. But they do not ask him to be their

⁴²⁵ DeMaris and Leeb, "Judges – (Dis)Honor," 180 and 184.

⁴²⁶ Webb provides an accurate description of Jephthah's use of words: "We cannot help but be impressed by the skill he displays as a negotiator. Yet for all this, the episode displays an aspect of his personality which we will later have cause to reflect upon more deeply, namely, the calculating way in which he goes about achieving his personal ambitions" (Webb, *Judges*, 54).

head (*rō'sh*); they request that he be their commander (*qāšîn*) (11:6). These are not meant to be the same.⁴²⁷ The term *qāšîn* carries with it connotations of leadership in a temporary military appointment (Josh 10:24, Dan 11:18, Prov 6:7), but it also refers to a chief or ruler (Isa 1:10, 3:7; Prov 25:15).⁴²⁸ Sasson argues that “it is reasonable to presume that the elders of Gilead are offering Jephthah leadership that has value mostly during combat; in the context, therefore, a translation “general” or “marshal” might suit best.”⁴²⁹

The *rō'sh* signifies a person who is the unambiguous (sometimes tribal) leader of a social group.⁴³⁰ The term denotes a chief who exercises military and juridical authority and also looks after the well-being and life of the community.⁴³¹ The term signifies a permanent leadership position.⁴³² Nielsen argues that the distinction between *rō'sh* and *qāšîn* is made plain in Judges 11 through the deliberations between Jephthah and the Gileadites. “The *qāšîn* functions as a military commander; the *rō'sh* is the ruler of all the citizens”⁴³³ In this tale, the Gileadites at first seek a *rō'sh*, but then when no one comes forward, they pursue Jephthah to be their *qāšîn*.

The difference in title could indicate Jephthah's foreign or outsider status; perhaps he could not serve as the people's head because he is not of the people. Willis suggests that the elders offer the title of *qāšîn* instead of *rō'sh* because Jephthah has been disinherited, and thus he was disqualified from being *rō'sh* over Gilead.⁴³⁴ Jephthah is not fooled. Before the elders, Jephthah employs his negotiating abilities. He reminds them of the past with a

⁴²⁷ See Sasson, *Judges*, 422. See also Micah 3:1, Joshua 10:24, and Isaiah 3:6-7.

⁴²⁸ K. Nielsen, “*qāšîn*,” *TDOT* 13:86-88 and Sasson, *Judges*, 422.

⁴²⁹ Sasson, *Judges*, 422.

⁴³⁰ U. Dahmen, “*rō'sh*,” *TDOT* 13:248-261.

⁴³¹ Dahmen, *TDOT* 13:254.

⁴³² Willis, “Nature,” 41.

⁴³³ Nielsen, *TDOT* 13:88.

⁴³⁴ Willis, “Nature,” 35.

rhetorical question, “Have you not hated me and did you not chase me away from the house of my father? Why do you come to me now just when you are in trouble?” (11:7). Jephthah’s words bring out 3 points: 1. Jephthah was wronged by the Gileadites, 2. Jephthah was unjustly forced from his father’s house, and therefore *is* one of “them,” and 3. The Gileadites need him now. With these points, Jephthah aptly supports his case and argues for a position greater than the appointment to be a *qāšîn*. He wants to be readmitted into his community, and more than that, he wants a permanent leadership position over the community.⁴³⁵ Perhaps Jephthah is aware of the Gileadites’ intentions in 10:18 and, without even referencing their quest for a *rō’š*, Jephthah orchestrates a way to become the head of their community. Jephthah seeks social security.⁴³⁶

The desperate elders of Gilead acknowledge and affirm Jephthah’s argument with *lākēn* (“just so”) and “sweeten the prize” by offering to make him “as one of theirs.”⁴³⁷ They state, “Go with us and you will fight the Ammonites. And you will be for us the head of all of the inhabitants of Gilead” (11:8). Jephthah is not completely convinced. He wants an indisputable promise that he will have a permanent leadership position, and thus he double checks. He makes sure that if he goes to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord delivers them to him, then he will be the Gileadites’ *rō’š* (11:9). The elders solidify the agreement by vowing to Jephthah’s words. They acquiesce, “May God be the one to hear our vow: according to your words, thus we will do” (11:10). And because words are so important and permanently binding to Jephthah, he takes one more verbal precautionary step even

⁴³⁵ Assis argues that Jephthah’s negotiations in seeking the leadership of the tribe office show clear personal motives without any indication of national concerns (Assis, *Self-Interest*, 197).

⁴³⁶ See also Sasson, *Judges*, 423. But even with this reestablishment into the community as either *rō’š* or *qāšîn*, Klein argues that the elders do not reinstate him as heir (Klein, *Irony*, 86).

⁴³⁷ Sasson, *Judges*, 423.

though the elders make him head and commander. The narrative states that Jephthah repeats what has been agreed, “Jephthah said all of his words before the Lord at Mizpah” (11:11). Jephthah solidifies the elders’ words by adding his own, and he does so by following the ritualized action of going to a holy place.⁴³⁸

b. Jephthah’s Vow

Jephthah receives the complicated “spirit of the Lord” in v.29. Following the bestowal of the spirit, he journeys toward the Ammonite forces. Before he enters combat, he “vows a vow” to the Lord. Jephthah’s vow demonstrates his facility and intentionality with words so as to develop tension within the narrative. The vow also displays how Jephthah uses his words to manipulate and bind people and YHWH.⁴³⁹ For these reasons, the episode with the vow serves to both highlight his pervasive insecurity and negatively evaluate Jephthah and his frequent use of words.

Jephthah’s vow is calculated and exact, yet there exists some confusion about what he intends to be the object of *’ôlâ*. In vv. 30-31, he vows to the Lord:

If you give completely the Ammonites into my hand, whoever/whatever comes out, who is coming out, of the door of my house to meet me in my returning in safety from the Ammonites, he/she/it will be to the Lord and I will make him/her/it a burnt offering.

⁴³⁸ There is not enough space to go into detail, but it is important to briefly note Jephthah’s correspondence with the Ammonites. Jephthah’s letter to the Ammonites in vv. 12-28 is essentially a declaration of war. He retells the history between the Israelites and the Ammonites in such a way that indicts the Ammonite King for waging an unwarranted war against the Israelites. Jephthah claims, “I have not wronged you, yet you do to me evil by waging war on me” (11:27). In atypical fashion of war correspondence, Jephthah’s words, “Let Adonai, the Judge, judge today between the Israelites and the Ammonites,” invokes only his god and does not mention the participation of the Ammonite god in the resolution of this conflict. In this way, Jephthah’s words engineer a justification for the conflict, and he binds his God, YHWH, to his cause.

⁴³⁹ Sasson also states that it is worth noticing how Jephthah personalizes the victory, and excludes everyone else from the achieved success. “As shaped, the fulfillment of the condition, accents the individual: it is I (*’ânôkî*) – Jephthah - who shall (continue) to be your leader” (Sasson, *Judges*, 424).

Jack Sasson provides a helpful structure for examining this vow and demonstrating how Jephthah's vow cannot possibly be thoughtless.⁴⁴⁰ He argues that the vow contains two conditions and two consequences. Using my translation, the vow structure breaks down in this way:

“If you deliver completely the Ammonites into my hand” = 1st Condition
“**whatever** comes out, which comes out of the door of my house to meet me” =
Subject
“in my returning in safety from the Ammonites” = 2nd Condition
“He/she/it will be to the Lord” = 1st Promise
“And I will make him/her/it a burnt offering” = 2nd Promise⁴⁴¹

The first condition follows typical terminology in Judges about deliverance from enemies and the Lord giving people into the hands of the victor.⁴⁴² This language is not surprising. However, Jephthah goes one step further than the expected language and practice as he continues to add and refine, making his desires more specific. In his second condition, Jephthah not only wants the victory, but he wants the assurance of his own personal safety. Once again, Jephthah's words reveal his concern for his own security. The first consequence in Jephthah's vow is also typical and acceptable. He willingly offers the first being to come out of his house as a dedication to the Lord. Just as the 2nd condition makes his vow more specific, Jephthah's 2nd consequence also provides a more serious offering in the form of a sacrifice and burnt offering to the Lord. One can debate the necessity of the 2nd condition

⁴⁴⁰ Sasson, *Judges*, 436-438. Many scholars argue that Jephthah makes a “rash” vow (see Marcus, *Jephthah*, 12). Boling claims that the vow is hastily worded (Boling, *Judges*, 207). Wong claims that this rash vow that dooms his daughter is echoed in Israel's rash oath that dooms virgin daughters later in the book (Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 138). Other scholars fall in line with Sasson and argue that this was not a rash vow. Römer says that the vow was not necessarily hasty (Thomas C. Römer, “Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell about the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter?” *JOT* 77 [1998]: 27-38). Jephthah's vow demonstrates his shrewdness in terms of negotiating and how he is utterly calculating (see Webb, *Judges*, 52 and 54; Olson, *NIB* 2:825). Webb argues that the vow is “entirely keeping with Jephthah's character as we have come to know it” (Webb, *Judges*, 64). DeMaris and Leeb claim that his vow is not rash, unnecessary or superfluous but crucial to resolving his and his daughter's honor status (DeMaris and Leeb, “Judges – (Dis)Honor,” 179 and 184).

⁴⁴¹ See Sasson, *Judges*, 437-438.

⁴⁴² See Judges 1:2, 4; 2:14, 23; 3:10, 28; 4:7, 14; 6:1, 9; 7:2, 7, 9, 14, 15; 8:3, 7; 11:21; 12:3; 13:1; 16:23, 24; 18:10; 20:28.

and 2nd consequence, but Jephthah's *modus operandi* is clearly to secure his own wellbeing. So, Jephthah does not hesitate to safeguard his life. And in fact, the 2nd condition and 2nd consequence parallel each other in theme. For the security of his own life, Jephthah will offer as a sacrifice another's life. In this way, the syntax of the vow and the meaning of the vow mutually enhance each other. The double condition and double consequence logically parallel each other in intensity, and they expose Jephthah's overriding concern for his own security.

Contrary to this reading of the vow, Kaiser argues that the vow's syntactic structure and meaning are much more complex. The complex structure he reads might come as a result of his reading only one simple condition in 30b.⁴⁴³ Kaiser fails to see 31a as a condition in and of itself. He claims that:

The double promise in v. 31b is preceded by an involved description of what is being vowed, so that v. 31a contains an expansion of the condition statement in v. 30b. This complexity may be viewed as a stylistic device used to represent Jephthah's inner uncertainty.⁴⁴⁴

Kaiser unnecessarily complicates the vow. He fails to see that the double condition and double consequence are clearly presented. And when the vow's complexity disappears, so does its representation of Jephthah's inner uncertainty. Building an argument based on Jephthah's inner turmoil is speculative work. The issue is not Jephthah's hypothetical inner uncertainty but his obvious unclear social status. Instead of representing his inner uncertainty, the vow exemplifies another example of Jephthah's tendency to use his words as his main tool at his disposal to manipulate situations to his benefit. Jephthah's vow is

⁴⁴³ O. Kaiser, "nādar," *TDOT* 9:242-255.

⁴⁴⁴ Kaiser, *TDOT* 9:249.

carefully crafted with a parallel structure and demonstrates not his inner uncertainty, but his undeniable concern for himself.

Focusing on these phrases, scholars have expended much effort to determine if Jephthah *intends* human or animal sacrifice. Boling makes a case about Iron Age houses accommodating livestock as well as family, and he claims that Jephthah's vow could very well refer to an animal.⁴⁴⁵ In fact, an animal sacrifice is not particularly noteworthy when following a victory. It is very likely that Jephthah would have sacrificed an animal in this time of war, and he could have done so before or after he spoke his words. But for the narrator to include this vow (rather than a simple animal sacrifice) and to be so vague regarding the object of sacrifice is worthy of note.⁴⁴⁶

Moore decidedly claims that Jephthah's vow does not refer to an animal; "that is absurd."⁴⁴⁷ Sasson argues that Jephthah has a human being in mind. It is possible to argue that only a human would come out "to meet/greet" another person (i.e. using the root *qr*), and this supports a case for the intention of a human sacrifice. Animals do not intentionally greet humans returning from war. Chisholm argues contrary to this and says that both animals and people could be used with the infinitive "to meet me."⁴⁴⁸ However, he claims that the infinitive "to meet" and the verb "go out," when together, are used only in reference to persons and not for animals.⁴⁴⁹ Even if Jephthah intends a human object in his vow, it is not clear if Jephthah knew it would or *could* be his daughter or if he expects an

⁴⁴⁵ Boling, *Judges*, 208.

⁴⁴⁶ For a list of various interpretations over time about what was the issue in Jephthah's vow, see Heinz-Dieter Neef, "Jephta und seine Tochter (Jdc XI 29-40)," *VT* 49 (1999): 206-217.

⁴⁴⁷ Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 299. Given the wartime circumstances, Reis also argues that an animal intended for sacrifice would be "ludicrously trivial" (Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah's Daughter," *Proof* 17 [1997]: 279-298).

⁴⁴⁸ Chisholm, "Ethical," 405.

⁴⁴⁹ Chisholm, "Ethical," 405.

“expendable” servant to be the object of sacrifice.⁴⁵⁰ Regardless of the intent, the point is that Jephthah’s daughter *does* become the object in the vow, and his words are unclear enough to provide the possibility that a human would be sacrificed.

It is apparent that the reader will never know what object of sacrifice this character of Jephthah (or even the narrator) intended in the vow, but one might reflect on why this uncertainty resides in a very calculated and well-crafted vow. Olson and other scholars argue that perhaps the vagueness is intentional.⁴⁵¹ Marcus’ article similarly predominantly focuses on the narrator’s deliberate ambiguity within the vow.⁴⁵² Logan posits, “what if the vow’s ambiguity was intended to be interpreted as a well-conceived, calculated offer to leave the choice to God, in the (desperate) hope that *against expectation* YHWH would surprise Jephthah and *not* demand his due?”⁴⁵³ Tribble argues, “we do well to let them (the words) be vague.”⁴⁵⁴ This imprecision in the vow enables tension and anticipation to build for the reader.⁴⁵⁵ The reader wonders how the vow will be fulfilled, and thus the narrator keeps the reader’s attention. The overall effect of this vow is to demonstrate on the one hand that Jephthah is very careful with his words, and on the other hand, that some openness in the dedicated and sacrificed object of the vow builds suspense in the narrative.

⁴⁵⁰ Niditch claims that even though the case has often been made that Jephthah must have known who would greet him (i.e. his daughter in a group of musical celebrants) and therefore he made a rash or foolish vow, no such value judgment exists in the narrative (Niditch, *Judges*, 134). This hero only fully comprehends the tragic ramifications of his vow in the wake of the war (134).

⁴⁵¹ Olson, *NIB* 2:832. See also Boling, *Judges*, 208.

⁴⁵² Marcus, *Jephthah*, 12 and 50. Marcus argues that likely a human was intended, but the lack of clarity is the first of a number of intentional ambiguities (18).

⁴⁵³ Logan, “Rehabilitating,” 678.

⁴⁵⁴ Tribble, “Meditation,” 61.

⁴⁵⁵ See also Marcus, *Jephthah*, 12.

The narrator's presentation of Jephthah's vow (*wayyidar nēder*) is the typical formula for introducing a vow narrative, and it is also evident in formulas belonging to the register of cultic language.⁴⁵⁶ An occasion of a vow can be in times of mortal danger, so Jephthah's timing of the vow (i.e. as the Israelites advance on the Ammonites) is not misplaced.⁴⁵⁷ Thus, Jephthah's initial movement reflects the typical introduction of a vow and the appropriate circumstance associated with making a vow.

However, the vow raises questions about Jephthah's motivation and his tireless concern only for himself. According to Levitical vows, animals can be presented as a freewill offering (*nēdābâ*) or to fulfill a special vow (Lev 22:18, 21). A vow allows for human beings (often slaves), or the equivalent of their worth, to be given to the Lord (Lev 27:2-8). Jack Sasson notes that "in Hebrew narratives, albeit not necessarily in real life, ritualized killing is scarcely condemned."⁴⁵⁸ Sasson provides a table of other biblical testimonies of sacrifice that correspond to Jephthah's story. In 1 Sam 14, Saul makes a damning oath, and even though Jonathan breaks the oath, he eventually pays with his life for his father's greed; Mesha of Moab offers his first-born as an *'ōlâ* in 2 Kgs 3; in 1 Kgs 16:34, Hiel of Bethel offers a human for sacrifice in order to reverse a curse that came after fortifying Jericho (and "the narrator is noncommittal about it all").⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ Kaiser, *TDOT* 9:243.

⁴⁵⁷ Kaiser, *TDOT* 9:246.

⁴⁵⁸ Sasson, *Judges*, 445. See also Num 25:4, 1 Sam 15:33, Gen 22, 2 Sam 21:1-11, 2 Kgs 23:10. Cf. Römer, "Deuteronomists," 27 and 31. Römer argues that Deuteronomistic ideology is absolutely hostile to human sacrifice. He cites 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17, 31; 21:6. Also, see Lev 18:21. See also Bauks, "La fille," 82-83. Boling says that human sacrifice wasn't condoned but it was known and sometimes used as a punishment by YHWH (e.g. Ezek 20:25-26, 31) (Boling, *Judges*, 209).

⁴⁵⁹ Sasson, *Judges*, 445. Cf. Bauks, "La fille," 85.

Perhaps the most famous human near sacrifice is the Akedah in Genesis 22, but Sasson argues that “it has little to compare with the Jephthah story.”⁴⁶⁰ They might appear to have similar elements, but the narratives are intended for different purposes and reflect very different contexts. In the case of the Abraham/Isaac episode, “the sacrifice is God inspired; the potential victim (Isaac) is identified from the first; the potential immolator would have accomplished the deed without complaints; the same impulse for the potential victim; and a substitute is advanced.”⁴⁶¹ The result of Jephthah’s tale coincides with the narrator’s routinely unflattering evaluation of Jephthah. Jephthah habitually pushes his luck. He seeks security, initiates the vow, and appoints God as the one to choose the victim. “Jephthah would go eyeball to eyeball with God, fully expecting him to blink first – just as God did for Abraham when the life of Isaac was at stake.”⁴⁶² When Jephthah spots his daughter, and “loses his gamble,” Jephthah remains true to his character and places blame on others rather than accepting responsibility for his actions.⁴⁶³

Jephthah follows Deuteronomy 23:22, “For when you vow a vow to the Lord your God, do not tarry to repay it, for the Lord your God will surely seek it from you, and you will have sin on you.” At the end of chapter 11, Jephthah is adamant about doing according to how he “opened his mouth.” In 11:35b he exclaims, “And I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot bring the words back (lit. I cannot return it).” He obviously has knowledge of Deut 23:24, “What goes forth from your mouth you must keep and do just as you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God which you spoke from your mouth.” But most importantly and perhaps *conveniently* for this verbose man, Jephthah fails to recall Deut

⁴⁶⁰ Sasson, *Judges*, 445.

⁴⁶¹ Sasson, *Judges*, 445. See also Bauks, “La fille,” 87.

⁴⁶² Sasson, *Judges*, 447.

⁴⁶³ Sasson, *Judges*, 448.

23:23, the verse that falls between the two verses by which he so stubbornly abides. Deuteronomy 23:23 provides a way for Jephthah to avoid his situation altogether, and implicitly acknowledges the seriousness of vow-making and the potential negative ramifications if a vow is not carefully expressed. It provides, “But if you cease to vow, you will have no sin on you (incur no guilt).”⁴⁶⁴

Reading Jephthah sympathetically, Chisholm claims that Jephthah is ignorant. Chisholm argues, had “Jephthah understood the Lord’s priorities and commands, he would have known that fulfilling the vow compounds his crime.”⁴⁶⁵ If Jephthah had known the Law in the first place, he would never have made the vow.⁴⁶⁶ It is true that without the vow, he would not have to face its consequences. Contrary to Chisholm’s sympathetic reading of Jephthah, it is more likely that the narrator depicts Jephthah making this unnecessary vow in order to demonstrate Jephthah’s selfish concern for his own life. Jephthah seems to realize the importance of keeping vows that are made to YHWH, and he is too arrogant to abstain from making the vow in the first place. In addition, the narrator shows Jephthah to be reckless and ruthless with another’s life. As the reader repeatedly observes, Jephthah is insistent on opening his mouth. In this case, he makes a potentially flawed and certainly avoidable vow. Even if Jephthah knows better, he still deliberately makes a vow for his own sake and potentially puts others at risk in order to secure his own safety. He acts selfishly. As will be evident in his interactions with his daughter, the narrator again implicitly negatively evaluates this selfishness.

⁴⁶⁴ A similar ideology is expressed in Qohelet 5:3-4.

⁴⁶⁵ Chisholm, “Ethical,” 415. Although hers is not a sympathetic reading of Jephthah, Bal similarly argues that Jephthah’s vow is superfluous, only because he lacks understanding (Bal, *Death*, 44).

⁴⁶⁶ Chisholm, “Ethical,” 415.

Jephthah's vow demonstrates how this man selfishly uses his words to manipulate not only people, but also a God who is already at work in Jephthah's life. God has previously acted by giving Jephthah the spirit. But it is not clear if Jephthah is aware that he has the spirit.⁴⁶⁷ If he does not know about the presence of the Lord's spirit on him, perhaps the vow is a way for Jephthah to gain a sense of divine security and approval in the military endeavor he pursues. If he is aware that the Lord has given him the divine spirit, then his vow could be read as an indication of faithlessness.⁴⁶⁸ Why would Jephthah need the vow if the Lord has already granted approval of Jephthah? Another possibility is that the spirit (wrongly) urges Jephthah to make the vow, and thus this could be an indication of a malevolent (or at least complex) divine spirit at work.⁴⁶⁹ These possibilities aptly demonstrate Römer's point that the narrator wanted to create a tension between the gift of the spirit and the vow.⁴⁷⁰ Klein demonstrates that this tension between the spirit and the vow reveals the great irony in Jephthah's story: YHWH bestows his spirit upon Jephthah, but Jephthah immediately makes a profoundly anti-Yahwist vow.⁴⁷¹ This tension also highlights and raises questions about YHWH's participation and action as the vow comes directly after the imparting of the divine spirit.

Jephthah's vow reflects more on his character than on attributes of God. Sasson claims that in a narrative, "There is hardly any doubt that the condition (of the vow) will be met by the petitioned deity; instead, whether or how the pledging individual resolves the

⁴⁶⁷ See Olson, *NIB* 2:832 and Exum, *Fragmented*, 19.

⁴⁶⁸ Tribble claims that the vow is an act of unfaithfulness and that "Jephthah desires to bind God rather than embrace the gift of the spirit" (Tribble, "Meditation," 61). Also, Römer claims that his vow is due to a lack of faith (Römer, "Deuteronomists," 30).

⁴⁶⁹ When she lists the ambiguous circumstances when Jephthah utters his vow, Exum poses this possibility as well (Exum, *Fragmented*, 19).

⁴⁷⁰ Römer, "Deuteronomists," 29.

⁴⁷¹ Klein, *Irony*, 107.

pledge generates the plotline and gives shape to the character of the person involved.”⁴⁷² Logan similarly remarks that Jephthah’s vow could be described as a “war vow,” a sort of “trump card,” enacted when victory really mattered and wherein the swearer promises “devoted” human life (or at the very least a most precious possession).⁴⁷³ In the serious business of making war vows, “if the deity fulfilled his end of the bargain, no king would have wanted to incur God’s wrath by not living up to his.”⁴⁷⁴ In other words, one expects the narrative to unfold with God fulfilling the conditions of Jephthah’s success against the Ammonites and safe return. It remains to be seen what will be the object of sacrifice and how Jephthah will fulfill the consequences he has set. The reader has little doubt about God’s future activity, but Jephthah’s character will continue to be tested.

Indicting Jephthah for impious and even criminal activity, Jephthah’s vow (and to some extent, *all* vows) can be read as a bribe to God.⁴⁷⁵ Jephthah’s tragic ending puts the final narrative evaluation on Jephthah’s vow. The narrator shows that such a selfish vow inevitably leads to devastation. While the vow might be read as a display of Jephthah’s faith in YHWH,⁴⁷⁶ the only true and right piety of Jephthah rests in the fact that he “vowed a vow” at all. Given the structure of the vow that reveals Jephthah’s obsession with his own safety, the lack of clarity about the object intended for sacrifice, and the vow’s manipulation of YHWH, the vow is at best an indication of Jephthah’s misdirected piety and at worst should be considered a selfish bribe to YHWH.

⁴⁷² Sasson, *Judges*, 436.

⁴⁷³ Logan, “Rehabilitating,” 272.

⁴⁷⁴ Logan, “Rehabilitating,” 272.

⁴⁷⁵ See David Janzen, “Why the Deuteronomist Told About the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter,” *JSOT* 29 (2005): 339-357. See also Webb, *Judges*, 64 and Olson, *NIB* 2:832.

⁴⁷⁶ See Römer, “Deuteronomists,” 30 and Tribble, “Meditation,” 61.

B. Jephthah's Daughter

The namelessness of Jephthah's daughter does not merely place her within the ranks of the other anonymous characters in Judges 11, such as Jephthah's mother, his brothers, the elders of Gilead; rather, this unnamed daughter's words and actions have profound impact on the analysis of the character of Jephthah as well as the story's unfolding. Reinhartz counters some arguments that her anonymity is symbolic of her fate; instead she claims that there is irony in the fact that the girl is anonymous and yet memorialized in an annual ritual for women.⁴⁷⁷ The anonymous daughter in the narrative is both an object to be acted upon and a subject who acts. A variety of narrative themes, already mentioned within this chapter, correspond to Jephthah's daughter's character and emerge in both parts of this section on Jephthah's daughter. Like Jephthah, both the daughter's role in the story and the narrator's evaluation of her contain vague elements. Also, much like how imprudence and vow-making reveal Jephthah's character, ritual acts symbolize his daughter's character. Finally, the daughter's designation as a *bētûlâ* and his only child highlights the narrative's preoccupation with family and inheritance issues and pinpoints how her character focuses the discussion of liminality within Judges 11.

1. Jephthah's Daughter as the Object of Jephthah's Vow

Intentionally or not, this young woman becomes the object for sacrifice in Jephthah's fatal vow. However, the text includes some imprecision about the daughter

⁴⁷⁷ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 118. Bal argues that the daughter's powerlessness is reflected literarily in her namelessness (Bal, *Death*, 199). Brenner claims that characters are often dehumanized by namelessness, and nameless is often a pejorative authorial comment (Brenner, "Introduction," 13). See also Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 158. Beavis gives her a proper name: "Bat-Jephthah" (Beavis, "A Daughter," 11-25). Bal calls her "Bath" (Bal, *Death*, 43).

being the *only* option to fulfill the vow's consequences. After Jephthah fights the Ammonites and the Lord gives them into his hand (v. 32), the narrative recounts specifics of the devastation to the Ammonite towns and claims that the "Ammonites were subdued before the Israelites" (v. 33). In this way, the narrative demonstrates that the Lord fulfills the first condition in Jephthah's vow. The fulfillment of the second condition occurs when Jephthah returns to his house in v. 34. Using the same verbs that Jephthah employs in his vow (i.e. *hayyôšē'/yēšē'* and *liqra'tî*), the narrator reports that "his daughter came out to meet him" (*yôšē't liqra'tô*). The repetition of word choice should clearly identify the daughter as the object for fulfillment of the vow, but the next phrase highlights some doubt about this interpretation.

Judges 11:34 claims that the daughter came out to meet him *bētuppîm ûbimḥōlôt* ("with drummers and dancers"). Many scholars and versions understand that the daughter emerged alone, dancing and playing drums.⁴⁷⁸ But these plural nouns also indicate "the ones who do these actions." In this way, the text could read that the daughter comes out "with drummers and people dancing" to meet her father. According to the grammar, it is very possible that the daughter is not the only one to emerge from the house.

The daughter, as one of many in a group of people exiting the home to greet a victorious man returning from war, follows accounts in other biblical texts. Dancing often displays people joyful because of a military victory (1 Sam 21:12 and 1 Sam 29:5), and playing instruments like the drum also demonstrates praise and rejoicing (Ps 81:3, 2 Sam 6:5, 1 Chr 13:8). Frequently this instrument of praise accompanies dancing (Pss 149:3 and

⁴⁷⁸ Tribble and Assis claim that she came out alone (Tribble, "Meditation," 63 and Assis, *Self-Interest*, 214), but this does not coincide with practices evidenced in the Hebrew Bible. Sasson does not think that it was a single woman because this is not what the text and custom prompt us to imagine (Sasson, *Judges*, 439). One person coming out does not make for much of a celebration of Jephthah's return.

