

Laughing In The Face of Violence:
Theological Implications of the Inter-relationships
between
Violence and Humour in the Book of Judges

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Trinity College and the Graduate Centre for Theological Studies of the Toronto School of Theology. In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology awarded by the University of Trinity College and the University of Toronto.

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Abstract

I assume that there is a theological basis and meaning to each book of the Hebrew Bible and I contend that the inter-relationships of the narrative devices humour and violence in the same story present theological messages and insights that have not, till now, been adequately examined in 21st century theological study.

This thesis is an inter-disciplinary undertaking, involving a range of exemplars and scholarly insights. It does not fit neatly into either the traditional theological or the biblical studies categories. I draw on René Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism, Bruno Bettelheim's insights on imagination and Stephen Leacock's understanding of humour, among others, employing particular social and literary theories about *märchen*, violence and humour, viewed from a contextual feminist perspective.

I scrutinize three stories in the book of Judges and I propose that violence and humour, presented together, modify and alter any interpretation that may be suggested and impact on the theological meanings of the corpus as a whole. Their interactions verify, yet moderate, the interconnections between the theological intent of the text and its

reception by the 21st century Canadian reader. While the violence may be unacceptable as a theological device in post-modern Western society, the humour modifies and amends any motifs that are presented, making them, and the anti-non-Israelite motif that is so clearly delineated, more palatable to the present-day reader.

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The late Fred Robinson, with his delightfully and deliciously wicked sense of life, love and the pursuit of happiness, is likely the originator of my interest in humour. I know he would have enjoyed this. Very especially, thank you to Nora Robinson, a stalwart presence, without whom, my life would have been very different, and this work would never have been completed.

I sincerely hope that Robert Benchley is wrong: “Defining and analyzing humour is a pastime of humorless people.”¹

¹ 1889-1945. A nefarious quote impossible to adequately cite.

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Abbreviations

Books

I took the first two or three words of a title as the second and subsequent references, i.e. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* became Frye, *Anatomy*. Most are self-evident. Leacock's two books, *Humor: Its Theory and Technique* and *Humour and Humanity*, abbreviated to "H" and "H and H" respectively.

Biblical Translations

All biblical book abbreviations based on *Accordance* standards: Judges=Judg.

ESVS:	<i>English Standard Version Bible</i>
GENEVA:	<i>The Geneva Bible</i>
KJV:	<i>King James Version</i>
KJVS:	<i>King James Version Study Bible</i>
MESSAGE:	<i>The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Terms</i>
NETS:	<i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i>
NKJVS:	<i>The New King James Study Bible</i>
NLT-SE:	<i>New Living Translation Second Edition</i>
NRSV:	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
RV:	<i>Revised Version</i>
WEB:	<i>World English Bible</i>

Journals and Scholarly Organizations

AAR:	<i>American Academy of Religion</i>
BAAAS:	<i>Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Science</i>
BAR:	<i>Bulletin of Archaeological Research</i>
BASOR:	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB:	<i>Brown, Driver and Briggs</i>
BibInt:	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>

<i>BT:</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB:</i>	<i>Biblical Theological Bulletin</i>
<i>JAAR:</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL:</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JLT:</i>	<i>Journal of Literature and Theology</i>
<i>JNES:</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSOT:</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SJT:</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TESOL Quarterly:</i>	<i>Teaching English as a Second Language</i>
<i>TJT:</i>	<i>Toronto Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TT:</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>USQR:</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VT:</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>ZAW:</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

1-Introduction: Setting the Parameters

My hypothesis involves a close reading of three narratives in the book of *Judges*: Ehud and Eglon, Ja'el and Sisera, and A Certain Woman and Abimelech,² which contain the narrative strategies of interest to me: violent actions in combination with humour and “unreality” or fantasy. It is my opinion that *Judges* is not an actual historical document within the 21st Century sense of historical record but rather a fictionalized text that supports specific theological intentions. This leads me to consider that they contain a number of fantastic factors that conflict with a “realistic” understanding of events portrayed in each story and that these elements affect and enrich any theological interpretation.

This is a truly interdisciplinary project, going beyond strictly traditional theological *and* biblical studies categories and criteria. I am using these disciplines to complement and contrast with each other along with additional scholarly methodologies, in the hope that I am able to augment current insights into the theological implications of the narratives. My interpretation does not imply or reflect an extensive hermeneutic approach, but rather I enlist a broad range of social and lit-

² Ehud and Eglon (Judg. 3:12-30); Ja'el and Sisera (Judg. 4 only); and A Certain Woman and Abimelech (Judg. 9:50-57).

erary theories that reflect my Canadian feminist perspectives about fairy tales/*märchen*, violence and humour.³ My goal is not to establish principles for theological ethics, but rather to detect new or unusual meanings in these texts. The stimulating discussions on biblical hermeneutics in a post-modern context as espoused by Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida and others are not part of my purview. I do not intend to engage or critique their ideas directly.⁴

Theology and Biblical Studies

John Webster proposes that reading the Bible [alone] is doing theology, a view I support.⁵ I take the texts seriously, but not necessarily literally. I perceive the Bible as the source of salvific, not scientific, truth, a complex, multidimensional text whose theological harmony is debatable.