150:4). And very often, women are exclusively depicted in this ritual that rejoices over military victory. In Exod 15:20, Miriam the prophetess engages in a similar action and “all the women went out with her as drummers and people dancing.” Similarly, women “come out of all of the cities of Israel” and participate in a welcome party with drums and dancing for David in 1 Samuel 18:6. Judges 21:21 doesn’t mention drums, but depicts the women of Shiloh coming out and dancing.⁴⁷⁹ In an allusion to this practice, Jeremiah 31:4 employs similar terminology to Judges 11:34 and describes a victorious Israel being built up again, “Again I will build you, and you will be built Virgin (*bētûlat*) Israel, again you will be adorned with drums and you will go forth in dancing with those making merry.” Thus, the scene with Jephthah’s daughter should be read in conjunction with the rest of the tradition, and it is not plausible that she came out of her house alone.

Never does just one person greet victorious soldiers. And because the daughter is not the only one emerging from Jephthah’s home, Sasson wonders why Jephthah must immediately assume that his daughter should be sacrificed.⁴⁸⁰ According to Sasson, Jephthah could have chosen another person for sacrifice from the group emerging from his home. Because Jephthah *chooses* the daughter to fulfill the vow’s consequence, it is apparent that the narrator uses Jephthah’s reaction to seeing his daughter in v. 35 as a way to once again develop Jephthah’s character.

Had it only been the drumming and dancing daughter emerging from the house, fate would have been the culprit. Or even worse, the Lord, who did not make sure that

⁴⁷⁹ Egger-Wenzel has an entire article that draws connections between the women in Judges 11 and 21 and specifically mentions this verb. See Renate Egger-Wenzel, “Jiftachs Tochter (Ri 11, 29-40) – die Töchter von Schilo (Ri 21, 19-25): Ursprung und Ausführung einer kultischen Feier durch Frauen?” *BN* 129 (January 1, 2006), 5-16.

⁴⁸⁰ Sasson writes, “The point of having a large party moving out of the compound is to accentuate the oddity of Jephthah fixing his sight just on his daughter when she was joined by other celebrants” (Sasson, *Judges*, 439).

something (or someone) else less dear to Jephthah emerged, would be to blame. But Jephthah had a choice in making the vow, and now has a choice in who he will sacrifice. Not surprisingly, Jephthah blames the victim, rather than admitting his own culpability.

Upon seeing his daughter, Jephthah tears his garment and says, “Ahah! My daughter, surely you have completely harmed me and you are causing my trouble. And I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot bring the words back” (v. 35). Given the evidence of the grammar and terminology in v. 34, the women’s ritual, and Sasson’s argument, Jephthah is wrong to assume that his daughter must be sacrificed. This becomes another indictment by the narrator that Jephthah has spoken unnecessarily. First, he makes a vow without considering the consequences. Then he cries, “Ahah!” and blames his daughter in v. 35 for the disaster that must befall him because he must now sacrifice her.

Jephthah’s insistence on his daughter could, again indicate his (perhaps flawed) desire to fulfill Israelite sacrificial practices. His daughter is his “only one and from him there was no other son or daughter” (v. 34). As his only progeny, she is his prized possession. And much like a stunted or deformed animal is an unacceptable object for an offering, Jephthah cannot choose a servant or another person of secondary importance to him. His daughter is the appropriate and only option. This possibility puts another notch in the list of indictments of Jephthah. If Jephthah anticipates a welcome party in his return and he knows that his daughter would be present in this party, and if he also knows that he is required to sacrifice a prized object, then he would be very aware that his daughter would be the consequence of his vow.

Jephthah's speech mirrors his earlier behavior. Jephthah's words bind everyone he encounters: the Gileadites, the Ammonite king, and YHWH. Now in v. 35, he constrains his daughter and his own future.

2. Jephthah's Daughter as an Object and a Subject

Most of what was mentioned in the previous section considers how and why the daughter becomes the object of Jephthah's vow, mainly viewing her from his perspective. The daughter becomes the object of Jephthah's earlier choice, she is the object for which he tears his garment, and she serves as a symbol of Jephthah's lost potential. This section will discuss how the daughter defies being merely an object of consequence for the vow and how she assumes a more assertive role as a subject in the narrative. The narrator presents Jephthah's daughter as both submissive and assertive. In many ways, Jephthah's daughter follows her father's lead, but she also takes her own initiative. First, she completes his mourning activity by establishing her own mourning ritual that is remembered for generations. Second, she repeats his words about how he has opened his mouth, a reiteration that serves as an implicit indictment. The daughter simultaneously acquiesces to her father's vow *and* challenges patriarchal authority.

a. The Ritual in the Hills

The degree of Jephthah's daughter's submission is debated. Exum repeatedly argues that the daughter fully submitted to her father, and that the daughter poses no threat to the patriarchal system.⁴⁸¹ In contrast, Reinhartz and Bal point out that she *does* leave her father's house for the company of other young women. And her request and departure could be interpreted as a challenge to paternal authority, even as he allows her to go. Exum

⁴⁸¹ Exum, *Fragmented*, 18 and 28 and Exum, "On Judges 11," 137.

does claims that the journey to the hills *is* a movement of self-assertion.⁴⁸² But Reinhartz argues more adamantly that the daughter puts an end to his role of father and supreme reign within patriarchy as she takes two months in the hills with her friends.⁴⁸³ Bal claims that the daughter's movement to the hills is her way of exploiting the only possibility left open to her, and she puts an end to Jephthah's paternity.⁴⁸⁴ As will become evident in what follows, the daughter is neither straightforwardly submissive nor assertive. She holds a complicated role in the narrative.

Jephthah's daughter both follows her father's lead and carves out her own path. Jephthah begins a mourning practice when he sees his daughter. He tears his garment and wails. Not only a ritualized mourning act, this tearing of a garment indicates the frustration in a deep sense of loss. Reuben tears his garment when he finds that Joseph is gone in Gen 37:29. David tears his clothes and lies on the ground when he receives word that all of the king's sons are lost (2 Sam 13:31). Similarly, the king tears his clothes when he hears of a woman who, tricked by another woman, has killed her own son (2 Kgs 6:30). The imagery of the tearing of a garment is used numerous times in the biblical text and elsewhere as a more or less universal sign of grief and distress. As evidenced by the above examples and in most other instances, it is the man who tears his garment.⁴⁸⁵ But women have their own response to tragic circumstances. Rather than tearing their clothes, women are often depicted weeping. Samson's wife weeps to him in Judg 14:16 and 17. All of Israel, often depicted as a woman, weeps (Judg 2:4; 20:23, 26; 21:2).⁴⁸⁶ This is the activity of Jephthah's

⁴⁸² Exum, *Fragmented*, 38.

⁴⁸³ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 121.

⁴⁸⁴ Bal, *Death*, 68.

⁴⁸⁵ See also 2 Kgs 19:1, 22:11; Esth 4:1; Isa 37:1.

⁴⁸⁶ For instances of women weeping in the Hebrew Bible, see Gen 21:16, Ruth 1:9, 14; 1 Sam 1:7, 8, 10. While Judges primarily depicts women or the whole of Israel weeping, men weep in other parts of the Hebrew Bible

daughter (i.e. *wattēbkk*, “she wept”) with her friends on the hills. Thus, Jephthah begins to mourn, and his daughter follows in her own mourning activities.⁴⁸⁷

When the daughter makes a way for her own mourning activity, she asserts herself and initiates a new women’s ritual. The dialogue between the father and daughter is most telling, demonstrating a shift in narrative perspective and focus as the narrator leaves behind Jephthah’s actions and military endeavors and draws attention to the words and actions of women. Jephthah’s daughter responds in v. 36 to his outburst in v. 35 by first acknowledging his words and his need to follow through on the words of his mouth. She says, “My Father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord. Do to me what came out of your mouth because the Lord has made for you retribution from your enemies the Ammonites.”⁴⁸⁸ Verse 37 is perplexing since the pattern of dialogue would expect his response. But surprisingly, for the first time in the entire narrative, Jephthah is silent. The daughter speaks again in v. 37 and breaks up the pattern of dialogue. It is possible that the break in the dialogue indicates that some time has passed since her last response and now she returns to her father in v. 37. Perhaps the gap in dialogue represents the realization of both father and daughter that something serious is about to happen to her. She changes from the imperative of “*Do to me (‘āšēh lî)* what came out of your mouth” (v. 36) to the fully realized and deeply tragic statement of the future reality in the imperfect and passive

(e.g. Gen 23:2, 27:38, 29:11, 33:4, 37:35, 42:24, 43:30, 45:14-15, 46:29, 50:1; 1 Sam 20:41; Ezra 10:1, Neh 1:4, Isaiah 16:9, etc.)

⁴⁸⁷ See Fuchs, “Marginalization,” 121; Niditch, *Judges*, 134. Claassens analyzes the wailing women in Jer 9:16-19 and the God who weeps in Jer 8:23 and argues that these women represent ways in which the community addresses trauma (L. Juliana M. Claassens, “Calling the Keeners: The Image of the Wailing Woman as Symbol of Survival in a Traumatized World,” *JFSR* 26 [March 1, 2010]: 63-77).

⁴⁸⁸ Egger-Wenzel makes much of this *ys’* verb and connects this instance to the subject of Jephthah’s vow and the actions of the daughters of Shiloh (Egger-Wenzel, “Jiftachs,” 12- 13). Lanoir also mentions the usage of the verb *ys’* by Jephthah in v.31, to describe the actions of his daughter in v. 34, and in the mouth of the daughter when she evokes the vow of her father (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 156). Lanoir draws theological connections with the same verb (i.e. the coming out) in the Exodus narratives and the theme of liberation while noting the ensuing irony in the “coming out” in Jephthah’s story (156-157).

Niphal, “This matter will be done to me” (*yē’āseh lî haddābār hazzeh*) (v. 37). Then the daughter introduces an entirely new course of action. In verse 37, she requests two months’ time and says, “I will go down to the hills and I will weep for my *bētûlâ*. I and my friends.” Her initiation of a plan allows for her own time with the women who accompany her.

With ironic effects, the narrator makes great effort to reference rituals and activities that women accomplish together. Previous mention was made about the ritual of drumming and dancing women who greet victors of war. Both vv. 37 and 38 reference Jephthah’s daughter and her companions as they go to the hills to weep “upon her *bētûlâ*” (v. 38). 11:40 references future generations of the daughters of Israel who collectively commemorate Jephthah’s daughter. In a narrative that seems to focus on military exploits and one man’s quest for security, the final verses of this narrative expend much effort on identifying rituals of women. Thus, it is noteworthy that the text’s final emphasis is on Jephthah’s daughter’s ritualized actions and how they are memorialized in the actions of generations of women rather than on the legacy of Jephthah’s military accomplishments.

The purpose of the women’s weeping on the hills is somewhat elusive, yet this event relates to her liminal life stage which will be discussed shortly. Perhaps she bewails her adolescent age and state; perhaps she has not quite yet attained this age and she bewails not reaching this life stage; or perhaps she bewails reaching the pubescent life stage and not being able to fulfill the life stage’s accompanying events (i.e. having children).⁴⁸⁹ More will be elaborated about the daughter’s life stage and the potential reason for the ritual in the hills, but it is enough for now to state that, while the narrator makes much effort to

⁴⁸⁹ Sasson, *Judges*, 442.

twice reference the women's ritual, the actual program of this particular ritual and the ultimate fate of the daughter remains vague in the text.

Even to the end, the narrator leaves a sense of ambiguity about whether the daughter is ultimately sacrificed or if she is merely dedicated to YHWH.⁴⁹⁰ The narrator indicates, "He did to her his vow which he vowed" (11:39). Although the difference between sacrifice and dedication has a much greater impact on the daughter, the ultimate result of either fate is arguably the same for the daughter given the patriarchal perspective of the narrator and the patriarchal context in which she lives. This *bētâlâ* is unable to fulfill the "normal" trajectory of her life, and she never moves into the role of mother. Exum remarks that women had one possibility of making a mark on the world in this kind of setting: having kids. And thus, "without children the woman is somehow incomplete; she has not fulfilled her role as woman."⁴⁹¹ In this way, it does not matter whether the daughter is sacrificed or dedicated to YHWH. Either way, the women mourn her loss of potential for

⁴⁹⁰ Reis is adamant that the daughter *chooses* celibacy as her fate (Reis, "Spoiled," 279). While Marcus prefers that she met a non-sacrificial fate, the evidence is such that the reader can't really know, and both sacrifice and dedication are possible (Marcus, *Jephthah*, 50). Olson follows Marcus's assessment of the consciously devised ambiguities within the text and that this element of the story is open to a number of interpretations (Olson, *NIB* 2:834). Although his argument does not easily coincide with the double condition/double consequence that Sasson proposes, Chisholm makes a convincing point that the syntax of the vow implies that Jephthah's daughter becomes the Lord's by being sacrificed to him as an *'ôlâ* (Chisholm, "Ethical," 408). In this argument, the consequences are related to each other. Sasson argues against Marcus's judgment of the narrator's intentional ambiguity, and that this ending is not "ambiguous," at least in the "rhetorical sense, in which a word, expression, or idea is open to multiple interpretations" (Sasson, *Judges*, 448). Sasson reasons that clearly the young woman dies in the end because only dead ones are remembered in future generations; there is hardly any evidence that she would be remembered because she was a spinster (583). Tribble similarly sees no more ambiguity at this point in the narrative, either in terms of the object for sacrifice or whether the action will be sacrifice or dedication: the daughter will be the sacrifice (Tribble, *Texts*, 100).

⁴⁹¹ Exum, "On Judges 11," 138. Exum further claims that this coincides with the fact that the daughter is not named. She is not remembered as herself but as a daughter who did not have children (139). See also Klein, "Spectrum," 26.

a “normal” (reproductive) life.⁴⁹² The text is clearly androcentric, as it is read from her perspective in that she is denied motherhood.⁴⁹³

When read from Jephthah’s perspective, namely that his line comes to an end by her death, the text is also undeniably androcentric. Smith argues that Jephthah sentences his lineage to death and loses all hope for posterity, regardless of whether she is killed or dedicated to the divinity.⁴⁹⁴ Contrary to this argument, DeMaris and Leeb claim that Jephthah does not really cut off the future of his house through the sacrifice of his daughter because his house cannot continue through his daughter.⁴⁹⁵ Any child that Jephthah’s daughter produces would belong to her husband’s family, not her father’s. However, the narrator’s emphasis on her being his only one and that he did not have another son or daughter continues to emphasize the fact that daughters *do* contribute to the producing and educating of offspring, and her death means a loss of potential progeny for the greater Hebrew community. Thus, unlike the many ambiguous elements in the narrative, the narrator unequivocally presents this loss most clearly from an androcentric perspective. Her death chiefly signifies a loss of her potential motherhood and progeny.⁴⁹⁶

b. “I have opened my mouth”

The exchange between the daughter and her father summarizes the narrative focus on and evaluation of Jephthah’s use of words and demonstrates how the daughter both accepts the consequence of her father’s vow and implicitly indicts her father’s poor word

⁴⁹² See Boling, *Judges*, 209.

⁴⁹³ Fuchs, “Marginalization,” 129 and Exum, “On Judges 11,” 141-142.

⁴⁹⁴ Smith, “Failure, Part 1,” 296. See also Ron Bruner, “Weeping in the Hills: Hearing Children Dwelling as Outsiders Among Us,” *ResQ* 53:2 (2011): 81-95.

⁴⁹⁵ DeMaris and Leeb, “Judges – (Dis)Honor,” 186.

⁴⁹⁶ Bal posits an argument similar to Smith, as she problematizes the androcentrism in the text. This conflation of father and daughter and their joint tragedy is disturbing and a way of ultimately taking Jephthah’s side: “If indeed, a woman’s life receives meaning only through motherhood, it is because it is thus that she provides offspring to the father” (Bal, *Death*, 63).

choice. After Jephthah blames his daughter for his demise, he mentions, “I have opened my mouth (*wě’ānōkî pāsîtî pî*) to the Lord and I cannot bring the words back” (11:35). The daughter’s response references her father’s mouth twice, “My father, you have opened your mouth (*pāsîtâ ’et-pîkâ*) to the Lord. Do to me what came out of your mouth (*ka’āšer yāsā’ mippîkâ*) because the Lord has made for your retribution from your enemies the Ammonites” (11:36). She might be acknowledging that what has been said must be done because of the Lord’s work, but both she and the narrative do not free Jephthah from blame.

This exchange returns to the narrative’s theme of Jephthah’s erroneous words. The phrase also harkens back to the meaning behind Jephthah’s name. In this turn of phrase, thrice alluded to in two verses, the man of “opening” has clearly “opened his mouth” in disastrous ways. The verb utilized by Jephthah (*pāsîtâ*) and his daughter (*pāsîtâ*) comes from the root *psh*, means “to part or to open” and sometimes references the utterance of a vow to YHWH in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁹⁷ It is a synonym with the root (*pth*) used in Jephthah’s name. In Job 35:16, Elihu references the falsehood in Job’s words, “And Job in emptiness opens his mouth (*yipseh pîhû*) and in wearing out knowledge, he makes many utterances.” In a similar use of terminology, Ps 66:14 references the problematic use of words that often accompanies desperate situations, with “the (vows) which my lips opened and my mouth spoke in my distress.” This kind of “opening of the mouth” and making a vow can lead to negative outcomes for the speaker.

This “opening” also has destructive connotations. The verb references the figurative swallowing of the ground in Gen 4:11. Additionally, in a story with multiple parallel themes

⁴⁹⁷ “*pāsāh*,” BDB 822.

to Jephthah's story, Num 16 utilizes the roots *psh* and *pth* interchangeably to describe the earth's opening of its mouth. Like the story of Jephthah's ousting and his reinstatement as commander and head of the Gileadites, Num 16 is another story about leadership and the internal conflict that can accompany the choice of a leader in the community. Also like Jephthah's episode, narrative elements in Num 16 demonstrate concerns regarding land and inheritance issues. The stories share similar imagery as well. Much like Jephthah's daughter emerging from the door of her father's house when she comes out to meet him in victory, Num 16:27 depicts wives, children, and little ones standing at the entrance of their tents. The matter in the Numbers narrative revolves around who can offer incense and which particular offerings or sacrifices must only come from Aaron's descendants. Thus, like Jephthah's story, the narrative in Num 16 is also concerned about establishing proper Yahwistic practices. In the end and according to Moses' test, the Lord makes the earth open its mouth and swallow up those who are associated with Korah and have treated the Lord with contempt by participating in improper practices. Num 16:30 states, "If the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth (*ûpâstâ hâ'ădāmâ 'et-pîhā*) and swallows them and all that they have, and they go down to Sheol, then you will know that these men have spurned the Lord." Then the text employs the root *pth* in parallel usage in 16:32, "and the earth opened its mouth (*wattiptaḥ hâ'āreṣ 'et-pîhā*) and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah, and all their property." In a story with such similar themes and similar terminology, it is easy to associate both Jephthah's name and his actions with this kind of destructive "opening."

Thus, the narrator provides the final evaluation regarding Jephthah's use of speech both in having Jephthah admit to opening his mouth and having his daughter reiterate this

particular action of opening. The narrative shows Jephthah repeatedly opening his mouth in order to orchestrate events for his benefit.⁴⁹⁸ But this kind of opening is ultimately destructive, even to himself.

Jephthah is the first to admit that he “opened his mouth.” And because of the negative connotations within this phrase, one might interpret that the narrator lets Jephthah acknowledge that he has made a grave mistake. But this phrase of potential confession lies between two phrases by Jephthah that deflect the blame away from him. Jephthah places ultimate blame on his daughter⁴⁹⁹ (e.g. “My daughter, surely you have completely harmed me and you cause my trouble”) and the irreversible requirements implicit in vow-making (e.g. “I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot bring the words back”). The Jephthah who cannot fully admit the poisonous quality of his words because he is so blinded by his quest for his own security, most closely fits the narrator’s portrayal of this character. It is less likely that Jephthah can actually admit his own culpability in his demise.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ Assis similarly states that once again Jephthah’s egocentric worldview and his inability to recognize his shortcomings and responsibility is presented here as he blames his daughter (Assis, *Self-Interest*, 216).

⁴⁹⁹ Fuchs claims that Jephthah’s outcry and blame of his daughter “does not necessarily reflect the authorial point of view, but it is nevertheless the only explicit evaluation of the daughter’s actions” (Fuchs, “Marginalization,” 124). For Fuchs, this author merges into dangerous territory and requires a resistant reading. To have only this explicit evaluation of the daughter’s actions makes the daughter the cause of her father’s demise and he becomes the victim (124). I argue, however, that there are other indications in the narrative that serve to indict Jephthah rather than the daughter.

⁵⁰⁰ Sasson similarly argues that blaming his daughter is part of the “narrator’s continuing construction of Jephthah’s character portrait” and he is “one with a talent for using perceived victimhood as a basis for concessions” (Sasson, *Judges*, 447). He does this before the Gileadites and the Ammonites. Exum argues that the interaction between Jephthah and his daughter is “par for the course” and coincides with other Judges’ stories and typical patriarchal rhetoric. Men do violence as a means of control, in order to not be victimized by it and in order not to be weak and powerless like women (Exum, “Feminist Criticism,” 87). And in Judges, women like the Levite concubine, Jephthah’s daughter, and the Timnite woman are blamed for the violence done to them.

The words returned by the daughter in v. 36 are vague. They can be read as a passive and faithful response of a dutiful daughter.⁵⁰¹ At first glance, the daughter seems to simply restate Jephthah's obligation to fulfill his words to the Lord. She does not challenge Jephthah or his vow, and she obeys and even justifies him.⁵⁰² Fully submitting to patriarchal society, she seems to be the perfect example of a loyal daughter.⁵⁰³ Once again, she follows her father's lead (e.g. "I have opened my mouth to the Lord") when she repeats his words (e.g. "You have opened your mouth to the Lord"). She accepts what Jephthah must do to fulfill his words to the Lord.

While her words can be read as those of a faithful daughter, the narrator *also* uses the daughter as a severe indictment of Jephthah.⁵⁰⁴ He addresses her with, "My daughter" (v. 35) and she replies with a similar term of endearment, "My father" (v. 36). His phrase names her as the one to blame. She uses the same mode of address to restate her father's words but also to implicitly blame her father, "My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord." She accepts the implications of making an utterance to the Lord, but her words contain a hint of sarcasm and remind him, "*You*, my father, have done this" (my emphasis and paraphrase).⁵⁰⁵ It is as if she, Jephthah's closest of kin and the one who knows him the very best, knows *exactly* how Jephthah uses his words to manipulate situations for his

⁵⁰¹ This is Fuchs' proposal. See Fuchs, "Marginalization," 128. In fact, the daughter's words and actions show obedience to Jephthah and justify him (128).

⁵⁰² Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 119.

⁵⁰³ Fuchs, "Marginalization," 121. Exum has a similar assessment in regards to how paternal authority goes unchallenged (Exum, "On Judges 11," 137 and Exum, *Fragmented*, 18). Exum claims that the storyteller uses the daughter's words against her because she doesn't question her father or hold him accountable (Exum, "On Judges 11," 137). Bal argues that even the daughter's suggestion and initiation to go the hills with her friends falls within the confines of fatherly power, and she poses no real threat (Bal, *Death*, 27). "Le fille de Jephté ne se rebella pas. Elle accepta tout ensemble l'autorité paternelle et la loi de Dieu," (Kelen, *Les femmes*, 53).

⁵⁰⁴ Fewell makes a similar assertion that the daughter does not have to be read merely as an obedient and unknowing character, but in her words could be "a tone of ironic judgment" against her father and in her actions could be a condemnation of his priorities (Fewell, "Judges," 77).

⁵⁰⁵ Reinhartz makes a similar point about the daughter's response saying that the daughter ignores his accusation and focuses on his own statement of responsibility for the vow (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 120).

benefit. She knows that he is in the habit of wrongly “opening his mouth” out of self-interest. His carefully constructed vow leaves in one vague element (i.e. *what* will be sacrificed) because Jephthah remains more concerned with himself at the time of the vow’s creation and less concerned with the implications of leaving open who or what might become the object of sacrifice. This young woman, the only character in the narrative who could possibly have intimate knowledge of Jephthah’s character, speaks with authority the words that the narrator wishes to convey. Her words indict her father for his false speech.

It is important to remember, however, the daughter simultaneously indicts and acquiesces to her father. Thus, the daughter’s words serve neither her father’s interests nor her own interests completely. The daughter becomes ultimately an object used by the narrator. The narrator paints a picture of an only child, a daughter, who knows about her father’s patterns of speech and her value to him and who willingly becomes his sacrifice. However, she becomes a sacrifice not for *her father’s* sake but in order to display his deeply rooted flaws. According to the narrator, the daughter becomes not only the symbol of Jephthah’s lost future but also a symbol of the devastation that comes with a gross misuse of words. It is true that Jephthah’s daughter is the only character and subject to stand up to Jephthah. But, however much the daughter carves out her own ritual and indicts her father with her own words, she is not ultimately a subject in her own right (at least according to the narrator).⁵⁰⁶ The daughter is the narrative vehicle to indict Jephthah and the sacrificial symbol of what impulsive and self-interested words can do.

Not surprisingly, the narrator grants Jephthah the last spoken word. In v. 38, Jephthah speaks for the last time in a simple feminine singular imperative, “Go.” And no one

⁵⁰⁶ Niditch argues that even though she speaks her mind and creates her own ritual, she still serves the interests of the patriarchal system that she is portrayed as supporting (Niditch, *Judges*, 135).

speaks again in this episode. There is double significance in this final word. On the one hand, it is fitting to Jephthah's character that he will get the last word in this scene, since he is the man who uses words as his primary tool for his own advancement. On the other hand, the terseness of the one imperative could be the narrator's way of implying that Jephthah *finally* realizes that too many words have previously gotten him into trouble. And now he knows that the tragic situation necessitates a frugality of words. In fact, given the tragic circumstances, there are no other words left to say.

C. YHWH

YHWH is a silent character in this narrative. YHWH receives reference many times in chapter 11 (vv. 9, 10, 11, 21, 23, 24, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36*2). And in most cases, the reference either acknowledges military work that the Lord has done or will do on behalf of the Israelites or refers to the Lord as a witness or recipient to a vow. God is named as a Judge in v. 27 and operates as the deliverer in v. 32. The Lord gives the spirit to Jephthah in 11:29. While characters and the narrator acknowledge that the Lord works behind many of the episode's events, YHWH does not speak in this text. This is especially telling in a narrative that focuses so much on one man's speech acts. This divine silence greatly contrasts Jephthah's loquaciousness.⁵⁰⁷

This contrast is most evident in the context of the vow. Jephthah's words confine YHWH, and YHWH becomes a victim, rather than a producer, of words. YHWH's silence further demonstrates that YHWH is bound by Jephthah's vow. Unlike an oath that works two ways, with a swearer and a recipient, the vow does not give YHWH the chance to

⁵⁰⁷ On the silence of YHWH, see Fewell, "Judges," 78. Webb also makes note of the silence of YHWH and the contrast with Jephthah (Webb, *Judges*, 54).

respond. The vow forces YHWH to consent to Jephthah's words with no room to maneuver. YHWH remains silent, and the silence could be a way of indicting Jephthah for speaking wrongly.⁵⁰⁸ Jephthah, and only Jephthah, has placed himself into his situation. Just because events occur according to Jephthah's vow does not mean that YHWH consents to all that happens. And just because the daughter is sacrificed does not mean that YHWH condones it. Jephthah's words have orchestrated the tragedy. The other characters invoke YHWH, speak before YHWH in vows, and claim to have YHWH's affirmation. But because of the divine silence, the reader never actually knows *what* YHWH sanctions.⁵⁰⁹

III. Liminality and Unhomeliness in Judges 11

As in other Judges stories, Judges 11 makes use of "in-between" spaces and people that defy clear categories so as to contribute to a sense of ambivalence within the text. In this story, Jephthah seeks social security, but the places in which he and his daughter inhabit and the termination of her life at her particular life stage makes it impossible for Jephthah (and his daughter) to find social fulfillment. Thus, Jephthah and his daughter's lives are constituted by permanent social transition and a lack of final security.

⁵⁰⁸ Tribble also comments on the continued silence of the deity, but how the narrator shifts the perspective to the daughter and her memorialized ritual. Thus, death and silence are not the final words of the story (Tribble, "Meditation," 66). Bauks makes the argument (along with Josephus) that Jephthah's tale reveals a pattern of YHWH's irritation with Jephthah for making the vow in the first place (Bauks, "La fille," 89).

⁵⁰⁹ "Il me semble qu'il faut aller plus loin sur le plan théologique en disant que ce récit apporte au corpus des textes saints la vision d'un Dieu mystérieux...Dieu est dans ses actions et ses absences celui qui dépasse la compréhension de l'homme" (Bauks, "La fille," 93).

A. Liminal spaces

1. The hills

The spaces mentioned in Judges 11 contribute to a sense of constant transition within the narrative. As has already been discussed, the land of Tob to which Jephthah flees and lives in exile contains men like Jephthah who are in transition and without social status. Jephthah experiences forced exile by his half-brothers, moves to Tob, is summoned by the elders of Gilead, attempts to find security in the appointment of commander and head, journeys into war with the Ammonites, returns to his own home, and ultimately discovers that security alludes him. He pushes for one kind of security that is constituted by being the leader of the Gileadites and loses another kind of security: that which is constituted by the continuation of a particular Israelite identity by way of his daughter's children.

Jephthah's daughter also briefly occupies a space of transition, namely a location and time that possesses a liminal quality. Not only do the "hills" represent a location that is typically considered out-of-bounds of normal society, but also, this transitional locale has very specific implications for young unmarried women. Similarly, the time in which she occupies these hills is an in-between time. After the daughter and the other women greet her father with drums and dancing, she deduces the gravity of the words her father spoke to the Lord, and she requests a time of two months in the hills to weep for her *bētûlâ* with her friends.

The term "hills" (*hehârîm*) similarly carries the connotation of a transitional space outside established society. The hills can be dangerous and are considered with suspicion. Also, these hills are outside the confines of her father's encampment. As previously

mentioned, the daughter submits to paternal power in accepting her father's vow, but going to the hills also suggests a *challenge* to paternal power.⁵¹⁰ It is surprising that her father grants her this journey to this location, because when in the hills, she is neither under his care nor under the authority of another man's care. She becomes vulnerable when she is granted a degree of autonomy and exists in the hills outside of women's typical domestic space.

The amount of time in which she spends in the hills carries little significance. It is not clear what is noteworthy about two months as a length of time. However, the two months occur between two important events in the narrative. This retreat to the hills transpires in the liminal time between the acknowledgement of the vow's consequences (vv. 36 and 37a) and the completion of the consequences (v. 39). This time and place of transition delays the fulfillment of the vow and not only enables the creation of a women's ritual but also adds to the pathos surrounding the daughter's demise.

2. The door

The realization of Jephthah's downfall occurs in a particular liminal location when the text identifies the elusive "whoever/whatever comes out, who is coming out" element of his vow. Jephthah's vow lacks clarity about the being that will come out, but he claims to know the location of this being. He/she/it will come out "of the door of my house to meet me." Jephthah's vow pinpoints that the place of revelation will be on the threshold, the liminal space, of his home. This door of his house is explicitly mentioned in his vow (v. 31) and then implicitly in v. 34 when the narrative repeats the vow's terminology to describe the daughter as she comes out to meet her victorious father. Thus, the woman (i.e. the

⁵¹⁰ See Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 119.

daughter) and the doorway become intricately connected, much like the women in other Judges stories.

The image of Jephthah's doorway extends a number of related themes in the book of Judges that the previous chapters have already discussed. The daughter and the women who accompany her out of her house with drums and dancing demonstrate another way in which women participate in war. Most might not engage in combat, but these women provide their men with support. Much like Sisera's mother anxiously waits at the window for the son who, unbeknownst to her, will not return, Jephthah's daughter and the women surrounding her await and then greet the victorious soldier. The doorway as threshold aids in symbolizing women as subjects in the context of war or unrest. Women have their own rituals and performances when it comes to their involvement in war.⁵¹¹ These transitional spaces that connect the domestic spaces to public spaces also represents the tragic elements of women's involvement in war. Jephthah's daughter engages in a victory dance with other women, but because she comes out of the door, she becomes a victim of war. Women who cross thresholds are not only subjects, but also objects. The daughter coming out to meet her father harkens back to Jael who comes out of her tent to greet two military men as they approach her house. Finally, the door in Jephthah's story carries a tragic quality very similar to the image of the threshold on which the battered *pîlegeš* seeks shelter and indicts her husband in Judges 19. The Judges' narrator presents women who emerge from doorways both suspiciously because of their specifically gendered ritual and autonomous behavior and tragically because of the potential victimization of their gender.

⁵¹¹ In a related note, Beavis argues that the ritual cult in the hills might have demonstrated how women were "Israelites" as much as men and that this was an affirmation that women could play an important role in the life of the nation and in warfare (Beavis, "Daughter," 25).

The threshold of a home becomes the place that women in Judges occupy. It is in these spaces that one observes the convergence of political/public and familial/private matters, sometimes with tragic consequences. Jephthah's vow promises the dedication and sacrifice of something from his house in exchange for his victory and safe return from war. The reader experiences the tragic unhomely moment in the realization that Jephthah's public vow impacts the life of his daughter. The public world invades her personal space. And thus, the real drama of the story occurs not with Jephthah on the battlefield but at the door of his home. As soon as he returns from war, his doorway presents the object of dedication and sacrifice.

B. Liminal Life Stage and Ritual

Not only does the daughter inhabit liminal spaces, but also the narrator's description of the daughter is constituted by liminality, transition, and unfulfillment. The reader learns something about the daughter in vv. 37 and 38, namely that she is a *bētûlâ*. This term "*bētûlâ*" carries some degree of obscurity and therefore continues to perplex scholars. Contrary to the modern translation and understanding of "virginity," *bētûlâ* does not denote necessarily biological virginity (i.e. being sexually untouched) but rather adolescence and potential motherhood.⁵¹² This term represents the daughter's age and life stage and the movement from childhood to adulthood.

Even though *bētûlâ* represents an age and life stage of a young pubescent girl, the Hebrew Bible does reveal some complexity in the usage of the term. In Lev 21:13, Dt 22:19 and Eze 44:22, *bētûlâ* means "virgin" (or sexually untouched), but in Joel 1:8, it almost

⁵¹² M. Tsevat, "*bētûlâ*" *TDOT* 2:338-348.

certainly does not.⁵¹³ Wenham points out that Lev 21 is less redundant if *bētûlâ* means “a girl of marriageable age” instead of virgin and that either meaning is compatible with Eze 44:22.⁵¹⁴ Often in poetry, the term is used with *baḥûrîm* and means young people.⁵¹⁵

Wadsworth insists that the woman’s sexual purity *is* part of the term, but that it also relates to her choice status because of her sexual ripeness.⁵¹⁶ He states that a woman who is designated *bētûlâ* must connote virginity.⁵¹⁷ In contrast, Wenham claims that this word has no more reference to virginity than the English word “girl,” and it designates a teenage girl of marriageable age, who may be a virgin, depending on circumstances.⁵¹⁸ For example, Wenham considers Deut. 22:13-21 and asserts that *bētûlîm* in these Deuteronomy passages makes more sense as a marker of age and adolescence and not virginity.⁵¹⁹ The concern in Deut 22:13-21 is unchastity, not virginity, and virginity serves only a procedural function as it becomes proof of unchastity.⁵²⁰ Virginity is a way to prove that a young woman is not with child and thus has not threatened the inheritance of the man to whom she should be faithful.

Following Wenham, I argue that *bētûlâ* is a sociological concept concerned predominantly with a woman’s life stage and her potential for properly placed and socially acceptable motherhood. A woman’s readiness for marriage coincides with her body’s

⁵¹³ See Tsevat, *TDOT* 2:341.

⁵¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, “*Betûlâh*: A Girl of Marriageable Age,” *VT* 22 (1972): 326-348.

⁵¹⁵ See Ps 148:12, Isa 23:4, Zech 9:17, Lam 1:18 and 2:21.

⁵¹⁶ Tom Wadsworth, “Is there a Hebrew Word for Virgin? *Bethulah* in the Old Testament,” *ResQ* 23 (1980): 161-171.

⁵¹⁷ Wadsworth, “*Bethulah*,” 171.

⁵¹⁸ Wenham, “*Betûlâh*,” 326.

⁵¹⁹ Wenham, “*Betûlâh*,” 340.

⁵²⁰ Tsevat, *TDOT* 2:343.

readiness to bear children. If any implication of anatomical virginity exists in the term, it is only a tertiary meaning.⁵²¹

Some verses add phrases like “who has not known a man” (Judg 21:12), “a man has not known her” (Gen 24:16), and “because she has no husband” (Lev 21:3) to the term. Jephthah’s story contains a similar phrase. When Judges 11:39 states that this *bētûlâ* “did not know a man,” Wenham emphatically states that this extra phrase indicates that this girl of marriageable age had not yet married off.⁵²² The sorrow of the Judges 11 tale is heightened when it is made clear once and for all that this girl, who is transitioning into her adult life, will never reach her full potential (as conceived by this patriarchal society). In the patriarchal understanding, the woman’s full potential does not concern her physical experience of sex but instead concerns whether the woman has a husband and produces his offspring. Sasson similarly argues that the purpose might be “to give us a glimpse at her future as a consequence of Jephthah’s deed...”⁵²³ The reference to the young woman as a *bētûlâ* reveals concerns about family lineage, progeny and inheritance rights. Jephthah’s daughter, a girl of marriageable age, will never complete her state of transition, never marry, never know a man, never have children, never secure a lineage for Jephthah, and ultimately never contribute to the continuation of the Hebrew community.⁵²⁴ She will die in a perpetually liminal state and in her unfulfilled potential for motherhood.

Even if the motivation in the text is predominantly androcentric, it is not *only* androcentric. Exum points out that this might be the issue for the androcentric narrator,

⁵²¹ See also van Gennepe who makes a distinction between the life stage and sexual experience. “Sexual enjoyment is not dependent on puberty... and can happen earlier or later depending on the individual... puberty is only important for the ability to conceive...” (Van Gennepe, *Rites of Passage*, 66).

⁵²² Wenham, “*Betûlâh*,” 341.

⁵²³ Sasson, *Judges*, 443.

⁵²⁴ See Chisholm, “Ethical,” 409.

but it is not the issue for the daughter.⁵²⁵ Exum's claim highlights a potential difference in meaning between the daughter and her father (and/or narrator) regarding the daughter's journey to the hills to weep her *bětûlâ*, and thus accentuates the multiplicity of meaning in this ritual. It can be argued that this ritual in the hills only secondarily has something to do with the daughter's lack of progeny, according to the daughter. Her request to go to the hills is really not about bewailing her lack of children as a kind of unfulfillment.⁵²⁶

Schneider argues that while others claim that the daughter's weeping in the hills is about her childlessness, this goes against what is happening in the story. The terminology that is typically used for barren women wanting children is not present: "If children were the issue there were a number of ways for the text to say so."⁵²⁷ Peggy Day similarly claims that the daughter going to the hills is not about her lack of children, but represents a foundation legend for a woman's rite of passage from childhood to physical maturity.⁵²⁸ The *bětûlîm* is not the *cause* of her lament, but it specifies *when* the lament takes place.⁵²⁹

Coinciding with the daughter's designation as a *bětûlâ*, her request to enter the hills with her friends perhaps reflects not a discreet event by Jephthah's daughter but a liminal ritual that was annually practiced by all marriageable women.⁵³⁰ In this way, the daughter's request to move to the hills might have little to do with the consequence of her father's vow and her impending death as a childless young woman. Instead, the daughter requests the time to have her coming out party.⁵³¹ The daughter anticipates her movement from one status to another. And she mourns her old status of a daughter as she moves to a new

⁵²⁵ Exum, "On Judges 11," 141.

⁵²⁶ Exum, "On Judges 11," 141.

⁵²⁷ Schneider, *Judges*, 180.

⁵²⁸ Day, "Child," 58-60.

⁵²⁹ Day, "Child," 60.

⁵³⁰ DeMaris and Leeb, "Judges - Dis(Honor)," 187.

⁵³¹ DeMaris and Leeb, "Judges - Dis(Honor)," 187.

status that includes her full range of adult responsibilities.⁵³² In some ways, this ritual marks a major transition in social status.⁵³³ DeMaris and Leeb explain:

In this rite they departed from their former status as children, marked their transition through an in-between, liminal phase, when they are physically but not yet socially mature, and now emerge ready to enter their adult roles. They return from the mountains prepared to marry and establish a new identity in a new household.⁵³⁴

And, in a positive sense, the ritual accomplishes a few things as it determines social identity, resolves social ambiguity by negotiating social crises, and alters social status.⁵³⁵

This ritual is something in which the daughter would like to participate, as it marks a time in her life and is something “normal” that she could do with other young women her age.

However, this ritual carries with it a new and terrifying reality. Exum claims that the *bētûlâ* is “a liminal stage, marked by insecurity and danger, a point of transition symbolizing the death of one phase in a young woman’s life and the preparation for a new one”⁵³⁶ This is a transition to be feared rather than excitedly anticipated.⁵³⁷ Bal names this as a transition from *na’ârâ* (i.e. a woman of near ripeness and still possessed and protected by father) to *bētûlâ* to *’almah* (i.e. a nubile, possibly already married woman, and if so, before her first pregnancy).⁵³⁸ The *bētûlâ* is between one man, her father, and the other, her husband, yet has not proven worthy of her new state.⁵³⁹

With all of the nuances of understanding surrounding this life stage and ritual, there is much possibility for the meaning of the ritual in the hills for the characters and narrator in the Judges 11. For the men (namely Jephthah, the narrator, and perhaps a male

⁵³² Niditch, *Judges*, 134.

⁵³³ See also Bal, *Death*, 42.

⁵³⁴ DeMaris and Leeb, “Judges – Dis(Honor),” 190. See also van Genneep, *Rites of Passage*, 59-86.

⁵³⁵ DeMaris and Leeb, “Judges – Dis(Honor),” 190.

⁵³⁶ Exum, “On Judges 11,” 141.

⁵³⁷ Bal, *Death*, 48.

⁵³⁸ Bal, *Death*, 48.

⁵³⁹ Bal, *Death*, 48.

readership), the ritual and the weeping that accompanies it represents the end of Jephthah's family line and a loss of potential descendants for the greater community. His daughter dies a young girl who does not give him or the Hebrew community heirs. This can also be viewed, to an extent, as the daughter's loss and tragedy as well. However, considering what the ritual symbolizes and who participates in it, it becomes clear to the reader that neither the males within the narrative nor the narrator's androcentric perspective fully understands and appreciates the ritual. Obviously, men cannot fully know about the content of the ritual (i.e. what happens in the hills) because they are not there. Similarly, men cannot understand the meaning of this ritual for young girls because the men never experience being young girls.

However, there is a sense in which the ritual has meaning for the entire community. The group with which she journeys represents a liminal group that exists outside of established hierarchies of the existent social structure. This group is a "community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions."⁵⁴⁰ Victor Turner might argue that this group of pubescent girls represent "communitas" for the structurally superior patriarchal order.⁵⁴¹ This group and the ritual it performs is supposed to represent a global community that momentarily transforms divisions, usurps elements of the structural superiors, and sets things right.⁵⁴² "It is perhaps significant that young maidens are often the main protagonists: they have not yet become the mothers of children whose structural positions will once more provide bases for opposition and

⁵⁴⁰ Turner, *Forest*, 100.

⁵⁴¹ Turner, *Ritual Process*, 184. See also Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 159: "Notons que dans ses paroles, son premier mot est "mon père" qui privilégie cette relation forte et duelle, alors que son dernier mot est "mes compagnes," qui pose un autre lien, de solidarité." Exum also sees this ritual as a symbolic way of representing female solidarity and undermining or resisting the androcentrism in the text (Exum, *Was sagt*, 43).

⁵⁴² Turner, *Ritual Process*, 184.

competition.”⁵⁴³ But this ritual is ephemeral, transitory, and liminal, and this kind of *communitas* cannot be permanent without establishing a structural form, exercising social control, and inevitably “changing its own nature and ceasing to be *communitas*.”⁵⁴⁴ This ritual, as it sets things right, cleanses society of its accumulated sins.⁵⁴⁵

Perhaps the ritual signifies a certain time with her friends and acknowledges a life stage that every young woman experiences. It is something “normal” to do, and it is something that ritually benefits the community. In this way, despite her father’s desperate attempts to find security, and despite the fact that he will sacrifice her in the process, she is doing what *she can* to experience some “social security” by participating in a typical ritual with her peers. And she also continues to participate in the cleansing rituals of the community. In this way, she stands in stark contrast to her narcissistic father. Also, perhaps she weeps for fear of this stage. Following the androcentric perspective or not, perhaps, in fact, she *does* weep because she will never fulfill this new life stage. Multiple possibilities of meaning for the ritual and for her weeping contribute to the ambiguity in this episode.

IV. Conclusion

On the one hand, the daughter makes a way to secure her social status by requesting to go to the hills, but the same goal of social status has continually eluded Jephthah throughout the narrative. On the other hand, the daughter dies as a *bětûlâ* and never moves into the more secure social status of a mother. This perpetual *bětûlâ* symbolizes for Jephthah the social security that never comes.

⁵⁴³ Turner, *Ritual Process*, 184.

⁵⁴⁴ Turner, *Ritual Process*, 184.

⁵⁴⁵ Turner, *Ritual Process*, 184.

Try as he may with his words and negotiating, Jephthah never finds the fulfillment he seeks. Even after this episode in chapter 11, there is a brief interlude with the Ephraimites that is constituted by conflict. Assis claims that Jephthah remains obsessed with his own status and honor in his confrontation with the Ephraimites.⁵⁴⁶ Jephthah once again finds that his precarious personal situation is compromised when the Ephraimites threaten to burn down his house (12:1). Military and political strife here again impacts familial concerns. And Jephthah admits that when he sees no other way, he takes his life into his own hands (12:3).

The final notice in 12:7 on Jephthah is odd: oddly placed, oddly phrased, and lacks any indication that he successfully safeguarded the land when he judged Israel. Usually the formula occurs at the beginning of one's rule. Sasson notes that this "is the only occasion when Jephthah is connected with judging."⁵⁴⁷ The remark about his burial is similarly odd, and it is not clear what sense should be made of his burial "among the cities of Gilead."⁵⁴⁸ For such a detailed narrative, it seems that Jephthah never achieves the pedigree afforded other characters. Yet, the odd ending to Jephthah is also fitting. He was buried in or amongst a random place in Gilead. We don't know where he is or from where he comes. The final statement further accentuates Jephthah's utter dislocation. Although he tries to right his situation, Jephthah's life and career ends the way that it began: with a man working on his own, with neither advocate nor community, and lacking in social security.

The characters and events in Judges 11 carry many similar themes to other Judges narratives. Through Jephthah's negotiations and attempts to reinstate his current equivocal

⁵⁴⁶ Assis, *Self-Interest*, 225.

⁵⁴⁷ Sasson, *Judges*, 455.

⁵⁴⁸ Sasson, *Judges*, 455.

social status, the narrative reveals a convergence of familial and political issues. The narrator takes a complicated and ambivalent perspective on this character, and his selfish and manipulative words continue to get him in trouble. There is similar narrative ambiguity in the presentation of Jephthah's daughter. Like other women who appear in the book of Judges, this young woman is an object used by men (e.g. both Jephthah and the narrator) and a subject who takes her own initiative. She highlights her father's erroneous use of words, and her ritualized actions contrast with her father's verbosity. Also similar to other Judges' narratives, the silence of YHWH and the use of liminality in the narrative contribute to the ambiguity in the Judges 11 narrative, such that the overall sense of this chapter constitutes a lack of fulfillment and perpetual social insecurity.

CHAPTER 5

Samson Part 1, When Politics and Home Collide:
*“And he said to her, ‘Look, to my father and to my mother I have not reported,
but to you I will report?!”*

I. Introduction

This chapter conducts character analyses of Samson, his mother, and the Timnite wife. And the following chapter focuses on Delilah and Samson. While similar themes exist throughout the Samson narrative, each of these two Samson chapters contain slightly different emphases. The former mostly focuses on group identity, namely how Samson’s special, unique and odd status separates him from others in his group and how his choice of a Timnite wife complicates issues for both families. The latter predominantly centers on the articulation and transgression of gendered boundaries. Each chapter contains an exploration of the condition of unhomeliness in the narrative as well as a consideration of the equivocal presence and movement of the Lord.

II. Samson: An Odd and Liminal Strong Man

Samson’s name comes from *šemeš* which means “sun” or “sunlight,” and this appellation provides narrative cues for the reader. Bethshemesh was just across the valley from Manoah’s home and was sacred to the sun-god, and thus, Samson’s name would hardly seem like an odd choice among these Danites.⁵⁴⁹ Literarily, his name juxtaposes the name of his lover at the end of the tale, Delilah. Her name, which sounds like the word

⁵⁴⁹ Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 325.

meaning “night” (*laylâ*) was probably chosen as a play on words for his “sunny” name.⁵⁵⁰ Samson as a potential representation of the light qualities of the sun serves an ironic purpose in the narrative. There is a repeated interplay in the narrative between the themes of light and dark, and the related theme of eyesight and blindness. While Samson, the little sun, often sees, or has the potential to see, he lacks comprehension and proper discernment. He is blinded by the women he sees, and he eventually loses his eyes completely.⁵⁵¹ This man’s connection to the sun and eyesight and his frequent lack of good judgment contribute to the complicated portrayal of this character.⁵⁵²

A. A Liminal “Hero”

While Samson might be interpreted as the quintessential strong man and hero in the biblical text, some claim that he is “perhaps the greatest jackass in the Bible.”⁵⁵³ The

⁵⁵⁰ Klein, *Irony*, 119; Schneider, *Judges*, 218 and 226; Crenshaw, *Samson*, 18; Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 222.

⁵⁵¹ See Schneider, *Judges*, 226.

⁵⁵² In fact, Crenshaw remarks that Samson as solar myth, or the “little sun,” was noticed early by scholars and then became overstated. Crenshaw argues that Samson’s legend has its roots on the earth, not the sky, and we need to minimize the significance of the sun (Crenshaw, *Samson*, 15-16). Some degree of importance should be afforded names, but they can also be highly ambiguous (15).

⁵⁵³ Crenshaw provides an interpretation of Samson’s character that lacks nuance: “(the) Samson saga celebrates the miraculous birth of its hero, traces his remarkable career in the arms of women and in hand-to-hand combat with uncircumcised foes...the saga extols Samson as mighty warrior and adventurous lover, capable of wit in no small measure...powerful sense of fair play...wishes only to get revenge – and to be left alone...allows no one to tell him what to do...” (Crenshaw, *Samson*, 19-20). Early classical and traditional interpretations of Samson underscore his goodness. Josephus writes, “But as for his being ensnared by a woman, that is to be ascribed to human nature, which is too weak to resist the temptations to that sin; but we ought to bear him witness, that in all other respects he was one of extraordinary virtue” (Josephus, *Ant.* 5.314).

Adrien Bledstein, “Is Judges a Woman’s Satire on Men Who Play God,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 34-54. Some modern academic perspectives maintain the emphasis on Samson as hero and the women in his tale as deviant. Crenshaw calls Samson “a helpless hero in the power of a woman” (James Crenshaw, “Samson,” *ABD* 5:950-954). Soggins provides, “The erotic adventures of the hero are simply the exemplification of the theme of the foreign woman who brings shame, deception and death” (J. Soggins, *Judges, a Commentary*, The Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981], 237). Feminist interpretations have warned against this tendency to praise Samson while vilifying the women in his tale. See Schneider’s comments on the sexist views of scholarship on Samson’s narratives (Schneider, *Judges*, 193).

reasons for these varying interpretations of the character could be the result of the unexpected and strange qualities that this “hero” possesses and the ways in which these qualities place him on the margins of his community. Samson’s narrative begins with his family of origin and mention of his father, Manoah. The close of Samson’s tale ends with his burial and final place of rest in Manoah’s grave. With the bookends of this story constituting the mention of family of origin, it is noteworthy that Samson’s story spends much of its time away from his family and in Philistine territory. He is a character of movement, volatility and transition. This man on the move goes to Timnah (14:1), then proceeds to move between Timnah, his future wife’s house and then his parents’ house (vv. 2, 5, 7, 8, 9), then travels to Ashkelon (v.19), and finally journeys back to his father’s house (v.19). He goes to dwell in a cleft of a rock in Etam (15:8), is captured and taken up to Lehi (15:14), finds a prostitute when he goes to Azata (16:1), then goes to the head of the mountain in front of Hebron (16:3), and finds Delilah in Shoreq (16:4). The Philistines bring him back to Azata (16:21), and his brothers bring his body back to the grave of his father between Zorah and Eshtaol (16:31). In his physical movement and in his inter-tribal relationships, Samson constantly transgresses boundaries between different groups of people. Exum’s helpful assessment points to the instability in being a liminal figure and the narrative’s incentive for his ambiguous portrayal:

Samson is a limen, a marginal figure who moves between the Israelite and Philistine worlds but does not belong to either of them. He is also a mediating figure between Israelite and Philistine. It is difficult, if not impossible, to remain in a liminal stage, a state of transition marked by ambivalence and ambiguity, and thus of danger. Samson cannot be a successful mediator between the two worlds, the Israelite and the Philistine, because the distinctions between them must be rigorously maintained by our story, even if at the price of the hero’s life.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁴ Exum, *Fragmented*, 77. Niditch makes a similar point about Samson’s odd status and names him a “bandit” (Susan Niditch, “Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak,” *CBQ* 52

In a number of other ways, Samson is simultaneously special and odd, placing him on the periphery of his community.⁵⁵⁵ The narrative descriptors emphasize the special status and abilities of this edgy person. Samson is a Nazirite, deliverer of the Israelites, blessed, charismatic and abnormally strong. This combination of qualities is uniquely bestowed upon and manifested in Samson.

B. Nazirite

A divine messenger announces the unborn Samson as a Nazirite to his newly pregnant mother (*kî-nězîr 'ēlōhîm yihyeh hana'ar min-habāten*). Typically, one voluntarily becomes a Nazirite (Amos 2:11 and 12) and is one for a limited time (Numbers 6:2).⁵⁵⁶ In Samson's case, it seems that being a Nazirite is intrinsic to his being. He will be a Nazirite to God "from the womb." A Nazirite is somehow set apart from others. Such a person is dedicated, consecrated, or separated for holy purposes.⁵⁵⁷ According to the Samson narrative, this Nazirite is constituted by dietary restriction and by long hair untouched by a razor.⁵⁵⁸ Importantly, the narrator reiterates that the dietary restrictions are placed on the woman (vv. 4, 7, 14), but no mention is made of the restrictions on the boy once he is

[1990]: 608-624). In this way, Samson represents "a variety of hero or trickster whose tale involves a challenge to the power of the establishment by weaker or oppressed elements in society" (Niditch, "Samson," 609). Such character portrayals are often accompanied by pairs of opposite or contrasting elements. In Samson's narratives, there is evidence of nature vs. culture, us vs. them, marginal status vs. centrality, and Israelite vs. Philistine (Niditch, "Samson," 609).

⁵⁵⁵ Morgenstern argues that "Samson is the embodiment of strangeness... he constantly breaches the boundaries of proper social etiquette and expected political performance... and even for his parents, he remains "other" ... and his narrative does not enact crude evaluation of "otherness" ... it does not automatically declare otherness to be suspect" (Mira Morgenstern, "Samson and the Politics of Riddling," *Hebraic Political Studies* 1 (Spring 2006): 253-285).

⁵⁵⁶ See also Amit, *Judges*, 277; Schneider, *Judges*, 198; and Susan Niditch, "My Brother Esau is a Hairy Man:" *Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 82.

⁵⁵⁷ "nazar" and "nazir," BDB 634.

⁵⁵⁸ "nazir," BDB 634. See also Numbers 6:3-5. Amos 2:12 insinuates that Nazirites refrain from drinking wine.

born. Similarly, Manoah is not restricted, and the woman becomes responsible for all preparations for the birth of the son.⁵⁵⁹ These restrictions become an important marker of the woman's liminal state and will be discussed in greater detail below.

The phrase that precedes the announcement of the infant as a Nazarite commands that no razor will go upon his head (*ûmôrâ lô'-ya'ăleh 'al-rô'sô*). Susan Niditch demonstrates that not only does hair serve as a physical sign of Samson's Nazarite status, the emphasis on his hair also highlights his complex identity by juxtaposing nature and culture within his character.⁵⁶⁰ Because he must keep it long, his hair is "untouched" by culture, "contains the very qualities of betwixt-and-between identity," and is the primary part of his identity that makes him a border figure and marginal.⁵⁶¹ His constant movement, between the cave and the town and the Israelites and the Philistines, as well as the way he hovers between the borders of animals and humans and the human and the divine, further reinforces this hero's liminal state.⁵⁶² But as this chapter points out, there are other elements of Samson's identity that make him a figure dwelling in peripheral spaces.⁵⁶³

He might be set apart for holy purposes, but Samson's food and wine restrictions further set him apart from other people in social and cultural ways. Wine is the chief liquid

⁵⁵⁹ See J. Cheryl Exum, "Promise and Fulfillment: Narrative Art in Judges 13," *JBL* 99 (1980): 43-59; Yairah Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed his Wife" (Judges 13:11): On the Place of the Woman in Birth Narratives" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (eds. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 146-156.

⁵⁶⁰ Niditch, "My Brother," 66. See also Niditch, "Samson," 613-614.

⁵⁶¹ Niditch, "My Brother," 66-67.

⁵⁶² Niditch, "My Brother," 66.

⁵⁶³ Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh is a similar kind of liminal figure. The theme of unkempt hair reverberates as an indication of being outside of culture or not in control. In the *OBV*, Enkidu immediately follows the beer/bread scene with acts that continue the rite of passage toward civilization. A barber trims his hair, Enkidu anoints himself with oil so that he "became a man," he puts on clothing, and he takes up weapons so as to battle the animals he once had as companions. Shamhat enables the process of Enkidu's socialization (*OB II* lines 106-111) (George, A. R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* [2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003]: 177).

shared among civilized people. Samson's abstention from wine would not only be physically difficult because potable beverages were difficult to come by, but it would also be socially isolating. Wine symbolizes social participation in a meal and is ultimately about developing social relationships.⁵⁶⁴ In addition, wine is a cultural medium as it requires skill in production and fermentation.⁵⁶⁵ As Samson refrains from the consumption of wine, his actions also symbolically represent his nonparticipation in cultural products and social connections. Thus, by outward appearance, by holy consecration, and by refraining from consuming certain food and drink, a Nazarite becomes markedly different from other members of the community.⁵⁶⁶

Nazarites in the Bible function in various ways, but the one consistent component in Nazariteship is a special relationship to the Lord.⁵⁶⁷ Before he is even born, the divine messenger separates Samson from the general public as he is outwardly and inwardly marked as a divinely appointed devotee of the Lord.⁵⁶⁸ As a Nazarite, although he might be in a special and perhaps elevated position in relation to the Lord, he is set apart, different, and even abnormal in relation to the rest of his own community.

C. Deliverer and Judge

Samson's identity as a deliverer also emphasizes his special status. He will be the person to begin delivering the Israelites from the Philistines (*wěhû' yāhēl lēhōšā' 'et-yisrā'ēl*

⁵⁶⁴ Niditch, "My Brother," 72.

⁵⁶⁵ Niditch, "My Brother," 72.

⁵⁶⁶ Jost raises questions about the extent to which Samson adheres to Nazirite practices. Samson at the wedding feast (and possibly partaking of wine), the pollution caused by the dead in battle with the Philistines, and dealing with the lion carcass are all behaviors that would be forbidden or of concern for a Nazirite. The only continuous feature of his Nazirite status is his long hair (Jost, *Gender*, 229).

⁵⁶⁷ G. Mayer, "nzt," *TDOT* 9:306-311.

⁵⁶⁸ Amit similarly asserts that Naziritehood serves in the Samson cycle to distinguish him and set him apart and externalize his connection to God (Amit, *Judges*, 278).

miyyad pēlištîm in 13:5). He becomes a member of the specific group of characters in Judges, like Deborah, Othniel, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, who work towards Israel's deliverance from the hands of their oppressors. But the phrase *yāhēl lēhōšā'* has perplexing implications relating this story to other Judges narratives. If Samson *begins* delivering the Israelites, does that imply that the other Judges did not?⁵⁶⁹ Does Samson's story reflect a time earlier than the other Judges? Or, because the Samson cycle (i.e. Judges 13-16) focuses chiefly on conflict with the Philistines, perhaps this is reflective of a literary unit that is separate from other Judges stories. The Philistines are not mentioned again in Judges after the Samson narratives. As part of its two-fold ending, Samson's narrative twice mentions that he judged Israel for twenty years (15:20 and 16:31). This correlation of deliverance and judging follows the pattern in the book of Judges that identifies, often divinely appointed, leadership of Israel at the time. Samson might be a divinely appointed leader, but he hardly leads well. He works alone much of the time, and he makes poor decisions based on personal desires. When he leads people, it is to settle personal vendettas, and his actions most often negatively impact people close to him.

D. Blessed and then Made to Move

The narrative describes Samson's consecrated and special status in several ways, and his status is marked not only by the Lord's involvement but also by Samson's response to these special designations. In Samson's case, the divine messenger foretells Samson as the one to begin deliverance from the Philistines (13:5). The narrator also provides the familiar *Piel* clause that "the Lord made him blessed" (*wayēbārkehû YHWH*) (13:24).

⁵⁶⁹ See especially Judges 3:31 that recounts the episode of the deliverer of Israel, Shamgar, who struck down 600 Philistines with an oxgoad.

Immediately following, a *Hiphil* verb adds the clause “and the spirit of the Lord began to/made him move” (*wattāḥel rūaḥ YHWH lēpa’āmô*). The succession of the *Hiphil* verb after this *Piel* verb in relation to the Lord’s movement and Samson’s subsequent movement are important to note.

Both *Piel* and *Hiphil* verbs pertain to causation, but to varying degrees of activity or passivity.⁵⁷⁰ Waltke and O’Connor provide a helpful summary:

Whereas the *Piel* represents the subject as transposing an object into the state or condition corresponding to the notion expressed by the verbal root, the *Hiphil* represents the subject as causing an object to participate indirectly as a second subject in the notion expressed by the verbal root.⁵⁷¹

The *Piel* causes a state and can be expressed often with an adjective, while the *Hiphil* creates a second subject and causes an action (and therefore is often called “causative”). In the *Piel*, the object of causation is in a state of suffering the effects of an action, and is inherently passive in part.⁵⁷² The *Hiphil* usually carries the sense of causation with an agency nuance.⁵⁷³

Most often, one finds the Hebrew root *bārak* in the *Piel*. For example, the biblical narratives uses the same verb form when King Melchizedek makes Abraham blessed and when the Lord causes Isaac to be blessed (Gen 14:19 and 26:12). In this sense, the humans are in a produced state (i.e. humans are blessed because someone blesses them). Thus, the *Piel* tends to signify a passive state of “being” blessed.

⁵⁷⁰ Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 355.

⁵⁷¹ Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, 435.

⁵⁷² Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, 400, 435 and 355.

⁵⁷³ Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, 355.

As the *Piel* designates “an effected state,” it also “governs an object.”⁵⁷⁴ This might be key to the relation between the *Piel* and *Hiphil* verbs in 13:24-25. At first it seems that Samson, like many others in the biblical narratives, passively receives his blessed state. But there are some instances in which neighboring verbs provide a sense that the person (who has been blessed) acts in relation to that blessed state. By being caused to do whatever the neighboring verb implies, the blessed state inevitably impacts others, Israel, or the related group. It is not expressly stated, but this combination of verbs imply that the person who is blessed, whose state governs them, is also made to bless. Samson’s passive reception of his blessed state enables his action. His action is compelled by his state of blessing and by the initiation of the spirit. Thus, the emphasis in the text is not only or mainly on his passive reception of these divine encounters (i.e. a condition of being made blessed by the Lord or the movement of the spirit of the Lord), but also on actions in the narrative that these divine encounters initiate.⁵⁷⁵

However, the presence of this spirit in Samson’s narrative is not always advantageous. The presence of the Lord’s spirit with Samson proves to be dangerous, violent and destructive at times (14:6 and 14:19). As in other Judges chapters, the presence of the spirit of the Lord working in a person does not inevitably lead to positive results for that person or the community.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, 401.

⁵⁷⁵ Gen 12:2 provides two *Piel* verbs, “I will make you blessed (*wa’ābārēkēkā*), and I will cause your name to grow (*wa’āgadlāh*). And you will be a blessing.” The second verb, used almost in a parallel sense, carries a strong causative and active sense as the Lord causes the name (the secondary subject) to assume the action of growing. The *Piel* of *bārak* takes on a similar active causative sense when it is paired with the *Hiphil* verb forms (*wēharbāh ’arbeh*) in Genesis 22:17. In this way, it seems that “you” and “your offspring” will be made to make yourselves numerous because of the blessed state. Deut 1:11 similarly conflates the people’s activity in the making of themselves numerous in relation to their blessed state.

⁵⁷⁶ See chapter 4 for more on the ambivalence with the bestowal of the spirit of YHWH.

E. Strength

In the instances where Samson responds to the Lord's spirit, Samson exhibits super-human strength (14:6 and 19; 15:14 and 15). This focus on strength in the Samson narratives has traditionally led to the interpretation of the character as the prototypical literary strong-man and hero. This might be true, but the emphasis on his strength simultaneously emphasizes his set-apart status. Samson's exceptional strength eschews reliance on a community or military unit. Samson is not often with other people, and he is not like other people. He can accomplish incredible – even terrifying – acts. He tears apart a lion, kills multitudes of men at one time, melts the cords that bind him, and causes buildings to fall. None of these is a display of normal human strength, and therefore Samson's strength sets him apart from “normal” people and renders him an “other.”

III. Samson's Mother: The Unhomely Collision of Politics and the Home

Samson's mother's story follows other biblical mothers who receive an announcement that they will miraculously bear a son. Her tale resonates with that of Rebekah (Genesis 25), Hannah (1 Samuel 1) and Hagar (Genesis 16) and the divine involvement in the bearing of a son. As in the story of Samson and his mother, Hannah's son will be dedicated to the Lord and forbidden the use of a razor (1 Sam 1:11). Samson's mother also follows in the footsteps of a long line of barren (*ʿāqārâ*) women who become matriarchs (e.g. Sarai in Gen 11:30, Rebekah in Gen 25:21, and Rachel in Gen 29:31). This mother fits nicely within the other type scenes/motifs of the special birth narratives.⁵⁷⁷ Judges 13:5 contains the birth announcement formula (*kî hinnāk hārâ wēyōladt*) that

⁵⁷⁷ However, in contrast to these other biblical women, we get surprisingly little background information on Manoah's wife (including the fact that she lacks a name) (Exum, *Was sagt*, 47).

indicates divine intervention and remains almost constant through out the Hebrew text.⁵⁷⁸

In all cases, this announcement concerns the birth of a boy with special qualifications.⁵⁷⁹

Olson remarks that the “opening episode is saturated with allusions to the wider biblical tradition...barren mothers, Nazirite vow, angels visiting, wrestling with Jacob, seeing God face to face...all point to the birth of this son as an extraordinarily momentous event.”⁵⁸⁰

However, the formulaic announcement of Samson’s birth has ironic effects. Such birth scenes create certain expectations for a hero, but then Samson becomes laughable.⁵⁸¹

The narrator utilizes the divine messenger’s announcement to his mother in order to establish the (ultimately false) dichotomy between that which is characterized as the domestic, familial and personal realms and that which is often deemed public, political and outside the home.

A. The Participation of the Woman

In regards to the birth of the son, the narrative concentration settles chiefly on the anonymous woman as she operates on her own. Exum and Amit argue that she has a central role and is more favorably pictured than her husband.⁵⁸² Following biblical conventions, the narrator has the messenger initially appear to only her (13:3). Then, after

⁵⁷⁸ M. Ottosson, “*hārāh*,” *TDOT* 3:458-461. See also Gen 16:11 and Isa 7:14.

⁵⁷⁹ Ottosson, *TDOT* 3:461.

⁵⁸⁰ Olson, *NIB* 2:846.

⁵⁸¹ Klein, *Irony*, 138. See also Niditch, *Judges*, 145.

⁵⁸² Exum, “Promise,” 53 and Amit, “Manoah,” 146-147. See also Reinhartz regarding Manoah’s wife’s centrality and anonymity: “Though defined throughout the passage as Manoah’s wife, her words, actions, and interactions both amplify and challenge this mode of identification... her centrality to the passage belies the insignificance implied by her anonymity... by forcing the reader to use “the wife of Manoah”... anonymity draws attention to the interplay between the wifely role and her narrative portrayal and thereby the uniqueness and individuality which personal identity expresses” (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 12). Fuchs notes that Manoah is the fourth character described and that the wife is the clear protagonist (Esther Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the HB,” *Semeia* 46 [1989]: 151-166.). See also Michael J. Smith, “The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 2: Samson,” *BSac* 162 (October-December 2005): 424-36.

Manoah requests that the messenger come to them both (13:8), the narrator makes a point to indicate that the messenger again only appears to the woman (13:9). This is emphasized in two phrases in 13:9. Although “God heard the appeal of Manoah” (*wayyišma’ hā’ēlōhîm bĕqôl mānôaḥ*), the narrator provides that the messenger “came again to the woman” (*wayyābō’ mal’ak hā’ēlōhîm ’ôd ’el-hā’iššâ*) when she was in the field and then further supplies “but Manoah her husband was not with her” (*ûmānôaḥ ’išāh ’ên ’immāh*).

In terms of the announcements about and instructions for the coming son, the husband is predominantly left out. He is not given the message directly while the messenger gives the woman specific instructions that impact what *she* must do to prepare for the son’s birth (e.g. refrain from eating and drinking certain things, etc.). The man of God repeatedly repositions his message toward the wife, even though the husband insists on knowing about “the regulations of the lad and his work” (*mišpaṭ-hanna’ar ûma’āsēhû* 13:12). The messenger won’t give any new details to Manoah and essentially says in 13:14, “Go ask your wife” (my paraphrase). The Hebrew provides, “From all that I have said to your wife, let her be on guard” and repeats the instructions given to the woman. It is notable that these instructions concern the domestic realm: food, drink, and personal hygiene. There are no instructions about how to train this deliverer in military tactics, and there is no mention of specific religious or social responsibilities for this Nazarite. Thus, the announcement about the son, the instructions for preparing for his arrival, and the instructions for his care are directed chiefly to the woman and address domestic matters.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸³ Schneider similarly asserts that Manoah is basically rebuffed by the messenger as he has no role in the preparations for the child’s birth and everything is the woman’s responsibility (Schneider, *Judges*, 200).

The narrator places the birth of this son firmly in the realm of the domestic, and even more accurately, the maternal realm, by making the woman the recipient of the divine message, by giving her the only significant role in preparing for the birth of the son, and by permitting her to edit the divine message.⁵⁸⁴ Following Exum's argument about how this character might serve the interests of the implicit patriarchy within the narrative, the emphasis on the woman as a mother and on her domestic and maternal activity is another indication of how this character cooperates with the text's patriarchy and poses no threat.⁵⁸⁵ It is true that she works for the messenger of the Lord, relays his message, and serves the interests of her husband and son. However, her significant omission of her son as a deliverer is one element in the narrative that pushes beyond dichotomous strategies that separate domestic/maternal/"feminine" spheres from public/political/"masculine" spheres. In fact, the text demonstrates a way in which political matters can invade domestic and maternal affairs. The dichotomy breaks down.

The news from the messenger means that the woman is an essential but compelled participant of public life and politics invading her family and more accurately, her body. She also becomes an accomplice in military efforts as she bears the deliverer of her people. The woman becomes faced with a complicated and terrifying reality: her child will bear not only the honor and fame of being a hero for her people but also the potential personal risk that comes with being a military leader. It is one thing to learn that her son is

⁵⁸⁴ Exum similarly argues that the narrative stresses the importance of the woman. "The narrative arrangement in Judges 13 teaches us, as well as Manoah, a lesson: in the events surrounding the birth of this wonderchild, the father is not more important than the mother" (Exum, "Promise," 58). Form and meaning work together to accentuate the role of the woman.

⁵⁸⁵ Exum, "Feminist," 78 and Exum, *Was sagt*, 47. Lanoir places Samson's mother within the list of other mothers in Judges: Deborah, Micah's mother, Sisera's mother, and Jephthah's mother, but notes how all are quite distant from the typical mother figure image. This group makes one of three types of women in Judges (the others being the *femme fatale* and daughters who seem to have no mothers and suffer by the hand of their fathers) (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 115-116).

predetermined to be a set apart and dedicated Nazarite to God for life, but it is another thing entirely to have a son who will be the leader and deliverer for a whole people. This moment is treated in a similar way to Gen 25:23 in which Rebekah receives a divine oracle. YHWH tells Rebekah that two nations are in her womb. The ominous oracle describes the political discord that will ensue. The two people “from within you,” from one origin, will be separated, and one will subjugate the other. In both stories, these once barren women find out that not only do politics enter the home and family, but also that which is political invades a woman’s actual womb. The women’s bodies hold the political leaders of entire peoples. Importantly, both women fail to acknowledge these political implications of the divine message. Rebekah does not respond to the oracle, and she does not share it with her husband. The wife of Manoah emphasizes the son’s mortality, and she does not share his political destiny.

However, the narrator reemphasizes a theme that runs throughout the Judges narratives: the complicated portrayal of women and the way in which women participate in political endeavors. This points to the reality that women bear, raise, and educate military leaders. Adrienne Rich provides a distinction between two connotations of motherhood:

I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children and the *institution* which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control.⁵⁸⁶

Jost comments on Rich’s analysis and recognizes the potential for women’s power in the former even though the latter has contributed to many cultures and eras of oppression of

⁵⁸⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), xv.

women.⁵⁸⁷ It is this potential for power that Samson's mother embraces, and that the narrator depicts her embracing. This story, like the stories of Deborah and Sisera's mother, demonstrates that women both reap the rewards of success and bear the consequences of defeat alongside the military men they promote.

B. The Testimony of the Woman

When she reports to her husband, the woman leaves out certain elements of the divine envoy's message and adds some as well. Her testimony is accurate, and in the ways that it differs from the messenger's dispatch, it is judicious and even more accurate than the messenger's original message. Thus, the woman's digressions from the messenger's announcement are not insignificant.

The woman adds words to the message. While the messenger reports that the lad will be a Nazirite of God "from the womb" (13:5), the woman's account of the message mentions his death. The lad will be a Nazirite of God from the womb "until the moment of his death" (13:7). While the messenger's lack of mention of his death does not necessarily mean that this divinely announced child will be super human and immortal, the mother's mention of a life from womb to death arguably indicates her understanding that the child will be "normal" and will have a typical life pattern. The mother's words simultaneously acknowledge that her son will have a *unique* form of Nazirite status. Vows need to have a term of operation, and the mother's words emphasize not only that her son will die, but that this Nazirite vow that binds her son will be in effect throughout his entire life. Again, it is not typical to have a lifetime of Nazirite status. Her words, "until the moment of his

⁵⁸⁷ Jost, *Gender*, 244.

death,” also note an important juxtaposition concerning the character of Samson. On one hand, she highlights the way in which he is “normal” (i.e. he will die), but on the other hand, he will have a unique Nazirite status. And importantly, the woman speaks the words that link the Nazirite restrictions (e.g. that no razor should go upon his head) to the moment of Samson’s death. Thus, the woman provides the narrative foreshadowing of her son’s demise. It is true, as Webb suggests, that “certainly she speaks better than she knows.”⁵⁸⁸

The woman also digresses from the messenger’s dispatch by omitting key elements. She makes no mention of a razor and does not relay the information to her husband that a razor should not touch his head. The messenger explains that refraining from using a razor is directly linked to the child being a Nazarite of God from the womb. The first phrase in 13:5 provides, “For you will bear a son and a razor will not go upon his head” (*kî hinnāk hārâ wěyōladt bēn ūmôrâ lō’ ya’āleh ‘al-rō’šō*), and the second phrase adds, “for a vowed Nazarite of God will be the lad, from the womb (*kî-nězîr ‘ēlōhîm yihyeh hana’ar min-habāten*). Then, when the divine herald relays the instructions for the woman to Manoah, the messenger also leaves out mention of a razor/knife (13:14). It is hard to know why the pregnant woman’s testimony leaves out this piece of information in her report. Perhaps the information seems superfluous because a Nazarite is often known by his long locks. The mention of a razor does not occur again until the end of Samson’s narrative in 16:17. At the end of Samson’s story, it becomes apparent that the razor bears much more significance to Samson than simply being part of his Nazarite status.

The woman also omits a key element in the envoy’s announcement when she leaves out Samson’s public role. The messenger tells her, “he will be the deliverer of Israel from

⁵⁸⁸ Webb, *Judges*, 166.

the hand of the Philistines" (13:5), but the woman makes no mention of her deliverer son when she speaks to her husband. Thus, she never addresses the political impact her son will have on their people. In this way, both the woman's words and narrative repetition of her restrictions (in vv. 4, 7, and 14) divert attention away from the political ramifications of the son and focuses instead on personal and intimate concerns.

Her particular speech, or more accurately, the omissions in her speech, demonstrate a *resistance* to the invasion of the public into the private. The narrator's exclusion of crucial components of the messenger's announcement is intentional and enables what Bhabha calls an "unhomely moment."⁵⁸⁹ While it might be speculative to rehearse the character's unspoken thoughts, it is still a potential unhomely moment for both her as a character and the reader who is paying close attention to the narrative. What is added and omitted in the report highlights the movement between and within private and political matters. The reader is able to grasp the stark reality that that which is political sometimes invades family life. In this moment, the woman's "world shrinks then expands," moving from the inward womb to the Israelite war with the Philistines, and becoming a narrative articulation in which the "recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions"⁵⁹⁰ What could be more "domestic" than a womb, and what could be more invasive than the declaration of war coming from your own doorstep? Powerful in narrative subtlety but still accessible for an observant reader, the additions and omissions by the woman highlight a reality in which the borders between the home and the world are confused.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ Bhabha *Location*, 13.

⁵⁹⁰ Bhabha *Location*, 13.

⁵⁹¹ See Bhabha *Location*, 13.

C. The Perfect Candidate the Unhomely Invasion: The Liminality of the Woman

As mentioned in earlier discussions of Judges stories, often the condition of unhomeliness becomes realized at the location of a threshold or liminal space. This episode in Samson's tale is no exception. The pregnant woman, in her liminal state, is the perfect candidate by which the unhomely moment can be articulated.

Van Gennep argues that in many cultures, pregnancy is recognized as a transitional period.⁵⁹² Sometimes there are rites of separation at pregnancy and states of isolation for the woman, either because she is considered dangerous or impure or because her pregnancy puts her in a physiologically and socially abnormal condition.⁵⁹³ Van Gennep describes the rites associated with pregnancy and childbirth as "actual bridges, chains, or links...to facilitate the changing condition..."⁵⁹⁴

The pregnant woman in Judges 13 is betwixt and between, and her womb that bears the Israelite deliverer becomes the location by which it is clear that domestic and public boundaries are both reinforced and challenged. Her transitional state enables the realization of other blurred lines, and it is in this state that her true social power is realized; "die Frau ist machtvoll als Mutter des Retters."⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 41. He examines pregnancy practices in the Todas of India and the Hopi of Arizona.

⁵⁹³ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 41. Not only is pregnancy treated as a liminal period, but there also often exists a transitional period after childbirth (46-47).

⁵⁹⁴ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 47.

⁵⁹⁵ Jost, *Gender*, 240. Jost also makes the interesting observation that this woman (and her husband) are not subject to the governing authorities, as are the Philistine women who appear in Samson's future. And except for 13:1, this chapter also lacks any detail on Philistine oppression (Jost, *Gender*, 240).

D. The Woman's Return to Matters of the Home

This blurring of lines is not lasting, and a new strategy that permanently defies the domestic/public dichotomy is not established. After her pregnant transitional period, the mother's role in the narrative diminishes. Patriarchal gender roles are reinstated. Her presence in the narrative is no longer central as the narrator's perspective shifts to Samson. Samson's world expands beyond his family of origin and into his public and political experiences with the Philistines. Acceptable patterns of behavior for mothers, according to patriarchal standards, return to the narrative.⁵⁹⁶ Samson's mother is always paired with his father in chapter 14, and she is mentioned in vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 as Samson initially pursues the Timnite woman.⁵⁹⁷ Both parents are present as they counsel him to look for an Israelite girl rather than take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines (14:3). But when the social and political (and extra-domestic) marriage arrangements are to be made, it is to his father alone that Samson requests the specific woman "for she is pleasing in my eyes" *hî' yāšrâ bē'ênāy* (14:3). And it is only his father who "went down for the woman" (14:10). The narrator now relegates the mother to domestic matters, and she is excluded from the official marriage arrangements. The force of the unhomely, albeit perceptive, realization that public and domestic matters are not so separate dissipates with the exit of this woman. In fact, the acting characters from Samson's family of origin disappear from the narrative altogether until the end when his brothers retrieve his body and bury him in his father's grave (16:31).

⁵⁹⁶ And Samson's mother remains in the category of "guten Frauen" (Exum, *Was sagt*, 45).

⁵⁹⁷ Samson only addresses his father to request that the woman be retrieved. See also Schneider, *Judges*, 203.

However, the invasion of the political into the private does not *completely* disappear with the departure of his mother and family of origin. The bedroom becomes the location of political invasion, rather than the mother's womb.

IV. The Timnite Wife: The Invasion of the Marriage Bed

The narrative episode involving Samson, his Timnite wife, and her community shows how tensions arise between families of origin and marital families. Also, the episode again demonstrates that private and political interests are not always clearly demarcated. Private, marital and familial interests impact group, communal, and public interests, and women can often operate between and within multiple spheres of influence.

A. A Foreign Woman and a Problematic Union

The narrator provides a few descriptors for Samson's future wife. She is a woman in Timnah and a daughter of the Philistines (14:1 *'iššâ bētimnātâ mibbēnôt pēlišṭîm*). From the very first introduction, a match with this unnamed woman should be considered "bad news." This early introduction makes the relationship problematic because of the social and political complications the marriage would bring.⁵⁹⁸ Philistines neither circumcise nor observe other Israelite practices, and they dwell out of the covenant with the Lord. While they are a particular historical group of people, the "Philistines" symbolically represent a threat to Israelite identity on a more general and literary level. Boling similarly argues that

⁵⁹⁸ Niditch claims that the ultimate message in the ethnography is clear: that no social relations with the Philistines can succeed (Niditch, *Judges*, 168).

the reason for the condemnation of the marriage between Samson and this Philistine woman arises from the “dual loyalty which such a marriage would involve.”⁵⁹⁹

Scholars argue about the type of marriage described in Samson’s narrative, and consensus remains elusive.⁶⁰⁰ Moore, Crenshaw, Gordon and other scholars argue that this is a *sadiqa* marriage in which the wife remains in her parents’ house and is visited there by her husband.⁶⁰¹ This is also called an *erébu* marriage, and comes from the Akkadian word “to enter.” Scholars draw parallels between stories in the Hebrew Bible (including Samson’s marriage to his Timnite wife) and the Nuzi tablets. The Assyrian Law A: 27 reads:

If a woman is residing in her father’s house, (and) her husband pays visits (literally, “he keeps entering”) to her, any settled property which her husband has given to her, he may take back; (but) he shall not touch what belongs to her father’s house.⁶⁰²

This kind of marriage arrangement provides economic opportunities to the man as long as he respects the father’s authority and remains in the woman’s domain and thus maintains the daughter’s social status.⁶⁰³ Gordon argues that this Nuzi custom might be reflected in Genesis 2:24, “man shall forsake his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife and they shall become one flesh,” and has parallels in Jacob marrying Laban’s daughters in Gen 29:1-30 and in Moses marrying Zipporah in Exodus 2:21.⁶⁰⁴

⁵⁹⁹ Boling, *Judges*, 229.

⁶⁰⁰ Also, the narrator’s description, or lack of description, of the betrothal demonstrates another way in which the narrator dooms this marriage from the beginning. Samson’s betrothal to the Timnite woman lacks elements typical of the biblical betrothal well-scene (Klein, *Triumph*, 132). Klein points out that there is no symbolic water, no invitation to her home, and no recognition of common heritage (132). Also, he goes to his home rather than her home, and there is no hurrying (132). Reinhartz claims that the lack of these elements leads us to know that something is awry in this scene and “foreshadows the calamities to which the marriage will lead” (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 116).

⁶⁰¹ See Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 329; Crenshaw, *Samson*, 41; C.H. Gordon, “*Erébu* Marriage,” in *General Studies and Excavations at Nuzi 9/1* (eds. M. A. Morrison and David I. Owen; vol. 2 of *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians*; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 155-160. Regarding this stream of scholarship, see also Exum, *Fragmented*, 75.

⁶⁰² Gordon, “*Erébu*,” 155-156.

⁶⁰³ Gordon, “*Erébu*,” 159.

⁶⁰⁴ Gordon, “*Erébu*,” 157-159.

Since Samson has traveled down to Philistine territory, these scholars argue that this atypical marriage arrangement is plausible. Moore claims that, with regard to this kind of marriage, “as a matter of course, his (Samson’s) parents have nothing whatever to do.”⁶⁰⁵ Moore identifies various editorial inconsistencies and says that a later hand added “his father” to the text in v.10 to make it appear that the father goes down to make the typical negotiations for an ordinary marriage.⁶⁰⁶ When the woman’s father refuses to let his daughter leave after Samson returns, this is the father’s way of preventing the consummation of the marriage. Gordon describes the scenario as this:

Samson’s marriage is also of the *erébu* type. As a Hebrew outsider...among the Philistines, he weds a Philistine girl. Angered because the Philistines had pressured his bride to find out and reveal the answer to his riddle, Samson leaves her in the house of her father. On the assumption that Samson no longer loved her (Judges 15:2), the father gives her to another man (Judges 14:20). When Samson returned to claim conjugal rights with his wife, only to discover that she had been given to another, the “wrath of Samson” took a dire toll on Philistine property and life (Judges 15:4-8).⁶⁰⁷

Other scholars insist on the hypothetical nature of the *erébu* marriage as a custom reflected in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁰⁸ Gottwald is adamant that the events in Samson’s narrative “hardly attest to the supposed custom” and that the Jacob and Laban story “does not stand up to examination.”⁶⁰⁹ Exum is skeptical and claims that it is hard to know what kind of marriage it is, and this is demonstrated in the fact that Samson and the Timnite father have

⁶⁰⁵ Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 329.

⁶⁰⁶ Moore, *Exegetical Commentary*, 329.

⁶⁰⁷ Gordon, “*Erébu*,” 158-159.

⁶⁰⁸ For others who are skeptical or against the *erébu* marriage theory, see Godfrey Rolles Driver and Sir John Charles Miles, eds. *The Assyrian Laws. Ancient Codes and Laws of the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 134; John Van Seters, “Jacob’s Marriages and Ancient Near East Customs: A Re-examination,” *HTR* 62 (October 1, 1969): 377-395; John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

⁶⁰⁹ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 305. Gottwald also argues against Samson’s tale as evidence for Israelite matrilineality: “The supposed existence of matriolocal residence in early Israel (and by inference of the matrilineal clan) resting on Samson’s marriage to the woman of Timnah is of no validity” (305). If anything, the story might tell us something about Philistine matrilineality (305).

different ideas about it.⁶¹⁰ The words from the woman's father do not indicate awareness of an *erébu* marriage, "I surely said that you truly hated her, so I gave her to your companion." Instead, the father assumes that Samson's absence was Samson retracting the marriage.

Although he doesn't comment on the type of marriage, Boling argues that Samson and the woman were legally married, and when Samson abandoned the woman, they were legally divorced.⁶¹¹ Clearly, the narrator has Samson operate under a different assumption. Schneider disagrees with Boling about the two being legally divorced.⁶¹² While the nature of the marriage remains unclear, what is clear is that Samson thought he had rights to the woman.⁶¹³

This confusion and question about the nature and legality of his marriage (within the text and in the interpretation of it) serves the narrator's purpose of highlighting yet another cross-cultural miscommunication, and hence the inherent problems in such a marriage between people of different groups. These characters have different ideas of what is going on. Schneider similarly asserts that the narrator is making the point that this marriage with the Philistines is destructive to both cultures.⁶¹⁴

What emerges in the Samson chapters is both a specific rhetoric against the Philistines and a general rhetoric against marriages that create complicated loyalties. The story is sated with rhetorical attacks on the Philistines. The Timnite wife is maligned as a "daughter of the Philistines." Samson accuses the Philistines and claims that they "plowed

⁶¹⁰ Exum, *Fragmented*, 75. See also Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 115.

⁶¹¹ Boling, *Judges*, 232.

⁶¹² Schneider, *Judges*, 212-213.

⁶¹³ Schneider, *Judges*, 211-212.

⁶¹⁴ Schneider, *Judges*, 213.

with my heifer.” The Timnite best man takes Samson’s wife as his own.⁶¹⁵ As to the general critique of complicated marriages, the protests of the mother and father against Samson’s chosen Timnite mate, the conflict between father-in-law and Samson the son-in-law, the protests of Samson’s wife, and the resulting violence and destruction that occurs between the Israelites and the Philistines in the wake of family conflicts solidifies a narrative polemic against marriages between individuals of different groups. Schneider emphasizes that the fear of such marriages leads “to carrying out the traditions of other people, which then leads to the worship of other gods.”⁶¹⁶ This is implicit in the mention of the ritual marriage festivities during Samson’s union to the Timnite woman, and the “story emphasizes that Samson was doing precisely what the Israelites were repeatedly told not to do.”⁶¹⁷ When he seeks to marry the Timnite woman, he pursues that which is forbidden, which renders his “hero” status questionable and heightens the ambiguity of his character.

The specific critique of the Philistines and the general critique of inter-group marriage informs a meta narrative and overarching articulation of an oppressed Israelite group. Bhabha’s condition of unhomeliness becomes apparent through the choices that the narrator makes. By creating a sense of concern with intertribal marriage and the Philistines, the narrator presents the characters as dwelling in an existence that lives in the

⁶¹⁵Schneider argues that the treatment of the Philistines is derogatory, which is clear in their depiction as “foreskinned” (*hā’ārēlīm* in 14:3). “The Philistines were the enemy and what better way to depict them as dirty and barbaric than by referring so vividly to something that the writer’s group disdains” (Schneider, *Judges*, 203-4).

⁶¹⁶ Schneider, *Judges*, 206. Schneider pushes against traditional interpretations, e.g. Soggin, who wants Samson to emerge the hero (Soggin, *Judges*, 240-241). Such interpretations ignore the fact that that which Samson pursues in the Timnite wife is what the deity has explicitly forbidden the Israelites: intermarriage (Schneider, *Judges*, 205).

⁶¹⁷ Schneider, *Judges*, 207.

fluidity and even breakdown of the false dichotomy of public/private spaces in light of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations.⁶¹⁸

The narrator explicitly mentions how the Lord is at work and manipulates political and private matters. Like the divine involvement in Samson's special birth, *the Lord orchestrates* Samson's attraction to the Timnite woman. Verse 3 ends with Samson saying to his father, "Take for me that one, for she is pleasing/right in my eyes" (*'ôtāh qaḥ-lî kî-hî' yāšrâ bē'ênāy*). Verse 4 then adds, "and his father and his mother did not know that this was from the Lord" (*wě'ābîw wě'immô lô' yādē'û kî mēYHWH hî'*). At the very least, the Lord enables Samson's attraction to the woman. Then the next line could point to the Lord's further involvement. "For this was the excuse that *he* was seeking from the Philistines" (*kî-tō'ānâ hû'-mēbaqqēš mippēlišṭîm*) is unclear whether the "he" (*hû'*) refers to Samson or the Lord. Samson would not be so clever as to make such an elaborate plan, and the narrator does not indicate Samson's intentions; plus, the antecedent is likely the Lord.⁶¹⁹ However, "he" is sufficiently ambiguous to raise the question about who devises the plan, and provokes suspicion regarding how the Lord is involved in orchestrating an unconventional, even forbidden, union. Perhaps the Lord coordinates both Samson's attraction and the facilitation of the marriage so that the Philistines might be defeated. If the Lord does facilitate the marriage, then the Lord also helps facilitate the devastation to the individual people and families. This is certainly a troublesome depiction of the Lord.

⁶¹⁸ Bhabha, *Location*, 9.

⁶¹⁹ See Morgenstern, "Samson," 274.

Regardless of the Lord's specific involvement, 14:3-4 unequivocally refers to personal attraction and familial relationships that eventually lead to political change.⁶²⁰ This confluence of politics with personal matters complements the birth narrative where the divine messenger announces the political deliverer indwelling a woman's womb and demonstrates that sometimes it is indeed the Lord who facilitates the invasion of private spheres.

B. The Riddle of Loyalty

During the marriage feast between Samson and his Timnite wife, Samson wagers with 30 Philistine men and propounds a riddle.⁶²¹ The Philistines fear that Samson will best them, so they make an assault on the marriage bed and the Timnite woman's father's house. Sometime between day three and day seven, the Philistines' paranoia and anxiety become so great that they resort to giving an extreme and violent ultimatum to the Timnite wife. The Philistine's press upon her, "Persuade your husband so that he will reveal to us the riddle lest we will burn you and your father's house with fire." (14:15). The 30 Philistine men also accuse the woman of using her personal and private relationships to bring destruction on her own people. The men justify their threat of violence in the first part of 14:15 as they indict her in the second part, "It is to dispossess us that you have

⁶²⁰ Amit also claims that the narrator's viewpoint stresses the political aspect, that this marriage will be a pretext against the Philistines (Amit, *Judges*, 281).

⁶²¹ There is disagreement about whether this is a "riddle/*ḥidâ*" (*úidâ*, and 'solve a riddle' to *higgid*) or not (see Azzan Yadin, "Samson's *Ḥidâ*," *VT* 52 [2002]: 407-426). Regardless of the specific genre, Morgenstern makes an insightful point that Samson's riddle/challenge to the Philistines actually reinforces Samson's liminal and marginal position. She writes, "the riddle reflects the internal contradictions of Samson's position in the context of his larger historical role... the tragedy is that the ambiguity of the riddle permeates his political position, not allowing him to be identified clearly with any one side in the Israelite-Philistine encounters" (Morgenstern, "Samson," 259). And in a similar move to this chapter's argument, that binary oppositions like private and public spaces are deconstructed or proved false in this narrative, Morgenstern points out that Samson's ambiguous position stresses binary oppositions in the narrative rather than resolving them (Morgenstern, "Samson," 259).

called us, isn't it?" (*halěyārěšēnû qěro'tem lānû hālō*). While blaming the woman for their circumstances, they allege that she is in collusion with the man who has caused them trouble.

While Samson and the discovery of the riddle might appear to be the initial issue in the episode, the infiltration of the woman's domestic space becomes the narrator's principal focus. The Timnite woman makes no independent decision to act, since if she does not comply with the men who give her orders, her house and father's house will burn.⁶²² The woman's assumed domestic places of retreat and security become an illusion; the world is truly in her home(s).

The dialogue in 14:16 takes place in the marriage bed and poignantly articulates the condition of unhomeliness. This is the disorienting sensation that the world is in the home and that the home simultaneously opens to all of the world. First, the woman questions the intimate bond that she has with her new husband, "You must hate rather than love me" (*raq-šēnē'tanî wělō' 'āhaptānî*). Then she supports this statement by claiming that Samson has foregone his private and marital loyalties when he gave more information to her people than to her, "You have posed a riddle to my people but to me you have not revealed its solution" (*haḥîdâ ḥadtā libnē 'ammî wěllō' higgadtâ*). Rather than respond to this accusation, Samson complicates the matter and adds another layer of personal and political loyalty to the issue, "Look, to my father and to my mother I have not reported, but to *you* I will report?!" (*hinnēh lě'ābî ûlě'immî lō' higgadtî wěllāk 'aggîd 14:16*, emphasis is mine). At this point in the story, the narrator has long ago moved the focus away from Samson's parents and family of origin. Yet, all of a sudden, his father and mother are mentioned

⁶²² Klein, "Spectrum," 31.

again. Samson's response also redirects the conversation away from his wife's concerns and toward his own competing loyalties. She comes to Samson with her concerns about his love and loyalty to her, and, instead of hearing and responding to her anxieties, he articulates his own discomfort with the conflicting groups to which he has allegiance.⁶²³ The narrative three times mentions that Samson did not report events to his father and mother (14:6, 9, and 16). Different understandings regarding loyalty and disclosure are implicit in Samson's question. Does Samson's foreign wife deserve his full disclosure when his own parents do not receive it? The woman would say that the intimacy in marriage precludes privacy for its participants; Samson would disagree.⁶²⁴ Samson gets to the heart of the matter. His answer focuses the issue in terms of blood relations versus marital relations and therefore the reality of different kinship groups at work. Samson does not choose loyalty to her; he operates under the assumption of loyalty to his own kinship group.

Even as she argues for marital loyalty, the woman's very identity replicates the extant tensions between one's family of origin and marital family. Reinhartz reflects on the woman's anonymity and claims that she in fact has a dual identity as the narrative identifies her as her father's daughter and Samson's wife.⁶²⁵ In continuity with this chapter's argument, she asserts, "Both the woman and Samson are torn between the competing claims of his filial and spousal relationships."⁶²⁶

⁶²³ When Crenshaw discusses the unifying themes of the Samson narratives, he writes, "I believe the primary purpose of the saga was to examine competing loyalties" (Crenshaw, *Samson*, 65). Crenshaw also notes the competing loyalties of filial devotion and erotic attachment (Crenshaw, *Samson*, 65).

⁶²⁴ Morgenstern, "Samson," 262.

⁶²⁵ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 115. Reinhartz emphasizes the woman's passivity, that her sexuality is ultimately controlled by her father, and that her passivity and anonymity allows focus to stay on Samson (Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 115-116).

⁶²⁶ Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 116.

When Samson finally reports the answer to her, the woman immediately reports the riddle to her people (14:17). Ultimately and ironically, the riddle accomplishes the opposite of what riddles typically accomplish. Crenshaw argues that “riddles establish worth or identity... (and) provide an excellent means of assuring a group’s integrity.”⁶²⁷ But rather than assuring group integrity, Samson’s riddle “polarizes the bond of marriage and bond of peoplehood.”⁶²⁸ The Timnite woman must choose to whom she belongs.

C. Ploughing with Heifers, Playing with Patriarchy, and Public and Private Spaces

After the woman reports the riddle to her people, the men of the city then go to Samson before the sun goes down to solve it. Less of an answer and more of a riddle or proverb in itself, the men provide their solution, “What is sweeter than honey and what is stronger than a lion?” (14:18). Samson responds to the men with an odd metaphor. He says, “If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found the riddle” *lûlē’ ḥārašttem bē’eglātî lō’ mēšā’tem ḥîdātî* (14:18).

Some interpreters have understood the woman to be at fault for reporting to her people what Samson says to her under guile. Josephus’s liberal translation of Samson’s response supplies, “Nothing is more deceitful than a woman, for such was the person that discovered my interpretation to you.”⁶²⁹ She has chosen loyalty to the “bad guys,” and she has betrayed her Israelite husband.

Exum cites this as another example of the androcentric fear of women’s sexuality and claims that the Timnite wife is disparaged as a loose woman because “plowed with my

⁶²⁷ Crenshaw, *Samson*, 100.

⁶²⁸ Klein, *Triumph*, 139.

⁶²⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 5.288.

heifer” is a reference to sexual intercourse.⁶³⁰ Niditch notices a sexual innuendo in Samson’s accusation, but argues that the text insinuates that the Philistines, rather than the woman, are at fault. Niditch claims this as an instance of “erotic verbal play” which suggests that the Philistines “have used his woman, worked her over, had their way with her.”⁶³¹ Another interpretation of Samson’s odd response is possible. Rather than an explicitly sexual reference, this metaphor in Samson’s accusation articulates other kinds of patriarchal fears that go beyond acts of sexual betrayal.

1. Using the Wrong Tool for the Job and Patriarchal Discomfort

The image of plowing with a heifer is meant to be troubling. The Hebrew word used here for “plow/plough” (*ḥāraštem*) not only represents the action of plowing, it also carries the meaning of engraving, craftsmanship, and the use of tools. Gen 4:22 references Tubal-cain who forged a variety of implements (using *ḥāraš*) of bronze and iron. Engravers of stone are mentioned in Ex 28:11, Ex 35:35, Deut 27:15, 1 Kings 7:14, Is 40:19-20, and Jer 10:3 and 9 mention the work of craftsmen and artisans. When it is not explicit, these references imply male artisans using their work for extra-domestic jobs. The use of *ḥāraš* as both the action of plowing and male craftsmen completing their public work clearly indicates this kind of action is designated for predominantly male, public and non-domestic purposes.

Furthermore, the term for heifer (*‘eglāh*) often accompanies other cultivation verbs in the Hebrew Bible, thus indicating what kind of farm labor heifers typically complete. In Deut 21:3, the elders are instructed to take a heifer from the herd, and find one that has not

⁶³⁰ Crenshaw comments regarding the “plowing with heifer” statement that “one would be hard put to discover a more apt description of the sexual act” (Crenshaw, *Samson*, 119).

⁶³¹ Niditch, *Judges*, 157.

worked (from *'ābad*) and has not pulled (from *māšak*) in a yoke. Thus, heifers work and pull but are not listed as “plowing.” Similarly, 1 Sam 6:7 depicts female cows (not *'eglāh*, but in this case *pārāh*) as carrying yokes and a cart, but not plowing. In Jer 50:11, heifers (*'eglāh*) like to tread (*dûš*).

One final example supports the argument that the use of “plowing” *hāraš* in conjunction with “heifers” *'eglāh* is meant to be enigmatic. Hosea 10:11 presents the metaphor of Ephraim as a heifer, “Ephraim as a heifer (*'eglāh*) was taught to love to tread (*dûš*), and I passed over her fair neck. But I will cause Ephraim to ride, Judah to plough (*hāraš*), and Jacob to harrow for himself.” At first, Ephraim was spared and treated as a heifer, but as a punishment, Ephraim will have to take on the yoke and plow alongside Judah and Jacob. Hosea 10:11 and surrounding verses depict a shift from what has been to what will be, in order to change bad behavior. Thus, making a heifer plow is viewed as a form of punishment.

Samson accuses the Philistines of using the wrong instrument for their job. Samson’s wife, in this context, is arguably valued as a young potentially-fertile woman and intended for, but currently without, offspring. Samson’s metaphor indicts the Philistines of using that which is designated for procreation instead for a public task that she was not supposed to do. The woman has been taken out of, and forced to operate outside of, her intended and proper sphere of influence. Thus, Samson’s response concerning his “heifer” accuses the Philistines of not only threatening himself but also threatening the way of doing things in a culture steeped in patriarchal values. The narrator has Samson make his point clear, perhaps overemphasizing gendered divisions of labor and society in order to stress his outrage at the Philistine encroachment. Samson’s accusation points out that the

Philistine's misuse of the Timnite wife is dangerous and threatening to the categories that keep this patriarchal culture operating.

2. Two Sides of the Unhomeliness Coin

The narrator implicitly hints through Samson's words that there is patriarchal discomfort in the actions of the Timnite woman, hence the tendency of some commentators to argue that the woman is blamed. As we have already seen in the stories with Samson's mother and the Timnite wife, the narrator demonstrates that politics pervade domestic spaces. If women should be relegated primarily to domestic and private spaces according to patriarchal assumptions, Samson's words about plowing with his heifer highlight the other side of Bhabha's "unhomeliness" coin. According to Bhabha, what is unnerving for the "domestic" subject is that the external invades, but in the case of the Samson story, what is unnerving for the "public"/male/patriarchal subject is that the private/domestic/female subject can impact political life. The same reversed unhomeliness occurs in Judges 4 and 5. This narrative, like others in the book of Judges, reiterates that women in publically political maneuvers is inevitable, even necessary. From the patriarchal perspective, it is also disturbing.

While the narrative, steeped in patriarchy, hints at a disconcerting reality that women can undermine men in the male sphere of influence, the text depicts Samson ultimately blaming the Philistines and not his wife. Using the heifer as a metaphor for his wife, Samson claims the Philistines have used that which is his against him. Samson is now the victim as the Philistines have invaded Samson's domestic space. His mother's womb has been utilized for political purposes, and now his wife's marriage bed and his father-in-law's house have been assaulted by men from the Timnite wife's group. The Philistines have

assaulted Samson's domestic and marital space not by directly threatening his young wife, but by using her to get to Samson. Samson's words, "'If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found the riddle" *lûlē' ḥārašttem bē'eglātî lō' mēšā'tem ḥîdātî* (14:18), associates the victimized domestic space with himself.

3. Samson: A Champion for Women?

"Heifer" is arguably a derogatory way to refer to a woman, and Samson's words reinforce patriarchal standards by relegating women to procreation and domestic work.⁶³² However, this metaphor is used by the narrator by way of Samson to disparage the Philistines. Samson, perhaps in an uncouth way, has referred to the woman as a heifer ("my heifer" *'eglātî*), but his point is to argue that the Philistines have done wrong to the woman by treating her as an animal.⁶³³ They have misused and threatened a woman. They have treated her like property. According to Morgenstern, they have exploited "another creature for one's own material enrichment" and this is possibly "Samson's way of acknowledging Philistine abuse of one of their own."⁶³⁴

If so, Exum's assessment that the "oppression of women is taken for granted in this story" needs to be nuanced.⁶³⁵ It is true that Samson uses a derogatory term for his wife, but he does so in order to speak out against the misuse of his wife. Her oppression by her people is not taken for granted. However, the narrator still has Samson use the derogatory terminology, and therefore the term is not necessarily justified simply because he indicts the Philistines. Furthermore, if things were to be "set right" according to Samson, she

⁶³² See Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 117 and also Schneider, *Judges*, 211.

⁶³³ Schneider makes a similar point that Samson blames the companions rather than the woman (Schneider, *Judges*, 211).

⁶³⁴ Morgenstern, "Samson," 259. One could argue, however, that Samson is equally – or even more – outraged at the Philistine threats against the woman's *father* rather than at the threats against her.

⁶³⁵ Exum, "Feminist," 82.

would return to her proper domestic space as prescribed by patriarchal gender roles. Even if he indicts the Philistines for mistreatment of the woman, Samson's outrage ultimately reinforces a systemic form of oppression of women.

4. Escalating Vengeance

After this episode, Samson and the Philistines engage in a series of violent and vengeful reactions. Samson strikes 30 men in Ashkelon, strips them of their clothing, gives the outfits to the Timnite men, and retreats to the house of his father (14:19). When he later returns to his wife's father's house, he is denied access into his wife's chamber and is told that she was given to his companion (15:1-2). He does not take revenge on the woman's father, but instead retaliates against the larger group of the Philistines by torching their grain and olive trees (15:5). In response to the destruction of their property, the Philistines do not strike back at Samson directly, but instead they burn the Timnite woman and her father (15:6).⁶³⁶ Samson's next act of vengeance escalates into all out war involving thousands of men (15:11-16). The vengeful acts are inconsistent in scale and transgress multiple mismatched social boundaries. An offense to one person brings crop destruction for a community, and this offense to the group leads to the termination of a family.

The marriage between Samson and the Timnite woman has become a test of loyalties that has led to indiscriminate devastation everywhere. Vengeful violence spirals out of control and permeates all aspects of society. The narrative of Samson and his Timnite wife shows a constant muddled reality of public and private, personal, familial and political spheres, wherein one constantly impacts the other.

⁶³⁶ Lanoir situates the tragic story of Samson's Timnite wife with that of Jephthah's daughter, the Levite's *pîlegeš*, and the daughters of Shiloh, arguing that these stories contrast the earlier Judges tales, depict the decline of Israelite society, and "presentment une tout autre vision du sort des femmes, beaucoup plus exposées à la violence et à la mort" (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 114).

VI. The Lord's Elusive Presence and Actions

A. *The Lord and Sight*

Samson's tale contains two indictments by the narrator. The first is communal, the second is personal. First, the narrative contains the formulaic introduction for Judges narratives, "and the Israelites continued to do evil in the eyes of the Lord" (13:1). Second, Samson chooses to marry the Timnite woman because she is pleasing in his eyes.

The second half of 13:1 states, "And the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years." The consequence for Israel doing evil in the eyes of the Lord was oppression, initiated by the Lord. The introduction to Samson's tales corresponds with a trajectory in Judges that expresses the problematic state of Israel and the Lord's response to the depravity. Then, Samson either compounds the problem or provides the rationale for the Lord's permission for Philistine oppression. Samson determines that the Timnite woman should be his wife, and the evidence he presents to his parents that allows him to justify this marital choice is that "she is pleasing/right in my eyes" (*kî-hî' yošrâ bē'ênāy* 14:3). Samson's rationale for his actions corresponds to the excuse the Lord uses to bring destruction to the Lord's people. Thus, in the case of Samson, one can then assume that there is a negative narrative evaluation of Samson's actions because he insists on marrying a woman who is "pleasing/right in his eyes." From the onset, this marriage seem flawed.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁷ Morgenstern puts the underlying implications of the problematic marriage in national terms: "How can there be national salvation when the protagonist seems unaware of the larger historical forces shaping the nation's identity?" (Morgenstern, "Samson," 266).

The union of this pair stands contrary to the Lord's ideal and could prove problematic for Samson, his family, the woman, and possibly Israel.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Samson as the "little sun" draws a connection between the themes of light/dark and sight/blindness. Samson's stories bear an overt theme involving eyes and sight.⁶³⁸ The use of *rā'āh* or *'ênê* occurs over 20 times in chapters 13-16.⁶³⁹ Samson chooses his wife, who is a woman both he and the narrator report he saw in Timnah, "because she was pleasing/right in his eyes" (*kî-hî' yāšrâ bē'ênāy*). This statement not only resonates with the introductory phrase in 13:1 but also creates narrative links both to the specific story of Micah and his mother which immediately follows the Samson tale and to the denouement of the entire book (i.e. chapters 17-21) in which chaos settles in the land. Thus, terminology that involves sight, eyes, and the Lord's approval provides an internal consistency in Samson's tale and an external link to the rest of the book.⁶⁴⁰

The story of Samson's miraculous birth prominently involves his mother and father's sight (e.g. 13:19, 20, 22) and the appearance of the messenger of the Lord (e.g. 13:3, 6, 10, 21, 23). This story bears much in common, especially in regards to this theme of sight, with Hagar's experience of learning about her son's conception in Genesis 16. While Samson's mother and father seem to be concerned with knowing the name of the messenger who appears to them (13:6 and 13:17), Hagar takes it upon herself to name the

⁶³⁸ Exum also notices the focus on seeing and watching with *rā'āh* in Judges 13 (Exum, "Promise," 59).

⁶³⁹ Judges 13:1, 3, 6, 10, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23; 14:1, 2, 3, 8, 11; 16:1, 5, 18, 21, 24, 27, 28.

⁶⁴⁰ 1 Samuel 3 is also relevant as "Samuel's vision had confirmed to Eli God's utter contempt for him," and Eli's eyes degenerate and "become fixed into a sightless stare" (4:15) (Jack Sasson, "Eyes of Eli: An Essay in Motif Accretion," in *Inspired Speech Prophecy in the Ancient Near East. Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon* [eds. Louis Stulman and John Kaltner; JSOTSup 378; London: T&T Clark International], 171-190). This is another instance of how faulty human sight corresponds with a distance from God's purposes or God's disapproval. Eli's eyes lose "their capacity to focus on God and on the grinding demands God's service required" (187). The motif of sight serves the narrative purpose of positively or negatively evaluating characters.

god who appears to her. In Gen 16:13, she calls the name of the Lord who speaks to her, “you are the God of seeing” (*’attâ ’ēl rō’î*). Manoah’s proof that he was dealing with the messenger of the Lord was in seeing the messenger disappear in the flame and smoke of the altar (13:20 and 21). Then Manoah’s wife abates his fear of dying because he had seen God (13:22) when she reasons, “If God truly wanted us dead, he would not have taken from our hands the burnt offering or the grain. And he would not have shown us (*Hiphil: herě’ānû*) all of this, and even now, he would not have made us hear all of this” (13:23).⁶⁴¹ In a similar way, the name that Hagar gives for the god she sees corresponds with her amazement of still being able to see even after “he saw me” (Gen 16:13). Both of these stories (and other miraculous birth narratives in the Bible) create a precedent that issues involving barrenness, conception, and the future of one’s offspring are worthy of a divine appearance.⁶⁴² In the case of conception and a certain kind of “family planning,” the Lord is intimately involved. Also, these stories demonstrate that seeing the Lord’s work or a messenger of the Lord is powerful and scary, but not necessarily deadly.

Herein lies the contradiction in Samson’s narrative: the Lord seems to be intimately involved in various aspects of Samson’s family planning, yet Samson does what is pleasing in his own eyes. Plus, that which is pleasing to Samson’s eyes and displeasing to the Lord’s eyes (i.e. being attracted to the Timnite woman) could be part of the Lord’s orchestration according to 14:4! Did the Lord intend for Samson to act unacceptably and begin the

⁶⁴¹ Exum argues that the woman’s foresight contrasts Manoah’s inability to understand, “versteht sie die göttliche Absicht besser als Manoach” (Exum, *Was sagt*, 46).

⁶⁴² See also Sasson, “Eyes of Eli,” 186-187. Sasson has a helpful discussion on the *Niphal* form of the verb and whether the text in 1 Sam 1:22 should be translated that (Samuel) “shall appear before God” or that “we shall look at the face of God” (i.e. worship). Whether or not Hannah wanted her son to be seen by God or simply to look at God, just a few years later Samuel indeed does see God, thereby sharpening his own vision about his role as mediator. (187). The Lord appears in Shiloh (*wayyōsep YHWH lēhērā’ōh*) and reveals himself to Samuel in 1 Sam 3:21. This is the same *Niphal* infinitive construct used in Judges 13:21.

process of destruction to many people? Samson behaves in socially unacceptable ways and in ways that the Lord would ordinarily disapprove (i.e. by seeking a Philistine wife), but the Lord possibly orchestrates this attraction and ill-conceived marriage. Clearly, the Lord is utilizing something forbidden for other purposes.⁶⁴³ The narrative proves time and again that the union between Samson and the Timnite woman brings nothing but trouble, and Samson's parents seem to have the foresight to warn about the disastrous union. But human seeing and knowledge, especially knowledge about God, are incomplete and elusive in the Samson story.⁶⁴⁴ This is the point in the contradiction: the Lord's actions and motives remain unclear.

B. The Lord and the Lion

This narrator emphasizes three times that Samson does not reveal events to his parents: the third of these failures to reveal comes from Samson's lips to his Timnite wife (14:16) and references back to a strange episode early in the chapter involving a lion and honey. This encounter with a lion interrupts the rest of the narrative in chapter 14. The narrator depicts Samson traveling to Timnah with his parents. Somehow, unbeknownst to them, a lion cub comes roaring toward Samson, who, when empowered by the Lord, powerfully tears the animal apart (v. 5). Later, Samson comes across the lion carcass, and it has honey in it. He gives some of this honey to his parents, but he doesn't tell them from where it came or how he got it (vv. 8-9). This lion episode reflects both the potential

⁶⁴³ It is not that intertribal marriage is always considered illicit in the Hebrew Bible. It is approved of in Ruth, despite the emphasis on her foreignness.

⁶⁴⁴ See Webb, *Judges*, 173.

influence of the Lord in Samson's story and the tensions regarding familial and political loyalties.

Samson's unique episode when he sees a lion cub could indicate another way in which the Lord operates in this narrative. In 14:5, "a young lion roared to meet him" (*kěpîr 'ārāyôt šō'ēg liqro'tô*). This animal carries connotations of a strong predator with its confidence, lurking, and tendency to attack (Ps 17:12 and Prov 28:1) and its associations with food, hunger, prey, and appetites (Ezekiel 19:3, 6, Amos 3:4, and Job 38:39). The biblical text also depicts this terrifying beast roaring (*šā'ag*) (Job 37:4, Pss 22:14 and 104:21). Prophetic imagery frequently depicts the Lord as a lion roaring. Hosea 11:10 contains, "They will walk behind the Lord, the one who roars like a lion. When he roars, the children will tremble from the west." In parallel form, Amos 3:8 links God to a lion: "The lion has roared; who can fear? My lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" In the Samson narrative, immediately following the lion roaring at Samson (Judg 14:5), the spirit of the Lord rushes upon him (*wattīslah 'ālāyw rūaḥ YHWH*) in 14:6. One can read this story as a sequence of unrelated events in which first an autonomous, random and dangerous lion approaches, roars and seemingly threatens Samson. Then, the Lord provides the spirit so that Samson can slay this dangerous predator. However, a second look at the scene shows how the events are intimately connected, and could even represent one simultaneous and divinely intended moment. The Lord is present in both the beast and the spirit. This harkens back to the end of Chapter 13 when Samson is first blessed by the Lord, and then the spirit moves him. In the case of Chapter 14, the lion presents one manifestation of the divine and the spirit presents another. Samson becomes the recipient of a divine appearance while becoming bestowed with divine power.

However, if it can be argued that the Lord is somehow implicitly at work in the lion incident, then the Lord's involvement, at least in this section of Samson's tale, must again be viewed ambiguously. The lion becomes the inspiration for Samson's riddle that eventually escalates the conflict between Samson and the Philistines. Perhaps the narrator gives another piece of evidence of the Lord's contribution to the story's events, and namely the Philistine conflict, by way of planting the lion in Samson's path. If this is the case, then the Lord's involvement in the Samson narratives again not only involves miraculous births but also the instigation of familial strife and political conflict.

Similar to the other Judges narratives, the Lord's presence runs subtly throughout the Samson narratives. The Lord enables a barren woman to bear the deliverer of her people; the Lord also facilitates the attraction between Samson and his future foreign Timnite wife so as to provoke conflict between Samson and the Philistines. Also, the spirit of the Lord rushes upon Samson multiple times throughout the Samson narrative, and the narrator's commentary indicates to the reader that the Lord orchestrates events. Often the Lord works in covert, perhaps malevolent but certainly inexplicable, ways. The narrator presents the Lord as at least an accomplice, if not the facilitator, of the invasion of the political into the private.

VII. Conclusion

Some scholars have acknowledged a peculiar dilemma about the nature and focus of Samson's acts. For example, Amit claims Samson's acts are more about his private vendettas and personal conflicts than about national concerns.⁶⁴⁵ Regarding Samson's

⁶⁴⁵Amit, *Judges*, 275.

strength, “Three times in this story Samson makes use of the unique power given him, that had been intended for national needs, for his personal needs.”⁶⁴⁶ My argument regarding the recognition of unhomeliness in these Judges narratives is that these two supposedly dichotomous spheres (i.e. the national vs. the personal) are recognized as one and the same, virtually inseparable, in the Samson narratives.

Perhaps more than any other biblical narrative, Samson’s story demonstrates that the personal is political and that the world is in the home. Samson’s mother first experiences the condition of unhomeliness when she bears the deliverer of her people. Then in Samson’s episodes with his two lovers, his Timnite wife and Delilah, the intimate bedroom becomes a public forum and a place of political conflict. Whereas Samson is confronted with Philistine aggression in his own bedchamber by way of his Timnite wife, the woman and her family suffer the consequences. Samson will not be so lucky with his next partner and literary counterpart, the one Samson loves: Delilah.

⁶⁴⁶ Amit, *Judges*, 286.

CHAPTER 6

Samson Part 2, The Work of Women:

“She caused him to sleep upon her knees. She called to the man, then she shaved the seven braids on his head, and she began to overpower him.”

I. Paginal Liminality: An Interlude in Form and Content

Samson’s tale curiously contains a double ending. According to 15:20, Samson leads the Israelites for 20 years in the days of the Philistines. Unlike many of the Judges whose stories close with a statement on the length of their leadership (e.g. Jephthah in 12:7 and Tola in 10:2), Samson’s narrative continues after the report of his tenure as judge. 16:31 provides a second ending to the Samson tale, repeating that he lead for 20 years and also adding more detail on his burial. What might be achieved in picking up the story again, after the apparent close of his story, and then adding a second conclusion? Some translations avoid the question altogether and give the pluperfect “he had led” (NIV) and “he had judged” (NRSV) in 16:31 in the attempt to harmonize the two endings. Instead of this solution, perhaps we might see how preserving both endings serves the narrative. Each ending closes a particular narrative account about Samson’s life (i.e. that which precedes 15:20 and that which occurs in chapter 16), and each narrative emphasizes different features about Samson’s character and the women in his life.

The second Samson account contains resonances with the first, but it portrays Samson in slightly new ways. The first account emphasizes the transgression of political maneuvers into seemingly private spheres; the second account continues this theme but goes further to demonstrate the transgression of gendered boundaries. Both accounts

depict Samson pressed upon by his political enemies the Philistines and by women residing in spaces of intimate connections. The first narrative emphasizes Samson’s ability to use words and riddles to manipulate events, while his physical strength receives less emphasis. The second account emphasizes his strength, which forms an *inclusio* for the narrative chapter 16. Contrary to Samson’s early narrative, it is Delilah’s words that ultimately trap Samson in the second account. The spirit working in Samson’s story is emphasized in the first episode (e.g. 13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14), but it is virtually absent in the second account. Instead, there is a brief mention that Samson “didn’t know that the Lord had turned aside from him” (16:20), and for the first time in Samson’s narrative, he prays to the Lord a prayer for vengeance, “Lord YHWH, please remember me and please make me strong only this one time, God...” (16:28).

Between Samson’s two principal episodes with this male character’s primary female counterparts, Samson’s story contains a brief three verse interlude. Chapter 16 begins with him in Gaza, again in Philistine territory. Par for the course, Samson spots a woman, a prostitute, acts on his desire, and goes to her (*wayyar’-šām ’ššâ zônâ wayyābō’ ’ēleyhā*) (16:1). Samson wanders around Philistine territory, perhaps trolling for trouble, or more likely, women. But, importantly, the places upon which he lands are liminal spaces. Both Ashkelon (14:19) and Gaza (16:1) are on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This little interlude with the Gaza prostitute contains temporal liminality as well. Narratively speaking, it is an under-developed, minor scene with an unnamed, unattached woman that occurs between Samson’s two main bedroom scenes with his principal love interests. Similar to the narrative in Judges 19, Samson’s interlude makes much of what happens in the middle of the night. The episode contains 4 references to “the night” (*hallaylâ*) twice in

16:2 and twice in 16:3. While the people of Gaza lay in wait all night, keep quiet all night, and say “in the morning light we will kill him” (16:2), Samson waits until the middle of the night (*wayyiškab šimšon ‘ad-ḥăšî hallaylâ*), arises at midnight (*wayyāqom baḥăšî hallaylâ*), braces himself in the liminal structure of the doors at the gate of the city, and breaks himself free (16:3). The multiple references to night contains linguistic cues that prepare the reader for the main character and Samson’s female counterpart: Delilah.

This paginal interlude resounds with liminal qualities as it dwells between the Samson tales. And as it literarily moves the reader from one Samson account to another, the interlude reintroduces major themes about Samson: his sight, his special strength, his desire for women, his Philistine enemies, the significance of his “sun” name and his “night” counterpart, etc. This interlude also opens new, and even more destabilizing, possibilities for Samson’s character.

II. Delilah

The meaning of Delilah’s name is famously unresolved. The root of her name comes from “*dalal*” which means thin thread or dangling, and carries connotations of flirting and enticement.⁶⁴⁷ But as conjectured by some, it may be based on a folk etymology, *d+lylh*, “she of the night.” If so, it might suggest darkness and so give a nice contrast to Samson’s name, that evokes the sun. Thus, the narrative might offer us another pairing such as we have for Deborah and Baraq. The fire and lightning pair and now the light/sun and dark/night pair

⁶⁴⁷ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 222.

reflect cosmic elements that are inevitably controlled by YHWH.⁶⁴⁸ The first pair, Deborah and Baraq, complement one another and even necessitate each other's presence. The second pair, Samson as "sun" and Delilah as "night," are opposing and hostile terms. The name pairing foreshadows that the tale will not end well.

Delilah is the *only* woman in Samson's narrative to have a name, thus heightening her importance. Sasson attributes the bestowal of a name to Samson's unique feelings of love for her.⁶⁴⁹ She is a full character in her own right, and she lacks attachment to any male. She has no father or brother. It is largely assumed that Delilah is a Philistine, however, it is not clear to what group Delilah belongs.⁶⁵⁰ The Valley of Sorek edged Danite and Philistine territories, and her name "follows excellent Semitic construction."⁶⁵¹ Based on 14:4, we might presume that she *isn't* Hebrew because Samson has a proclivity for choosing foreigners.⁶⁵² The issue of her uncertain background, by way of her name, Samson's interest in foreign women, and the liminal space of the Valley of Sorek from where she derives, makes this character immediately suspect for an observant reader.

Striking connections arise between Delilah and Samson's Timnite wife. Klein relates the two characters by claiming that the Timnite woman is the passive version of Delilah and foreshadows Delilah.⁶⁵³ The similarities between the women and their bedroom scenes with Samson, as well as notable deviations between the two episodes, promote implicit negative evaluations for both of these non-Israelite women. The Samson narrative is

⁶⁴⁸ Schneider mentions multiple times the theme of light and dark in the narrative and how Samson represents the sun and Delilah represents night and darkness (Schneider, *Judges*, 219 and 224).

⁶⁴⁹ Jack Sasson, "Who Cut Samson's Hair?: (And Other Trifling Issues Raised by Judges 16)," *Proof 8* (September 1, 1988): 333-339. Luciani argues the same, "parce que l'amour a toujours un nom" (Didier Luciani, "Samson: l'amour rend aveugle," *VT* 59 [January 1, 2009]: 323-326).

⁶⁵⁰ Lanoir writes, "une femme probablement (?) philistine, Dalila" (Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 113).

⁶⁵¹ Sasson, "Who Cut," 334.

⁶⁵² Sasson, "Who Cut," 334.

⁶⁵³ Klein, "Spectrum," 31.

certainly a text that uses the Timnite woman and Delilah to teach lessons about the “dangers” of foreign women, and in this text “nationalism reinforces its gender ideology.”⁶⁵⁴ The Samson narrative may perpetuate a misogynistic cultural view about women’s “wiles” and their tendency to nag men.⁶⁵⁵ But because of the way in which Delilah’s story is told, the narrator portrays her as a much more troubling and dangerous obstacle than the Timnite woman.

Thus, my reading of Delilah does little to reclaim Delilah’s perspective and instead demonstrates how the narrator works methodically to portray her in negative ways. The first part of this Delilah section shows similarities and differences in the narrator’s presentation of the Timnite wife and Delilah, highlighting the incentives and allegiances of each woman, the narrative depiction of the relationship between Samson and each woman, and the pressure that both women exert on him. The second part considers the use of repetition in the Delilah narrative and demonstrates that ambiguity is inherent in the information that Samson’s enemies seek. The repetition and ambiguity underscores how Delilah increasingly works on her own and how she works in excess of her agreement with the Philistines. While the first two parts of this Delilah section consider *how* the narrator works to depict Delilah in negative ways, the final part of this consideration of Delilah’s character questions *why* the narrator considers Delilah to be such a problem.

⁶⁵⁴ Exum, “Feminist,” 81. See also Exum, *Fragmented*, 89.

⁶⁵⁵ Schneider warns that the “depiction of her (the Timnite woman) as a foreign temptress luring Samson is completely unfounded” and that really Samson seeks *her* and poses a threat to *her* family. He is the aggressor (Schneider, *Judges*, 210).

III. Delilah and the Timnite Wife: Similarities and Differences

A. Allegiances and Loyalties

Both of the scenes involving Samson's lovers raise questions about their allegiance. The Timnite woman is clearly caught between her father's people and Samson. Delilah works alone, without any group or family interests or loyalties, to enable Samson's demise. Her efforts are for her personal benefit. The Lords of the Philistines go to her (16:5), and they persuade her to work for money by adding, "And we will surely give to you, each man 1100 shekels of silver" (*wa'ānaḥnū nittan-lāk 'iš 'elep ūmē'â kāsep*). Unlike their communications with the Timnite woman, the Philistines do not threaten Delilah. Thus, the question of what is at stake for both women is relevant. The Timnite works under threat of her and her family's demise. On one hand, the Timnite woman could justify her betrayal of her husband because of her countrymen's threats.⁶⁵⁶ But on the other hand, she ultimately shows more allegiance to her own people than to her husband.⁶⁵⁷ Delilah appears to work for monetary reward. Unlike the Timnite woman who must choose between loyalty to various men, Delilah is available outside the bonds of marriage. She is not identified through male kinsman; she is an unattached woman.⁶⁵⁸ She has somehow broken out of or defied gender expectations that necessitate her attachment to a man. Neither woman chooses allegiance to Samson or the Israelites, and the women's dubious loyalties raise questions about dealing with foreigners, especially in marital and sexual relationships.

⁶⁵⁶ Klein, *Triumph*, 120.

⁶⁵⁷ Klein, *Triumph*, 120.

⁶⁵⁸ Lillian R. Klein, "The Book of Judges: Paradigm and Deviation in Images of Women," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Lillian R. Klein; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 55-71.

B. Defining the Relationship with Samson

It is important to pay attention to the way in which the narrator characterizes the beginning of the relationships with these women. Each episode defines Samson's attraction to the woman in a specific way, yet the differences in the descriptions of how Samson relates to these women are important to note. As mentioned in the last chapter, the narrator communicates a particular point of view about Samson and his choice of spouse when Samson chooses his Timnite wife because "she is pleasing/right in my eyes" *hî' yāšrâ bē'ênāy* (14:3). An implicit negative evaluation resides within this statement, since Samson, like others before him, chases after what seems good to him. However, a different perspective on the relationship between Samson and Delilah arises when the narrator provides, "he fell in love with a woman" *wayye'ēhab 'iššâ* (16:4).⁶⁵⁹

A number of instances in the Hebrew text mention individuals who love another person in a similar way to this story. Some patriarchs are said to love their wives. Isaac loves Rebekah in Gen 24:67 (*wayye'ēhabehā*), and Jacob loves Rachel in Gen 29:18 (*wayye'ēhab ya'āqōb 'et-rāḥēl*) and 30.⁶⁶⁰ Leah hopes that her husband will love her in Gen 29:32. A similar kind of romantic or affectionate love that exists between individuals appears in David's stories. Saul loves David very much *wayye'ēhabehû mē'ōd* (1 Sam 16:21); David loves Jonathan as his own self *wayye'ēhabēhû yēhônāton kēnapšô* (1 Sam 18:1). The love between David and Jonathan also receives mention in 1 Sam 20:17 and 2 Sam 1:23.

⁶⁵⁹ Schneider makes the point that the terms could indicate that the situation this time is different because he loved this woman Delilah (Schneider, *Judges*, 219). Luciani points out that in the first two episodes involving Samson and his lovers, Samson sees the Timnite woman (14:1) and the prostitute in Gaza (16:1). The episode with Delilah lacks that he "saw" her, and instead directly states that he fell in love with her (Luciani, "Samson: l'amour," 324).

⁶⁶⁰ See also Sasson, "Who Cut," 335.

Then Saul's daughter Michal loves David in 1 Sam 18:20 and 28. The term signifies relationships with true affection, whether the relationships have positive or negative consequences for the characters or for Israel as a whole.

"Love" for one person by another is also used in ironic ways by the narrator in some Hebrew narratives. The narratives about Dinah and Shechem and Tamar and Amnon are marked by the violation and defilement of the one who is "loved." The violent action by one character on the other is utterly incongruent with any kind of affectionate love. In this sense, the "love" more closely fits with irrational lust and sexual violence than the affection that exists in the verses mentioned above. The mention of "love" in the Samson stories more accurately reflects the "love" found in the Tamar/Amnon and Dinah/Shechem stories than that which is in the stories of the patriarchs and David.

Parallels exist in the sequence of events and the vocabulary in the Dinah/Shechem and Delilah/Samson stories. According to Gen 34:3, Shechem's "soul/self clung to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. And he loved the maiden and he spoke upon the heart (to) the maiden" (*watidbaq napšô bēdînâ bat-ya'ăqōb wayye'ēhab 'et-hanna'ārā wayēdabbēr 'al-lēb hanna'ārā*). Samson's episode with Delilah emphasizes the state of his soul/self (*napšô* appears in 16:16 and v. 30 contains "my self" *napšî*), and how he does or does not love her (16:4 and 16:15). Similar to Samson's encounter with his Timnite wife, Shechem requests that his father take the maiden for Shechem's wife (34:4). Notably, the narrator reports that Shechem loves the woman and requests for her to be his wife after he has violated her (*wayē'annehā* in Gen 34:2). This is the same verb used in Samson's story to describe how Delilah begins to overpower Samson (*watāhel lē'annôtô* in Judg 16:19).

Similarities exist in the Tamar and Amnon scene. 2 Sam 13:1 and 4 both report that Amnon loved Tamar (*wayye'ēhābehā 'amnôn* in 13:1). However, like Shechem's and Delilah's attack of their supposed lovers, Amnon humbles/overpowers Tamar (*wayē'annehā* 2 Sam 13:14). Unlike Shechem who loves Dinah *after* the fact, Amnon hates Tamar after he violates her (v.15). The location of the Tamar and Amnon scene bears much similarity to Samson's story. Amnon is in bed and calls for the woman to make him food. Not only is this an intimate scene that takes place in a man's bedchamber, but it is also a nurturing scene in which the woman provides nourishment and comfort for the man. Such parallels also exist in the scene with Jael and Sisera when she covers the commander and gives him drink. And analogous tones reverberate in Samson's bedroom scenes with his wife and Delilah and in the way that Delilah causes Samson to sleep on her knees (*wattēyaššēnēhū 'al-birkēhā* in 16:19). Clearly the Dinah/Shechem, Tamar/Amnon, and Delilah/Timnite wife/Samson stories express something that is different than the kind of love represented in the patriarch stories and David stories. Intimate moments take a dangerous turn in Gen 34, 2 Sam 13, Judg 14 and 16, and the male/female relationships utterly lack care and affection. With the exception of the Timnite wife story, these tales of "love" are also constituted by one character "overpowering/humbling" (with the root *'nh*) the other person.

While similarities exist because of the situations in these stories, it is important to note that Dinah is a *na'ārā* and Tamar is a *bētûlāh*, and Delilah receives no such qualification. The sexualized violence not only hurts young Dinah and Tamar, but they are labeled in such a way that a sexual transgression with these women also negatively impacts the men with whom the women are connected. The narratives explicitly affiliates these

women with their fathers or men that are responsible for them. Dinah is Jacob's daughter, and Tamar is the sister of Absalom, son of David. These two elements, the women as *na'ārā* and *bētūlāh* and their connections to a father or brother, highlight the women's preparedness for marriage. There are no undercurrents of potential marriage for Delilah in the scene with Samson, no identification as a young woman ready for marriage and no connection to men in her family. Also, an important reversal exists in the Samson and Delilah scene. Even though Samson *loves* Delilah, he does not execute the violence against her as in the stories of Dinah/Shechem and Tamar/Amnon. The roles are inverted and even blurred, for she is the beloved and also the assailant.

C. Pressure from these Women

The dichotomy of love and hate (with the roots *'hb* and *śn'*) becomes apparent not only in the Tamar and Amnon scene (2 Sam 13:1 and 13:15), but also in the Samson scenes. When both women in Samson's life express that he is withholding information from them, they challenge his love for them. For both women, their arguments operate under the assumption that affection or sexual intimacy somehow necessitates or corresponds with disclosure of information. The Timnite wife says, "Surely you hate me and you do not love" (*raq-śēnē'tanî wēlō' 'āhbtānî* in 14:16). Delilah questions, "How can you say, 'I love you,' and your heart is not with me?" (*'ēk tōmar 'āhabētîk wēlibbēkā 'ēn 'ittî* 16:15).

Both women pressure Samson, specifically they "pressed/constrained" (*hēsîqatēhû* in 14:17 and *hēsîqāh* in 16:16) him to reveal an answer. They drive him into a corner. And one should not gloss over the seriousness of this scene with the simple misogynistic notion that women can be annoying, nagging, and overbearing. The scene evokes a more powerful

image of pressure and aggression that eludes to encounters with foreign enemies. This term denotes a psychologically stressful and even terrifying condition, implying physical pressure.⁶⁶¹ It is important to note that the term is often used in military contexts.⁶⁶² Isaiah 29:1-8 demonstrates Jerusalem's distress caused by foreign nations. The pressed upon victim often experiences a humiliating posture.⁶⁶³ And the term evokes a sense of oppression and harassment. In the Samson story, the verb demonstrates the extent to which the women press upon him, such that he has no other choice and has to resort to the most desperate reaction. He reveals secrets that cause him great trouble and even cost him his life. And because of the physical pressure of Delilah, Samson's foreign enemies, the Philistines, ultimately capture this Israelite deliverer. Exum explicitly argues that the narrative depicts the larger conflict between Israel and the Philistines through the individual characters; the women in Samson's story represent the Philistine oppressors, and Samson stands for the enslaved Israelites.⁶⁶⁴

In a general sense, the term also harkens back to other biblical instances when the enemy constrains people under siege to the point of compelling them to consume their own children. Jer 19:9 contains, "I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters. And one will eat the flesh of a neighbor in the siege and in the stress/constraint (*ûbĕmāšôq*) that their enemies, the ones seeking their souls, constrain (*yāšîqû*) on them." Similar examples of being constrained to the point of eating one's own flesh or the flesh of one's sons and daughters appear in Deut 28:53, 55, and 57. The narrator's expression of

⁶⁶¹ H. Lamberty-Zielinski, "swq" *TDOT* 12:301-306. See also Niditch, *Judges*, 170.

⁶⁶² Lamberty-Zielinski, *TDOT* 12:303.

⁶⁶³ Lamberty-Zielinski, *TDOT* 12:303.

⁶⁶⁴ Exum, *Was sagt*, 55. Exum also notes that while the narrator wants to see Israel's oppression turned, the oppression and subordination of women remains natural and acceptable (Exum, *Was sagt*, 55).

Samson's distress at the hands of these women who relentlessly press against him denotes his private battleground in his own bedroom. In the end, Samson reveals the information that both women want to hear, but to his detriment. And this narrator ultimately turns over gender expectations, as Samson is constrained and overpowered by the woman that he loves.

IV. The Effects of Repetition in the Delilah Scene

The narrator portrays Delilah in much more sinister ways than the Timnite woman. The reader can more easily empathize with the foreign Timnite woman and the impossible choice between betraying her husband or destroying herself and her father. Given the Philistine threat, the Timnite wife has little choice but to comply. In contrast, Delilah is not forced into betrayal. Because of the way in which the narrator reports the two scenes, the effect of the narration brings different meanings. Narrative repetition emphasizes Delilah's involvement as especially problematic.

As mentioned above, the scenes are similar enough that once the reader gets to Delilah's episode, there are certain expectations at work. The reader expects that Samson will eventually divulge to Delilah what she wants to hear. One also expects that this woman will report her findings to the Philistines. Although the many elements of the bedroom scenes are similar, they differ in their mode of reporting events. The narrative portrayal of the scene with the Timnite wife only briefly centers on events. In contrast, the scene with Delilah is long and repetitive. It also has more dialogue. Repetition in the Delilah narrative

builds suspense as well as the anticipation of a dramatic, and perhaps unexpected, outcome.⁶⁶⁵

First, there appears to be an inconsistency between the characters and the narrator and also amongst the characters themselves about the content of Samson's secret that the Philistines and Delilah seek. What information is of interest: to discover what can bind Samson or to find the source of his strength or both? The Philistines want to know both, but Delilah's questions contain different combinations of terms, and frequently do not seek complete information. Delilah is persistent until Samson cracks. Secondly, the repetition in the narrative highlights the ways in which Delilah increasingly works on her own and is autonomous from the Philistines. And thirdly, narrative repetition accentuates how Delilah operates in excess of the agreement she has with the Philistines. In this way, Delilah becomes an autonomous woman (and therefore unquestionably threatening in this patriarchal worldview), and even more dangerous than the Philistines. The use of repetition in Delilah's actions emphasize Samson's ultimate downfall.

A. Information Sought and Questions Asked

The repetition in the scene between Samson and Delilah begins after the Philistines enlist her to find out information about him. Numerous discrepancies exist between what information the Philistines ask Delilah to discover, what she asks of Samson, and what he reveals. The Philistines want to know in 16:5, 1) the source of Samson's strength (*bammeh kôhō gādôl* lit. "in what makes his strength great") and 2) how they might capture and overpower Samson (*ûbammeh nûkal lô wa'âsarnûhû lě'annôtô* lit. "in what way might we

⁶⁶⁵ See Crenshaw, *Samson*, 53.

overpower him by pressing him into submission”). When Delilah first approaches Samson in v.6, her words are similar, “Please tell me in what you have great strength and by what you are bound to overpower you” (*haggîdâ-nnâ’ lî bammeh kôḥăka gadôl ûbammeh tē’āsēr lē’annôtekā*). Samson only responds to the second matter in v.7; he gives a false answer about what will bind him (e.g. “7 fresh cords that have not been dried”), and he does not make mention of his strength or its source. After the first attempt of finding what can bind Samson, the narrator provides the commentary that “the source of his strength was not known.” When the first attempt fails, Delilah asks Samson about his secret but only in terms of “in what you can be bound” (*bammeh tē’āsēr* v.10). The same is asked in the third attempt to catch him (v.13). Her fourth and final attempt returns to the question, that she has largely ignored, about “in what you have great strength” (*bammeh kôḥăkâ gadôl* v.15). It is at this point that the tide starts to turn. The pertinent question was never about what external thing could bind Samson; the question is really about where Samson’s strength resides. Nothing of the Philistines can bind Samson as long as he has his source of strength. After sufficient pressure, Samson cannot take it any more, and he reports to her “all of his heart” (*’et-kol-libbô* in 16:17). Originally, the Philistines seek two pieces of information. By the end of the tale, both Delilah and the Philistines are satisfied with hearing “all of his heart” (*’et-kol-libbô* occurs twice in v.18) even though Samson does not reveal both pieces of information. Once his strength leaves, then the narration supplies that the Philistines seize Samson and bind him (v.21).

The narrator repeatedly portrays Samson as a character who is interested in semantics and word games. He is also susceptible to pressure from women. In Timnah,

Samson plays with words.⁶⁶⁶ In the scene with Delilah, the word games are apparent in the questions she asks Samson. Coercion from both of the bedmates weaken Samson. Samson's source of strength might have been his hair; but his place of greatest vulnerability was not located in his hair. His weakness in the end is his fascination with both words and women.⁶⁶⁷

The argument that Samson's ultimate weaknesses are his fascination with word games and women is bolstered by the fact that the reader never knows that the source of his strength is in his hair until he says so in 16:17. When Samson tells Delilah "all of his heart," this is the first time that the reader also gets the explicit connection of refraining from using a razor and his unique strength. In the scene with Samson's parents in chapter 13, the divine messenger's prescription for Samson's long locks and refraining from razor usage was a condition for his Nazarite status. In 16:17, Samson precisely repeats (albeit in the first person) the messenger's instructions in 13:5 that "a razor will not go upon my head" (*môrâ lô'-'olâ 'al-rô'sî*). Only now is it revealed to the reader, and other characters, that the importance of refraining from razor usage extends beyond his Nazarite status.

B. A Woman Working on Her Own

If women are one of Samson's weaknesses, then the narrator continues to take great pains to present Delilah as the one responsible for Samson's downfall. The narrator accentuates Delilah as a woman working on her own through the course of the repetition in the narrative. In the first attempt to capture Samson, Delilah works with the governors of the Philistines, who supply the fresh cords, and she binds Samson (v.8). "The ones

⁶⁶⁶ See Yadin, "Samson's *Hîdâ*," 407-426.

⁶⁶⁷ Amit also claims that women are the underlying factor in the failure of the hero (Amit, *Judges*, 280).

ambushing” (*hā’ōrēb*) cooperate with Delilah in the dark room and are ready to catch Samson in this first attempt (v.9). In the second effort, while there is mention of the “ones ambushing,” there is no mention of the governors of the Philistines supplying the cords or even being present (v.12). “Delilah took fresh ropes and she bound him with them” (16:12). And in her third failed attempt in v.14, neither the Philistines nor the “ones ambushing” work with Delilah. In each iteration, Delilah wakes Samson by saying, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson” (v.9, v.12, v.14 and v.20). And in fact, Delilah lies. In the third and fourth try, no one else is present except Delilah.

In the final attempt to best Samson, the narrator provides more detail than the first three efforts in specifying Delilah’s actions to remove Samson’s strength. In v.8, the Philistines bring her (*wayya’ālû-lāh*) cords and she binds him/Samson(*watta’asrēhû*) before she alerts Samson of the Philistine presence. In v.12, Delilah takes (*wattiqqah*) fresh ropes and binds (*watta’asrēhû*) Samson. In v. 14, she fastens a pin/peg in Samson’s hair. In the final and ultimately successful effort in 16:19, Delilah causes Samson to sleep, calls to the man, shaves the plaits on his head, and starts to overpower Samson (*wattÿyaššēnēhû ‘al-birkēhā wattiqrā’ lā’îš wattĕgallah ‘et-šeba’ maḥlĕpôt rō’šô wattāḥel lĕ’annôtô*) all before she calls out, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” This string of verbs both emphasize her actions and drag them out in a way that the reader can imagine the events in slow motion. We have seen a similar narratological method of slowing down and focusing on the action in scenes of violence with Jael and Sisera in 4:21 and 5:26 and with the Levite’s *pīlegeš* in 19:25. A cascade of verbs once again emphasizes the brutality in the scene. And the scenes are eerily similar in the type of violence and level of violation that is insinuated.

In this case, the singular woman is the uncompromising and savage aggressor; the Israelite man plays the victim.

C. A Woman Working in Excess of the Agreement

In fact, Delilah more than upholds her part of the deal that she made with the Philistines. Delilah gets the governors of the Philistines involved again in v.18 when she claims certainty in her discovery, with her imperative, “Return for he has reported to me all of his heart.” This, apparently, is proof enough for the Philistines, even though their first two questions are not expressly answered. The Philistines come to her with the silver in their hands. At this point, Delilah’s spying appointment should be finished. She has extracted the information from Samson that the Philistines requested, and she has been paid. According to the Philistines’ request of Delilah, it was not explicitly stated that she would be the one to bind Samson or overpower him. Yet a disturbing scene occurs as she exceeds the expectations of the contract she made with the Philistines. The Philistines in 16:5 are seeking a way that they might bind Samson (with a first person common plural with a third masculine singular suffix, *wa’āsarūhū*) in order to overpower him (*lě’annôtô*). In 16:19, Delilah, who has already betrayed Samson by reporting “all of his heart” to the Philistines, begins the process of physically subduing him (*wattāḥel lě’annôtô*). It isn’t until v.21 that we see that the Philistines are nearby to capture Samson. They seize Samson, bind him (*wayya’asarūhū*) as they had originally hoped to do in 16:5, and they gouge out his eyes. It is Delilah who actually removes Samson’s strength.

1. “The man”

Judges 16:19 reads, “She caused him to sleep upon her knees. She called to the man, then she shaved the seven braids on his head, and she began to overpower him. And his strength turned aside from him.” Two elements of this verse are confusing. First, there is the question of who is “the man,” and second, which character completes the shaving (i.e. Delilah, Samson, or some third party male in cahoots with Delilah). The Hebrew provides that “she called to *the man*” and that “she shaved” (*wattēgallah*). However, a BHS footnote claims one should read along with a Septuagint source and that the verb should be the third person masculine singular *Piel* verb “he shaved” (*wayēgallah*) the seven braids. Major translations follow the footnote. The NIV supplies, “Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair.” The NRSV also has, “She called a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his head.” The TNK provides, “Then she called in a man, and she had him cut off the seven locks of his head.” In other words, according to these translations, this unknown “man” who Delilah calls is responsible for shaving Samson’s hair.⁶⁶⁸

As noted, Delilah utilizes others in her attempts to best Samson. The governors of the Philistines and the “ones ambushing” have both worked with Delilah. So, it is within reason that a third party male is present and that the third action listed in the verse belongs to this anonymous new male figure. If this is the case, it is possible that the use of the third person feminine singular verb was an oversight by a copyist who was in the mode of writing feminine forms of verbs (e.g. “she caused him to sleep” *wattēyaššēnēhû* and “she called” *wattiqrā*).

⁶⁶⁸ See also Sasson’s discussion regarding NEB, JPS2, and AB translations in Sasson, “Who Cut,” 336.

However, it is even more likely that the copyist was correct, and that all verbs should be attributed to Delilah. Since the narrator emphasizes how Delilah increasingly works on her own to bring about Samson's demise, it would not make sense to suddenly introduce an unknown man to the scene, and to use the definite article, "the man," as if the reader would know to which man the text was referring. It is more plausible that Delilah would be calling to Samson, i.e. "to the man" in the current scene.⁶⁶⁹

But why would the narrator include, "she called to the man," when Samson is not typically referred to as "the man?" This one use of "the man" highlights the gender of the characters, namely the gender of those who act and those who are acted upon in the scene. The use of "the man" also generalizes the scene, making Samson, for a brief moment, no longer "Samson," i.e. the story's hero, but an anonymous man who becomes subjugated by a woman.

The Judges narrator routinely utilizes gendered and anonymous language in intimate bedroom scenes like this one. The only other time that another character references Samson as "man" is in Judges 14:15. Here, the Philistines tell Samson's Timnite wife to entice "your husband/man" to explain the riddle. They do not refer to Samson by name. Schneider similarly notices the odd use of this term. When the term "is used for a husband, it is often in unusual circumstances where the term seems to be intentionally open to multiple interpretations."⁶⁷⁰ Schneider notes that the *pîlegeš's* Levite in chapter 19 is called "her man" (19:3) or simply "man" (vv. 6, 7, 9, 10, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 28), which

⁶⁶⁹ Sasson similarly argues that it is neither a Philistine nor a newly introduced male character, but "the man" refers to Samson, himself (Sasson, "Who Cut," 337-338).

⁶⁷⁰ Schneider *Judges*, 209.

leaves obscure the precise relationship between the two characters.⁶⁷¹ In terms of the Samson narrative in ch.14, perhaps the Philistines envision a private scene wherein the Timnite woman uses her abilities to best this man. Jael similarly defeats a man in her private quarters. Sisera instigates his own anonymity when he instructs Jael to withhold information about his presence. She must deny that there is any “man” in her tent. When Jael meets Baraq in v.22, she does not reference Sisera by name, even though both Jael and Baraq know that the only man Baraq seeks is Sisera. Instead she says, “Come and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” In all of these Judges scenes, the use of “the man” imposes anonymity on named and unnamed male characters, and obscures the relationship with the woman in the scene. In this way, the narrator problematizes gendered power dynamics within the man/woman relationship. In the Samson and Sisera episodes, powerful men lose their names and identities when the women take advantage of them in private and intimate spaces. Thus, it is no accident that when Delilah prevails upon Samson, the narrator shocks the male reader by referring to the narrative’s hero Samson as simply, “the man.”

2. The shaving

When it is made clear that “the man” is actually Samson, the other question about who shaves Samson’s hair is partially answered. It is necessary to again return to the verb *wattəgallaḥ* and to bolster the case for this feminine form, claiming that Delilah completes the shaving. But could the BHS footnote with the masculine singular *wayəgallaḥ* indicate that Samson or some other man shaves his own hair? The root of this verb *gāllaḥ* appears

⁶⁷¹ Schneider *Judges*, 209. See also Reinhartz, *Anonymity*, 79.

most often in the *Piel*, “to shave.”⁶⁷² While Delilah is working alone and there is not a third party anonymous male called “the man,” it is helpful to reconsider the verb and thereby explore which character completes the shaving. The ambiguity in the text, coupled with the footnote, presents five scenarios regarding Samson’s shaving. If the verb should be read in the masculine singular *wayĕgallah*, then either another man shaves Samson or Samson shaves himself. If the verb should be read in the feminine singular *wattĕgallah*, then Delilah enables the shaving (e.g. Delilah compels another third party man to shave Samson, Delilah compels Samson to shave his own hair, or Delilah shaves Samson). Given the *Piel* verb and the other uses of the verb in the Hebrew Bible, the options that Delilah compels someone else to complete the shaving are not likely.⁶⁷³

Options:

Using *wayĕgallah*

1. Another man shaves Samson.
2. Samson shaves himself.

Using *wattĕgallah*

3. Delilah compels another man to shave Samson. (NRSV, NIV, and TNK)
4. Delilah compels Samson to shave his own hair.
5. Delilah shaves Samson.

Since an anonymous third party man is not present, and “the man” in the scene is Samson, options 1 and 3 can be deleted. Are choices 2 and 4 viable, and could Samson shave himself in the scene? This is unlikely since he is asleep, and since it would be synonymous with causing his own demise. Even if Samson shaving his own hair does not make narrative sense, is it even semantically plausible? The Hebrew Bible contains instances in which a man shaves his own hair (Gen 41:14, Lev 14:8-9, Num 6:9 and Ezek

⁶⁷² See also Sasson, “Who Cut,” 336.

⁶⁷³ “In all of its occurrences, the verb never bears a causative or even factitive meaning... If there is shaving to be done, it must be Delilah” (Sasson, “Who Cut,” 336).

44:20). The verses in Leviticus and Numbers refer to a ritualistic process. Similarly, Num 6:18 and 19 reference Nazirites shaving their consecrated hair. The *Hithpael* is also used to denote when a man shaves his own hair (Lev 13:33). Could this scene depict Samson the Nazarite shaving his hair, especially if Samson is “the man” in the scene? Given the nature of this scene and the other uses in the Hebrew text, this is the only possible explanation for reading with the third person masculine singular. But Samson shaving his own hair is not only unlikely, it doesn’t follow the Hebrew. It is important to remember that all of the other verbs in the verse are feminine singular and indicate Delilah as the one to orchestrate the events in the scene.⁶⁷⁴ Thus, option 2 is not likely.

If the third person masculine singular *wayĕgallaḥ* is no longer under consideration, is it possible to argue that this *Piel* verb in the feminine singular could indicate that Delilah causes Samson to shave? Sometimes *Piel* verbs are causative.⁶⁷⁵ Is she making Samson shave himself? If this were the case, the verb would probably appear in the *Hiphil* in an active causative sense where subject one causes subject two to do something. But nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does one person cause another person to shave a third person. In other words, this is another strike against option 3 (i.e. that Delilah makes an unknown third party man shave Samson). (Here, again, I disagree with the TNK, NRSV, and NIV.) Regarding option 4, the Hebrew Bible similarly does not contain an instance in which one person causes another person to shave themselves (i.e. Delilah causes Samson to shave himself).

What is most likely is that Delilah shaves Samson. From the announcement of his conception, it was stated that no razor was to touch Samson’s hair. Thus, Samson, as a

⁶⁷⁴ Sasson argues for the temporal unity of the scene. Also, “If subjects are to control more than one verb in a single scene, they are most often made to control a sequence of three verbs” (Sasson, “Who Cut,” 335-336).

⁶⁷⁵ “It is possible to revocalize into a causative stem (*wattagleaḥ*) in order to have Delilah make Samson shave Samson, but the resulting form is not likely for this verb in Hebrew” (Sasson, “Who Cut,” 336).

unique kind of Nazarite, does not participate in the same kind of ritualistic and preparatory shaving that occurs in Leviticus 14 and Numbers 6. In fact, when Samson tells all of his heart to Delilah and describes how his strength might leave him, he explains “If I were to be shaven...” (*im-gullaḥtî*). This *Pual* verb expresses a passive action that would be done to Samson. The text uses the same verb again in the *Pual* in 16:22, as the narrator reports that the hair, which had been shaven, began to grow back. The emphasis here also stresses Samson’s inability to act upon his own hair. If anything, the hair acts by itself when it grows back.

If one person shaves another’s hair, the Hebrew Bible uses this as a symbol of someone’s defeat. A person or army who was successful in combat might shave the defeated enemy. When Hanun seizes David’s men, he shaves off half of each man’s beard, cuts their garments, and sends them away (2 Sam 10:4).⁶⁷⁶ The 2 Samuel scene drastically differs from the Judges 16 bedroom scene, and the shaving happens for different purposes, but the effects in both scenes are similar. The process of shaving heads, legs and beards becomes a way that the Lord brings devastation to Assyria (Isa 7:20). Jer 41:5 describes men with shaved beards and torn clothes as both a symbol of destruction and of penance to the Lord. It is not enough to defeat an enemy, often the victor causes the loser to visually represent the loss.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁶ Niditch also claims that this “shaving” is a “form of unmanning and asserting control” by the emissaries of David in 2 Sam 10:4 (Niditch, “*My Brother*,” 130).

⁶⁷⁷ Niditch also argues that “to tend or cut another’s hair is to have power over them” (Niditch, “*My Brother*,” 67).

V. The “Problem” with Delilah: Another Mothering Agressor

It is clear *how* the narrator works to portray the treacherous Delilah, but *why* she is considered to be disturbing to the storyteller and his audience? First, her story resounds with themes from other Judges stories, making Delilah memorable. Secondly, she is autonomous, she actively defies gender roles, and she creates Samson’s final unhomey moment. Thus, Delilah is terrifying. However, her mistreatment of Samson enables his final act of deliverance for the Israelites. Her actions work toward the Lord’s intentions, and thus create an ambiguous picture of Delilah’s character and the Lord.

A. Echoes from the book of Judges

Samson’s story echoes many themes in the other stories of gendered pairs and violence in Judges. In a scene with strong resonances to Jael’s story in Judges 4, Delilah also causes the man to sleep, makes him vulnerable, and removes his power by attacking his head.⁶⁷⁸ Both places that these women occupy appear (at least at first) to be safe domestic spaces for the men to inhabit. Both women nurture the men in intimate ways. In both Samson’s and Sisera’s case, it is the men’s expectation of security in the particular intimate setting that allows the women to accomplish their goals.⁶⁷⁹ This security is presented as the security that a mother provides. In a very motherly and domestic way, Jael covers Sisera and gives him a drink. Fewell points out that Delilah’s scene is also an instance in which the woman “mothers” Samson.⁶⁸⁰ The disclosure of his hair as his source of strength links his

⁶⁷⁸ Olson also makes the connection to the Jael story. He notes that “the parallel is a foreboding sign that Samson is moving closer to his own downfall and death” (Olson, *NIB* 2:858). Schneider also notes the parallels with the Jael narrative (Schneider, *Judges*, 223). See also Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 113-114.

⁶⁷⁹ Schneider, *Judges*, 223.

⁶⁸⁰ Fewell, “Judges,” 80.

biological mother to Delilah. One mother gives him the information, and he disseminates that information only to his new lover-mother. Thus, women are viewed as both possessing and having the ability to dispossess valuable information about men. One woman hides Samson's secret, another woman reveals it. Like a mother with her child, Delilah causes him to sleep on her knee (*'al-birkêhā*), he loses his manly hair and is overpowered by a woman.⁶⁸¹ Bal describes Samson as bald and asleep on a woman's lap as a "return to infancy."⁶⁸² Niditch argues that Delilah makes Samson part of domestic activity by weaving his hair into her loom.⁶⁸³ Both Delilah and Jael betray the men and overpower them when they are incapacitated with sleep. In Jael's case, the dangerous woman works for the benefit of Israel by defeating the enemy commander. With Delilah, the narrator reminds the reader that women can be dangerous and can work against Israel's interests.

As already mentioned, Delilah's final action of overpowering Samson (*lě'annôtô*) is a verb used in other Hebrew Bible stories that depict gendered violence (i.e. Amnon/Tamar and Shechem/Dinah). It is also present in the Judges 19 narrative. The violent verb in Judges 19 is intended to ignite outrage from a male audience, but its presence in Judges 16 advances a different emphasis and meaning. In 19:24, the man of the house tells the mob outside to afflict/mishandle/humble/overpower/ravish (*'ānāh*) his daughter and the man's young *pîlegeš*. In Samson's scene, "She (Delilah) began to overpower/humble him (*lě'annôtô*)." It is offensive that such a thing would happen to the women in Judges 19 for multiple reasons (i.e. that the mob would demand such access to that which belonged to the Levite or the man of the house, that the men would abuse women like this, *and* that

⁶⁸¹ Fewell, "Judges," 80.

⁶⁸² Mieke Bal and Christine van Boheemen, "The Rhetoric of Subjectivity," *Poetics Today* 5 (1984): 337-376.

⁶⁸³ Niditch, "My Brother," 66-67.

men would not only allow but actually invite a daughter/*pîlegeš* to succumb to such abuse). But it is doubly offensive to the narrator and the male audience that a man (and especially the hero deliverer for the Israelites) would experience such affliction at the hand of a *woman*. In a way that reveals sympathy to patriarchal ideologies, this scene ostensibly raises suspicions regarding women's abilities and motivations, and it challenges Samson's masculinity and male dominance.

B. Problems for Patriarchy

1. Autonomy and Liminality

Delilah is a woman influenced by foreign (Philistine) powers, yet she is not loyal to any man or any group. She is ruthless. She works alone.⁶⁸⁴ She works for money. Unlike "Manoah's wife" or the "woman in Timnah, a daughter of the Philistines," Delilah is neither presented by way of the men in her life nor introduced by way of the group from which she derives. Perhaps most dangerous of all of the women in Samson's life, Delilah is an autonomous woman. Schneider names her depiction in a helpful way and highlights Delilah's liminal status and her connection to other women in Judges:

Delilah is between depictions of a wife, which she clearly was not, and a prostitute, raising serious questions about who she was and what she did for a living. These questions are important in light of the role women held in society, who did and did not protect them, and how they threatened society when they were not controlled. Her liminal status between wife and prostitute is similar to the raped *pîlegeš* whose story follows shortly.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴ In fact, Feldman argues that Josephus's account highlights the betrayal as Delilah's alone by making no mention of the Philistines' payment of money to Delilah (Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* [Hellenistic Culture and Society; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998], 480-481).

⁶⁸⁵ Schneider, *Judges*, 221.

Delilah follows the widespread trope of the *femme fatale*.⁶⁸⁶ Jael and the woman of Thebez who kills Abimelech with a millstone are also considered *femme fatales* in the book of Judges.⁶⁸⁷ In the case of all of these women, virtually nothing is said of their family of origin, their actions result in the death of a hero, and they are considered dangerous women according to the operative ideology in the text.⁶⁸⁸

Like the Delilah and Samson episode, the Egyptian tale, Setne Khamwas, contains a woman who seduces a man and causes him to lose valuable goods. Setne Khamwas becomes smitten with desire by the *femme fatale* Tabubu. He begs her to make love to him, but she gives the conditions that he must hand all of his property to her and kill his own children. This *femme fatale* episode exhibits that the woman's interest is not simply in seducing the man, but in inheritance and property issues that might arise. Tabubu expresses that she does not want her children to have to contend with his children (for his inheritance), and thus, Setne Khamwas has his children killed before him and thrown out the window. Just before the man is about to sleep with the woman, to "accomplish what I have come here for,"⁶⁸⁹ she screams and disappears. He wakes up naked and realizes it was

⁶⁸⁶ See Luciani, "Samson: l'amour," 326. Josephus actually plays up the sexual aspects in this tale (5.310). See also Feldman, *Josephus*, 481.

⁶⁸⁷ Lanoir, *Femme fatales*, 115. Jael in Judges 4 could be considered a *femme fatale*, however Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin argue that Jael is not a *femme fatale*, nor someone who disrupts hospitality codes, but a hero who defends her house from the enemy intruder (Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin, *The Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250-587 BCE* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993]: 82-95). See also Victor Harold Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup 262; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 116. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau argues that Sisera is not lured in by Jael's sexual advances but by her mothering actions. Perhaps Sisera would be cautious enough to avoid seduction by a *femme fatale*, but he is completely caught off guard by the woman's maternal concern (Tamber-Rosenau, "Mothers," forthcoming).

⁶⁸⁸ Lanoir, *Femme fatales*, 115.

⁶⁸⁹ Miriam Lichtheim and Joseph Gilbert Manning, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume III, The Late Period* (2006 Ed.; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 135.

all a dream. And thus, Setne's tale, as well as Samson's, becomes a patriarchal cautionary tale about women's ability to disrupt patriarchal structures.⁶⁹⁰

Mary Douglas names this as "The Delilah Complex" wherein cultures believe that women can weaken and betray.⁶⁹¹ Samson and Setne Khamwas's stories, and others like them, justify men's anxieties about women's behavior, and thus the "situation of male/female relations is so biased that women are cast as betrayers from the start."⁶⁹²

2. Breaking and Confusing Gender

The narrator equivocally presents Delilah as an aggressor and enemy combatant with masculine attributes and political incentives, but also as one who behaves like a mother and lover in a domestic space. According to patriarchal standards, she operates beyond her proper sphere of influence. She breaks boundaries such that bedrooms become battlefields. Sasson points out that the Philistines keep distance between them and Samson and use Delilah as an instrument to control him.⁶⁹³ In this way, the political enemy uses a feminine instrument to enable the male hero's defeat. Her nurturing behavior actually destroys him.

So, on the one hand, she does political work in the domestic space, acting as a mother/lover. But on the other hand, she inevitably *becomes* the man in the scene and breaks gender divisions completely. Delilah unmans Samson, literally makes him weak "like" a woman. The loss of his hair is associated with the feminization of a defeated warrior.⁶⁹⁴ And as Delilah begins to overpower (*l'annôtô*) Samson, she inverts the

⁶⁹⁰ See Lanoir, *Femmes fatales*, 114.

⁶⁹¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 190-191.

⁶⁹² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 191.

⁶⁹³ Sasson, "Who Cut," 337.

⁶⁹⁴ Niditch, *Judges*, 171.

paradigm of the male-female relationship.⁶⁹⁵ Not only is he bested by this woman, he is abused like a woman by a woman. Delilah becomes the overpowering man, and “the man” named Samson becomes the woman.

Samson embodies a character whose story moves beyond the boundaries of gender expectations. While it might appear that he simply falls for the seduction of a woman, the narrator has Samson lose masculine qualities as he is overpowered by a woman (in the same way that women are sexually overpowered by men in other stories) and he loses his hair and source of strength. According to patriarchal assumptions, Samson exists in a peripheral space beyond acceptable masculinity. The odd and liminal Samson is finally “othered” as he becomes a queer figure.⁶⁹⁶ He is not just an odd man, existing in a peripheral position in relation to his family and group, Samson is also made to be like a woman by being overpowered by one.

C. Unhomeliness

Delilah instigates Samson’s final unhomely invasion. Samson’s story ultimately reveals that private spaces continue to be invaded by political interests. The problems that Samson’s story presents are manifold. It is meant to be distressing that Samson is overpowered by a woman. It is problematic that the woman, Delilah, is the antagonist and operates outside of her expected roles. On one hand, the narrator stresses how women like Delilah are disloyal, concerned about themselves, manipulative, constraining, and problematic for men. On the other hand, it is Samson’s own fault for getting involved with these women. The narrator never affords a clear opportunity to give Samson accolades.

⁶⁹⁵ Klein, “Spectrum,” 28.

⁶⁹⁶ Exum, *Fragmented*, 85. See also Smith, “Failure, Part 2,” 434.

Samson's story is truly a personal soap opera turned tragedy under the pretext of political and public ventures. And thus, the Samson narrative is an unhomely revelation, a recognition of the inextricable connection of public politics and private life.

VI. The Lord and Sight Return in an Unhomely Denouement

The Lord's subtle, convoluted, and meandering orchestration of Samson finally defeating *some* Philistines would not have happened if it were not for Delilah's labor. In this way, Delilah becomes an agent for the Lord's work. This further highlights Delilah's (and YHWH's) ambiguous presentation in the narrative.

Samson's narrative closes with a return to the theme of sight and fittingly reflects on the Lord's subtle involvement in the story. The narrator reminds the reader of the human flaw in sensory perception and namely, the way in which humans pursue what they see.⁶⁹⁷ This tendency to pursue what is attractive to him causes Samson's inability to see the Lord at work. Samson's flawed awareness and obliviousness to the Lord's machinations is clear in his final moments. He cannot "see" properly. He assumes that he can shake the bonds that are on him when he awakes, but when Delilah has bested him, he is unaware that his strength has left him. 16:20 provides, "He did not know that the Lord had turned away from him."

The emphasis on eyes and sight at the end of chapter 16 should not be ignored. In the end, Samson loses his eyes.⁶⁹⁸ He first loses the spirit with the loss of his hair, then the

⁶⁹⁷ Luciani argues that Samson is blinded by love. "Mais qu'il ne puisse ou ne veuille pas voir les motivations et les intentions réelles de Dalila, Samson confirme en tout cas, par son manqué de lucidité, la justesse de la sagesse populaire. S'il ne "voit" pas, c'est tout simplement que "l'amour rend aveugle" (Luciani, "Samson: l'amour," 325).

⁶⁹⁸ Bledstein puts it nicely: Samson was "blinded by lust then by Philistines" (Bledstein, "Judges," 50).

Philistines seize him and gouge out his eyes (16:21).⁶⁹⁹ Samson's loss of sight occurs just after Delilah fulfills the Philistine's imperative, "See what in him...." (16:5). When "Delilah saw" (16:18), Samson's days become numbered. When he no longer physically can see, multitudes of Philistines gawk at him, worship their gods (16:24), and make him a sport (16:27).⁷⁰⁰ It is for the loss of his eyes and sight, not the loss of his hair or the spirit, that Samson prays to the Lord for vengeance (16:28).

This lack of sight, this problem in perception, corresponds with the condition of unhomeliness. Bhabha claims that the condition of unhomeliness, the invasion of the private by the public, "creeps up on you stealthily as your shadow."⁷⁰¹ This transgression of boundaries is an unforeseen reality. And thus, the narrative's emphasis on sight further highlights the human inability to completely see and anticipate the conflation of public affairs into private spheres.

VII. Conclusion

Morgenstern rightly points out that there is a clear concern with national identity in the Samson narratives as well as a realization of his estrangement.⁷⁰² She argues that Samson's experience impacts Israel's experience as he "deliberately uses his strangeness to deepen his own, and hopefully his people's understanding of the paradoxes of nationhood."⁷⁰³ Thus, one purpose of Samson's narratives is to help Israel "create a dynamic sense of national identity" that is able to respond to different circumstances and

⁶⁹⁹ This gouging of his eyes continues the theme of light and dark, as the darkness consumes him and his eyes no longer see light (Schneider, *Judges*, 224).

⁷⁰⁰ See Schneider, *Judges*, 219 and 224.

⁷⁰¹ Bhabha, *Location*, 13.

⁷⁰² Morgenstern, "Samson," 253.

⁷⁰³ Morgenstern, "Samson," 253.

eras.⁷⁰⁴ “Samson is the focal point of anxiety as the tensions inherent in the categories of nation, religion, family, and belief play themselves out in the text”⁷⁰⁵

The Samson narratives contain a heightening awareness of otherness and strangeness, persons and nationhood. These narratives also contain the breakdown of gender expectations and public and private spaces. Samson becomes separated from his group of origin and from his masculine gender in these narratives, and joins the ranks of other complex and ambiguously presented figures in Judges.

Regardless of personal or familial impetus, the Timnite wife and Delilah episodes emphasize that the bedroom is not safe from political matters. And women are part of it all, having roles in both the public and private spheres. The dichotomy is proved false, as the two spheres become virtually indistinguishable in Samson’s narratives. Also, “edgy” people (i.e. Samson, Delilah, the Timnite wife) who are “other” are central and integral to the narratives. And the Lord arguably orchestrates the workings of these liminal people to enable events and outcomes.

Boling claims,

It may be purely accidental that the surviving information about judge Samson deals exclusively with his private life, not his public responsibilities. The narrative makes the point that, while he ran afoul because of his own lusty self-interest, the consequent suffering evoked a new confession from him and he died honorably in the act of effecting Yahweh’s justice toward Philistia.⁷⁰⁶

This assessment is flawed for multiple reasons. For example, did Samson really die honorably, when he repeatedly fought the Philistines not for Israel but to seek personal revenge? Was Yahweh’s justice enacted or Samson’s selfish vengeance? Boling also misses

⁷⁰⁴ Morgenstern, “Samson,” 253.

⁷⁰⁵ Morgenstern, “Samson,” 260.

⁷⁰⁶ Boling, *Judges*, 253.

an important point. It is not at all by accident that the enduring information about Samson primarily focuses on his private life. This narrative, like the other Judges stories, demonstrate that private events have public consequences, and vice versa. And no private space is safe from a political invasion.

CHAPTER 7

Looking Ahead

*"...beneath the sheets of paper lies my truth...And history books forgot about us and the bible didn't mention us. And the bible didn't mention us, not even once..."*⁷⁰⁷

"Samson" by Regina Spektor

Regina Spektor puts the words in the mouth of Delilah, and the lyric hints at hidden realities that the biblical story does not make explicit because of the limitations and finality of words on the page. The song speaks from Delilah's unrevealed perspective. Through centuries of the narrative's interpretation, Delilah has routinely received condemnation. Along with many feminist scholars, Regina Spektor argues that Delilah's own voice and version of the story (as well as the voices of the other women in the book of Judges) lie somewhere beneath the literary page, forever buried in both the narrative and its sea of interpretations.

While it is true that the reader never gets Delilah's perspective, there remain elements of the relationship between Delilah and Samson that are also unrevealed. Neither the "history books" nor the "Bible" tell the whole story about these characters and their relationship. Nor do they make explicit the ideological tensions that exist within and behind the words on the page (or perhaps: "beneath the sheets of paper").

The reader of the book of Judges can learn something new about the narratives by reevaluating the characterizations and relationships of characters and observing the utilization of ambiguity, liminality and the representation of unhomeliness in the stories.

⁷⁰⁷Regina Spektor, *Samson*, *Begin to Hope* (New York: SeeSquaredStudio and New York Noise Studios, 2006), <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/reginaspektor/samson.html>.

I. Implications for Biblical Interpretation and Application

A. Gender and Identity

This study addresses complexity in Judges narratives, advancing claims about the Judges texts and the ways that ambiguity, liminality, and unhomeliness operate in the narratives. It uses contemporary language and theories to draw out complexities in the Judges stories that might illuminate underlying identity issues in the general context of Ancient Israel.

The narrator's complex treatment of gender provides insights into the intricate formation of group identity. The narrator's evaluation is far from advancing the cause of women; yet it does offer a critique of the men in Israel and even of the Lord. Even as they are viewed with suspicion, women receive sympathy and also affirmation in their non-traditional public roles. The narrator's treatment of gendered-violence is similarly ambiguous. The narrator clearly does not condone the kinds of gendered and sometimes sexualized "overpowering" that overtakes the Levite's *pîlegeš* or Jephthah's daughter. However, by shaping violent if not also humiliating ends for men (e.g. Sisera), the narrator drafts scenes that are just as disturbing to the male audience and male narrator. The narrator's patriarchy cannot condone actions when men are de-masculinized or feminized, or when women assume the masculinized role of aggressor.

There are patriarchal biases in the Judges narratives, but deeper ideological issues co-exist with the patriarchy in the text. The narrator's depiction of gendered spaces, roles, and violence, ambiguously presented characters, the breaking down of public and private

spheres, and the inexplicable presence or absence of the Lord in the midst of the drama all disclose the narrator's anxiety about how women contribute to the shaping of group identity. The Judges stories bear witness to the tensions that arise between familial and political groups and between families connected by marriage. This project has brought to light the complicated ways that women participate in forming group identity and how there is a significant degree of ambivalence by the narrator in this reality. There would be no proliferation of the group without the women, but women also have the power to thwart the efforts of those who hold official power.

The narrator discloses a reality in the stories that men by no means wield dictatorial power. Women, as mothers, wives, daughters, prophets, political liaisons, practitioners of pyromancy, and more, have the potential to frustrate men's political affairs. Women complicate marriage arrangements and influence how men inherit communal roles, leadership and land. Women shape what impact men make to the group. And the narrator discloses a preoccupation with foreign intrusion, lineage, and women's roles in the education and socialization of persons in the community. Women possess an unofficial power that could benefit or undermine the interests and efforts toward the codification of the ideal Israelite group identity, according to the implicit ideology of the text's narrator. It is very apparent that the narrator's stories are layered in patriarchal lenses and biases and that many of the women in Judges remain silent and anonymous. However, clues lie buried under these biases and expose how women might have operated in the formation of Israelite group identity not only within but even behind the text. In these ways, the narrators project their actual fears and hopes as they apply women's real social power into their tales.

The narrator invests in the creation of blurred categories, as diverse women in Judges are described as *'iššâ zônâ*, *pîlegeš*, *bětûlâ*, and (pregnant) mothers, among many others. Even in these liminal roles, women in Judges exert a kind of power. Women in Judges also vary in the spaces they inhabit, the roles they play, the statuses they occupy, and the occupations they have. The women characters defy clear categorization. In literal ways, the narrator has women, and sometimes men, transgress typical dichotomous gendered roles and break public and domestic boundaries. These transgressions and breaking of boundaries simultaneously render questionable the reality of these boundaries *and* reinforce such dichotomies.

B. Feminist Scholarship

This project responds to feminist scholarship on Judges in two ways. First, this project complicates the Judges texts. When many feminists concentrate on the patriarchy that the text supports, I try to demonstrate that women become categorized by the narrator in ways that extend beyond simple patriarchal binaries and standards. Turner and Bhabha have helped me unveil the complexity in the text, especially around spaces, statuses, and articulations of gender and patriarchy. On the one hand, this project follows many feminist scholars and demonstrates the pervasiveness of the patriarchy in and behind the text. On the other hand, the project highlights fissures in patriarchal agendas and initiatives. This project highlights the instability within the book of Judges, namely that systems like patriarchy are re-established *and* undermined, and that gender norms are destabilized *and* reinforced.

Second, this project counters other feminist scholarship on Judges as it provides the groundwork for a contemporary response to the book of Judges. Feminist scholars who use interdisciplinary approaches when reading the book of Judges vary widely in their evaluations of the texts. Some feminists employ a resistant reading and argue that the texts contain little redeeming value for women because of the way the women characters are silenced and marginalized.⁷⁰⁸ Other feminists utilize more of a recuperative and sympathetic reading of the texts and argue that the biblical text can act as a critique of patriarchy.⁷⁰⁹ In other words, feminist and other biblical scholars frequently make judgments on the usefulness of the text for the contemporary reader, sometimes trying to save the text or narrator and sometimes trying to condemn them.

Julia O'Brien notes this ideological and theological phenomenon of biblical scholarship when she considers the gendered metaphors in the prophetic material in her book *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*. O'Brien articulates an impasse in scholarship regarding approaches to these prophetic texts.⁷¹⁰ This polarization occurs between "approaches that understand prophetic texts, when read properly, as faithfully witnessing to God...and those that underscore the danger of prophetic texts and the need to develop alternative understandings of God."⁷¹¹ She examines the ways in which scholars "love" the prophetic texts, "hate" the texts, or "love it and hate it."⁷¹² Scholars have a hard time both appreciating and critiquing. O'Brien suggests a way of reframing the contemporary readers'

⁷⁰⁸ See Fuchs, "Marginalization."

⁷⁰⁹ See Tribble, *Texts*.

⁷¹⁰ Julia M. O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 40.

⁷¹¹ O'Brien, *Challenging*, 40.

⁷¹² O'Brien, *Challenging*, 40-44.

relationship to and theology surrounding the text by reading the Bible as literature.⁷¹³ She also employs a form of ideological criticism. The practice she encourages “helps readers to understand more clearly not only the logic of ancient texts but also the current ideologies with which those texts intersect, offering readers deeper insight into the cultural scripts that shape their own thinking and thus inform their responses to the text.”⁷¹⁴

The questions that O’Brien raises about the contemporary reader goes beyond the scope of this project. An ideology of critique or appreciation has to do with the ideology of the reader, and this project has focused on the ideology of the narrator within the text. But before a thorough ideological or theological evaluation can be made, one must understand the complexity and ideologies within the text.

The hope is that this project on Judges takes cues from approaches like O’Brien’s by employing a literary and ideological reading of the stories in order to pave the way for helpful theological and ideological reflection for the contemporary reader. I hope that my project provides a new way of approaching the Judges texts as literary texts in a way that creates a deeper understanding and awareness of the complexities within the Judges material. This is not to say that the patriarchal narrator should be let off the hook, but the project helps name more precisely what is at stake in the book of Judges. This project also raises awareness to the contemporary readers’ ideology. In this way, it is possible to leave open the possibility of having both an appreciative and a critical eye and to not pit the two against each other. The project attempts neither to condemn nor to condone the narrator or the book of Judges for a contemporary context but to more deeply understand the stories at the level of the text and also gain some understanding of a world and ideology

⁷¹³ O’Brien, *Challenging*, 52.

⁷¹⁴ O’Brien, *Challenging*, 60.

very different from our own. The deeper understanding of the text's ambiguous elements creates new opportunities for theological reflection of the reader's context.

II. Possibilities for Further Study in the Book of Judges

I have chosen to focus on Judges 19, 4 & 5, 11, and 13-16 because of the attention they have received from feminist scholars. Each tale in these Judges chapters is well-developed and contains at least one gendered pair of main characters and an account of gendered-violence. However, there are other episodes in the book of Judges that could be analyzed in similar ways because they contain similar literary elements. Judges 1, 9, 17, and 21 are narratives that also contain prominent women, elements of war, gendered-violence, and concerns for group continuity. However, none of these episodes are fully developed narratives. A more thoroughgoing investigation of these narratives is useful, but it is sufficient for now to point out where they raise the same kinds of issue this project has considered.

A. Achsah and Caleb

Judges 1 begins as a story about war with the Canaanites, but soon the reader discovers an interest in marrying off daughters, connecting families, and inheriting pieces of land (1:12).⁷¹⁵ The woman in the story, Achsah, takes initiative and goes to her father Caleb to ask for springs connected to their land (1:15). She joins the ranks of women like Deborah and Jael in the book of Judges who display *chutzpah*, and she is also one of the few

⁷¹⁵ Lanoir comments on Achsah's story and its prominent placement. This position should not be ignored as it begins a book whose structure has women prominently featured (Corinne Lanoir, "Le livre des Juges, l'histoire et les femmes," *FoiVie* 96/4: 55-71).

women in Judges who receives a name.⁷¹⁶ Achsah is an acting agent and independent of men, and her speaking out counters any readers' expectations that women have "pawn-like status" in the Hebrew Bible. She is portrayed "as assertive, as practical, and as one who, at least to some degree, can lay claim to land ownership."⁷¹⁷ The book of Judges opens with this tale to remind the reader that Israel's accumulation of the land is not only about war and conquest but also about inheritance procedures and marriage arrangements.

B. Abimelech and the Woman of Thebez

Although Abimelech's tale in Judges 9 does not contain prominent women in the narrative, the brief impact that two women have on Abimelech's life are critical. Thus, gender roles in the tale should not be ignored. First, Abimelech's story concerns inheritance issues between his legitimate brothers and himself as the son of an unnamed *pîlegeš* (8:31). Although she is only mentioned once and neither acts nor appears in the narrative, this woman plays a significant role. Her and her family's existence enable Abimelech's tale. His manner of usurping and then murdering his brothers by appealing to his mother's kin (9:1) demonstrates a deteriorating Israelite community and the problems that can arise when multiple men claim inheritance rights.

In many ways, Abimelech's tale resonates with Jephthah's story, who is also a son of an outsider woman labeled as an *'iššâ zônâ* and *'iššâ 'aḥeret*. Both men are surrounded by gents of ill-repute (11:3 and 9:4). Both men seek leadership of their community, although

⁷¹⁶ "Achsah is derived from an ornament, as was for Zillah and Adah (daughters of Lamech in Gen 4:19" (Sasson, *Judges*, 145). The name could be "Fusspange," or bangles, maybe an anklet (Stamm, "Hebräische Frauennamen," 328). Her name reflects an object of value but also women's practices that might be viewed with suspicion. See Isa 3:16-18 and Prov 7:22.

⁷¹⁷ Ackerman, *Warrior*, 2.

neither has legitimate rights to that leadership. In the case of the narratives for both men, brief references to the women form an *inclusio* around the depictions of the men's lives. By a woman each man is born, and by a woman each man meets his demise.

The woman of Thebez executes the gendered-violence in Abimelech's story and is a head smasher like Jael.⁷¹⁸ She causes Abimelech's death by dropping a stone on his head (9:53). She is another example of a woman taking up leadership in war, and the millstone that kills Abimelech is a domestic implement.⁷¹⁹ But the victory is denied the woman as Abimelech calls a boy to kill him. He does not want to be remembered as a man who died by the hand of a woman. He considers this shameful (9:54).⁷²⁰ Ironically, according to 2 Sam 11:21, this is exactly how Abimelech's death is recalled.⁷²¹

C. Micah and his Mother

The early part of Micah's narrative includes a scene with his mother (Judges 17). The scene lacks gendered-violence, but it does reveal an interest in how women contribute to Israelite practices and identity. Micah's story cultivates questions about how the narrator understands women's religious spaces and whether they are or should be inhabiting public or private roles. Micah's mother takes independent action and consecrates money toward building an idol for the Lord (17:3), and her piety and devotion contrasts Micah's "failure to adhere to Israel's covenantal standards."⁷²²

⁷¹⁸ Ackerman, *Warrior*, 48-49. Kelen also makes the connection between Jael and the woman of Thebez and the way that the men died (Kelen, *Les femmes*, 101).

⁷¹⁹ Yee, "By the Hand," 111.

⁷²⁰ She is an unnamed woman of unknown origins (Schneider, *Judges*, 224).

⁷²¹ Ackerman, *Warrior*, 49.

⁷²² Ackerman, *Warrior*, 115.

Regarding the Judges stories in general, Ackerman argues that this tale, along with the narratives of Deborah in Judges 4, Jephthah's daughter in chapter 11, and Manoah's wife in chapter 13, reflects the narrator's tendency to confine women to the domestic space, praise their acts of religious piety in those spaces, and deny women religious functionaries a truly public voice.⁷²³ When it is occasionally granted to them, women in Judges are not able to retain their official authority or public roles.

D. The Daughters of Shiloh

Judges 21 emphasizes the degree to which women are an important commodity and often the link that creates unity and solidarity between groups. Women also symbolically represent the objects (much like Sisera's mother's reference to women as "breeders") that can perpetuate a group. On one hand, Judges 21 is a heartbreaking story of a tribe's desperation and of the ambush, mass kidnapping and rape of young women. On the other hand, Kawashima argues that though the women do not consent to their abductions, they are absorbed into "legitimate marriages." There is no crime in their abduction, and the daughters are "fair spoils of holy war."⁷²⁴

This ambiguous tale closes the book of Judges. The story contains many of the Judges themes we've discussed: gendered-violence, concerns with continuity of an Israelite group, and women and their contribution to group identity. The image of the women coming out dancing (*wěhinnē 'im-yēš'û bēnôt šilo lāḥûl bammēḥōlôt* in 21:21) reminds the reader of the tragedy that befalls Jephthah's daughter after she came out of her house to

⁷²³ Ackerman, *Warrior*, 115-117 and Jost, *Gender*, 222-223.

⁷²⁴ Kawashima, "Could a Woman Say 'No,'" 14.

meet him “with drummers and dancers” *bētuppîm ûbimḥōlôt* (11:34).⁷²⁵ The general scene of unnamed groups of men and women reflects the story of the anonymous Levite and his *pīlegeš* and how the condition of Israel has deteriorated so much that one family’s experience of rape has turned into the rape of many women. The penultimate verse of this chapter, as well as the entire book of Judges, contains explicit interest in family matters: “And the Israelites went from there, at that time, each man to his tribe and to his clan, and they went out from there, each man to his inheritance” (21:24). With no further mention of war or battles, the book concludes with the familiar evaluative refrain, “In those days there was not a king in Israel. Each man did what was right in his eyes” (21:25).

III. Beyond the Book of Judges

The methods in this study can be utilized to consider not only Judges narratives but also other stories of gendered pairs throughout the Hebrew Bible. The project has already given attention to the violent tales of the gendered pairs of Dinah and Shechem (Gen 24) and Tamar and Amnon (2 Sam 13) and their similarities with the Judges narratives.

Rebekah’s barrenness, divine oracle and withholding of information from her husband in Gen 25 recalls similar motifs in the story of Manoah’s wife. More comprehensive investigations could consider the liminal aspects of Rebekah’s story and the emphasis on

⁷²⁵ In fact, Renate Egger-Wenzel has an entire article that considers the phraseological connections between the daughters’ events in Judges 11 and 21 (Renate Egger-Wenzel, “Jiftachs Tochter (Ri 11, 29-40) – die Töchter von Schilo (Ri 21, 19-25): Ursprung und Ausführung einer kultischen Feier durch Frauen?” *Biblische Notizen* no. 129 (January 1, 2006), 5-16.) She mentions the shared use of the verb *yš*’ in both accounts, and the fact that the events describe young unmarried women who have not been with a man and are celebrating a feast without men (Egger-Wenzel, “Jiftachs,” 12-13). Other similarities exist as well. She also argues that given the links in phrasing, the commemoration of the sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter might initiate the celebration of a feast of the Lord in Shiloh (which is perhaps a stretch). “Abschließend ist festzuhalten, dass es aufgrund der vielen textlichen und inhaltlichen Querverbindungen, die von kultischen Handlungen durch Frauen berichten, durchaus vorstellbar ist, dass der durch einen JHWH-Eid veranlasste Opfertod von Jiftachs’ Tochter, die zum Brauch in Israel und jährlich von den Töchtern Israels besungen wurde, sich zur Vorlage für ein JHWH-Fest in Schilo entwickeln konnte” (15).

the struggling twins in her womb. The narrator provides explicit detail in her narrative of the transitional phase of giving birth. The theme of sight is present in Hagar's story (Gen 16). Also, the angel of the Lord tells her to return to her mistress (Sarai) and humble herself (*wěhit'anni*) under her mistress's hand (Gen 16:9). And Hagar, like Rebekah and Manoah's wife, learns of her son's future political exploits.

A. Hannah, Eli, and Samuel

Other narratives occur in the time of the judges of Israel, but the stories are not found in the book of Judges. According to 1 Sam 4:18, Eli judged for 40 years. Samuel is a judge who makes his sons, Joel and Abijah, judges over Israel.⁷²⁶ Eli the judge and the barren woman, Hannah, both play an important role in Samuel's birth story.

Like other episodes in the book of Judges, eyes, sight and perception influence the narratives about the young Samuel. Eli and Hannah's episode commence the narrative emphasis on sight and perception before Samuel is even born. With a touch of irony, Hannah, who desperately desires a son, pleads to Eli, "May your maidservant find favor in your eyes" (1 Sam 1:18). But the narrator makes efforts to note Eli's poor perception and sight. At the end of his life, Eli's "eyes had become fixed into a sight-less stare" (*wě'énāyw qāmâ wěłō'yākôl lir'ôt* in 1 Sam 4:15), and he could neither see the bearer of bad news nor "distinguish any longer between the sound of triumph and despair."⁷²⁷ This is reminiscent of the key evaluative phrase in Judges (i.e. "and every man did what was right in his own eyes" or "they did what is pleasing in the Lord's eyes").

⁷²⁶ 1 Samuel 7:6, 15, 16, 17; 8:1-2.

⁷²⁷ Sasson, "Eyes of Eli," 186.

Hannah's story, which is analogous to the stories of many other barren women in the Hebrew Bible, has numerous commonalities with the story of Samson's mother. Both women bear judges. Hannah vows that a razor will not touch her son's head (1 Sam 1:11), and thus identifies the Nazarite status of the boy.⁷²⁸ Susan Niditch argues that the reader should not assume a literal borrowing of terminology between the 1 Samuel 1 and Judges 13 texts but should assume a consistency in cultural expectations regarding the great leader born of a barren woman who has special connections with the deity.⁷²⁹

Hannah's consumption of intoxicating drink is of interest in the 1 Samuel story. The reference to wine or strong drink does not occur in Hannah's vow to the Lord as it does in the dialogue between Samson's mother and the divine messenger. Instead, it is Eli who can neither see nor perceive situations properly and who accuses the woman, Hannah, of drunkenness (1 Sam 1:13-14).

Hannah's tale contains an interruption that describes Eli's presence at the doorpost of the temple of the Lord (1 Sam 1:9).⁷³⁰ It is from this liminal space that he spies Hannah making her vow (à la Jephthah), and it is from Eli's position at the doorpost of the temple that he tells Hannah to "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel give you what you have asked of him" (1 Sam 1:17).

⁷²⁸ Both the Qumran and LXX contain more Nazarite characteristics, including the boy's dedication and that he will avoid wine and strong drink, and thus closely follow the text in Judges 13:15. See Niditch, "My Brother," 74.

⁷²⁹ Niditch, "My Brother," 74.

⁷³⁰ The mention of Eli's positioning on the doorpost is awkwardly placed in the middle of the description of Hannah's movement to pray to the Lord. Just after "After they ate and drank in Shiloh, Hannah arose" (1 Sam 1:9a) and just before, "She was bitter, and she prayed to the Lord, and she wept bitterly" (1 Sam 1:10), the text introduces Eli: "the priest Eli was sitting on the seat of honor at the doorpost of the temple of YHWH" (1 Sam 1:9b).

B. Ruth

Although there is not a named judge in her tale, Ruth's story occurs "in the time when judges ruled" and contains elements relevant to this study. Marriage, inheritance, and security are the overriding concerns in the entire narrative. The main impetus in the book of Ruth is to establish family relations between two women who are no longer "related" or legally bound to one another.

In Ruth's pledge to Naomi, the reader recognizes public and political language employed in a very private moment. Ruth says,

Do not urge me to leave you, to turn away from following you; for wherever you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people are my people, and your gods, my gods. Wherever you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. Thus, may the Lord do to me and thus may he add, should anything but death separate me from you.

Ruth's promise to Naomi is couched in covenantal language and mirrors the same patterns of language and structure used in political treaties.⁷³¹ That which is familial is political. The public realm draws from the private realm; the two become blurred.

Ruth is an odd character by all biblical standards. She is a foreigner, adopts a god who is not her own, and links herself to a woman instead of to a man.⁷³² Irmtraud Fischer similarly argues that, "Ruth's oath to be inseparably tied to her mother-in-law depicts an alternative, seemingly unsuitable concept of living."⁷³³ However, the narrator makes efforts to place great value on Ruth because of her unconventional behavior and despite her

⁷³¹ See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*. (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 241; Mark S. Smith, "'Your People Shall Be My People': Family and Covenant in Ruth 1:16-17," *CBQ* 69 (2007): 255-256. "It is not family bonds that are simply like international treaties or covenants, but rather covenants and treaties, whether at the individual, group, or international level, that constitute interfamily relations across family lines. Family is the basic model, whether at the local level or the international level, for establishing ties across family lines" (Smith, "Your People," 255).

⁷³² Andre LaCocque. *Ruth. A Continental Commentary* (trans. K.C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 52,

⁷³³ Irmtraud Fischer, "The Book of Ruth: A 'Feminist' Commentary to the Torah?" in *Ruth and Esther*. Vol. 3 of *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 24-49. 26-7.

foreignness. Boaz's praises Ruth. He references her as a "worthy woman," (*'ēšet ḥayil*) using the same term that the narrator used to describe the "man of substance," Boaz, in 2:1 (*gibbôr ḥayil*). Boaz also exclaims that Ruth's latest deed of loyalty (*ḥesed*) is greater than the first (v.10). The use of this term is a daring maneuver by the storyteller, for the Bible typically uses the term to describe God's fidelity.⁷³⁴ In a story where God is noticeably absent as an actor, it is even more remarkable that a Moabite woman demonstrates this divine quality.

The intimate and private scene on Boaz's threshing floor might not contain gendered-violence, but the sexually charged scene primarily focuses on Ruth acquiring the social security that she and Naomi need. As the woman takes initiative in the scene and pressures the man, Boaz and Ruth's scene bears much resemblance to the intimate scenes of Jael, the Timnite wife, and Delilah. At the moment that Boaz discovers the woman on his threshing floor, "Ruth does not wait for Boaz to tell *her* what *she* has to do (as Naomi instructed), instead *she* tells *him*."⁷³⁵ Ruth instructs Boaz, "I am Ruth, your handmaid. Spread out your robe upon your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman." Ruth's imperative to Boaz reveals the two issues at stake: Ruth needs a husband to marry, and Naomi needs a redeemer to purchase Elimelech's land.

At the end of the story, the private contracts between Naomi and Ruth and Ruth and Boaz give way to men enacting public rituals with economic, political and judicial maneuvering. The heroine Ruth is completely absent from the final scene. The story has

⁷³⁴ Andre LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 86-7.

⁷³⁵ Fischer, "Book of Ruth," 30

moved from feminine space to masculine space.⁷³⁶ But, it is still the private contracts that bear the weight of meaning in the story. Ruth carves her way through the limitations of the patriarchal institutions, making the public marriage contract in chapter 4 appear as a foregone conclusion. Ruth's private moments with Naomi and Boaz *undermine* the established institutions even if the private covenants do not *overthrow* the public institutions.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Sasson remarks on the relatedness of Ruth and Judges and points to thematic connections that run deeper than Ruth's opening statement. The book of Ruth has more to do with the book of Judges than simply that the tale of the Moabite woman occurs "when the judges were ruling." Historically, many interpreters have connected Ruth and Judges.⁷³⁷ The Greek canon places the book of Ruth directly after Judges.⁷³⁸ Sasson argues that the characters in the book of Ruth not only contrast, but also redeem many of the characters in the book of Judges:

(The Ruth) tale is about ordinary people achieving extraordinary ends when they care for each other; but if it be noticed that Ruth is also a subtle parable for rising from the ashes, the linkage with Judges and its many near-perdition experiences might be apparent.⁷³⁹

Judges is certainly not a tale of remarkable people or loyal YHWH followers who are morally astute and secure in their social location. If it is anything, Judges is an exemplary

⁷³⁶ Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 188. Trible says this public gathering is entirely a man's world.

⁷³⁷ See Sasson, *Judges*, 15 and Josephus, *Ant.* 5.318.

⁷³⁸ See Sasson, *Judges*, 15.

⁷³⁹ Sasson, *Judges*, 14.

tale of what *not* to do, how *not* to be, and how *not* to treat each other. In the book of Judges, we have encountered complicated and ordinary people doing desperate and sometimes deplorable things. The book of Ruth helps remind us that the book of Judges is, fortunately, not the last word in Israel's story.

The study of the ambiguity, liminality, and unhomeliness in the book of Judges helps us more deeply understand the narrator's perspective of gendered pairs and families in the creation of Israel's identity, analyze the levels of patriarchy that are operative in the text, and seek the perspective of the under-represented and silenced women that the book depicts. This kind of reading also reminds the postmodern reader of our own ideological biases and the vast difference between our Western context and Israel's tiny territory and often subjugated existence.

Uncomfortable and troubling as it might be, we must recognize the ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning that resides in the book. If we do, we are able to imagine the untold parts of the stories. And we, too, might become liminal readers, in a transitional state situated on the threshold of disclosure and hiddenness. If we read in this way, we might stand (or more accurately *move in* our transitional liminal states) in solidarity with Spektor's Delilah who sings: "beneath the sheets of paper lies my truth... I have to go...I have to go..."

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