Advances in hermeneutical and linguistic work support David Bosch's assertion that Biblical hermeneutics is a "never ending discipline,"⁶ bearing in mind the possibilities of "inferior moral attitudes and practices."⁷ New interpretations or

³ All terms, as I interpret them, will be explained within this text.

⁴ Ricoeur's idea of the potential surplus meaning of texts has some validity in this work. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

⁵ See John Webster, "Reading Theology," *TJT* 13, no.1 (1997): 53-63 and also his "In the Shadow of Biblical Work: Barth and Bonhoeffer on Reading the Bible," *TJT* 17, no. 1 (2001): 75-91.

⁶ "Hermeneutics is the never-ending discipline of attempting to make the foundational events of the Christian faith relevant to every new generations of believers." D.J. Bosch, "Towards a Hermeneutic for 'Biblical Studies in Mission'," *Mission Studies* 3, no.2 (1985), 65, quoted in Charles Fensham, *Emerging from the Dark Age Ahead: The Future of the North American Church* (Ottawa, ON: Novalis, 2008), 25.

⁷ Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 62.

proposals are possible because “All meaning, including meanings in Biblical texts, are mediated by human thinking.”⁸ The percipient reader, therefore, should understand that “the meaning of a text cannot be reduced to a single univocal sense.”⁹ This permits a great variety of interpretations that could be considered legitimate and justifiable, regardless of the analytical methods employed and the reader’s philosophical attitudes. Diversity of thought is enhanced by the readers’ abilities to place discordant aspects in incongruous combinations, an imaginative conceptualization that requires a free-ranging ability to fantasize beyond the printed word.

“The foremost and perhaps the only aim of the Bible is the moral improvement of the world, essentially an educational undertaking.”¹⁰ While Yehuda Radday, the originator of this comment, is Jewish, the observation is valid for consideration by thoughtful Christians. The Hebrew Bible is generally believed to be an instructive tool for the betterment of the human race, a guide for appropriate behaviour and a way in which a person can obtain insight into the thoughts, lives and times of specific Jewish/Hebrew and Christian peoples, their theologies and their God.¹¹

⁸ This is Ricouer’s perception. Klemm, “Philosophy and Kerygma,” 68.

⁹ Fensham, *Emerging from the Dark Age Ahead*, 23, echoing Bosch’s sentiment.

¹⁰ Yehuda Radday, “On Missing the Humour,” in *On Humor and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Yehuda Radday and Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1990), 32.

¹¹ Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Towards War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1960), 42. In the 1990s, English Methodists organized their understandings of the Bible into seven categories, from “inerrant absolutism” to “interesting literature,” assuming their members’ beliefs extended through the full range.

As tools of education, no part of the Bible should be ignored.¹² This stance means that *all* biblical narratives are valid for study in the development of theological understanding and insight. Notwithstanding, the book of *Judges* is neither prominently featured in survey texts on Old Testament/Hebrew Bible theology¹³ nor is it highlighted in the Revised Common Lectionary.¹⁴ As such, the narratives of Eglon, Sisera and Abimelech are examples of “lectionary gymnastics,”¹⁵ a very common theological tendency. Many pew-Christians have no knowledge of the book because they never hear them in church. However much theologians might wish to ignore them, these and all parts of the Hebrew Bible are integral to the Christian ethos.

Along with commandments, instructions and sanctions, the Hebrew Bible tells stories of YHWH’s people and YHWH’s relationships with those people over time. Narratives create a means by which cultural values and theological beliefs are preserved to help “bind people together in one cohesive group,”¹⁶ presenting information, attitudes, perspectives and theologies in unique ways. Anthony Bartlett’s assertion that “theological tradition is not based on dogma, but on cultural

¹² Radday, “On Missing the Humour,” 32.

¹³ Craig Bartholomew *et al.*, *Out of Egypt, Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004) has two references (93, 94). Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008) has one reference to *Judges* (173).

¹⁴ There is only one selection from *Judges* that is found in the three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary: *Judges* 4:1-7, Year A, Proper 28. In contrast, *Zephaniah* and *Micah* have 3 references each, *Amos* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, 7 each.

¹⁵ “Lectionary gymnastics” is an appropriate term to refer to texts that are ignored, avoided or negated during the religious year. The phrase was coined by Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us?* xiv.

¹⁶ Nicholas Wade, *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why it Endures* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2009), 58.

reflection,"¹⁷ is affirmation of this process. The challenge for a Christian theologian is to attempt to extract elements and ideas that would also be considered canonical and valid within Christian scholarship and theology.¹⁸

The stories of Ehud, Ja'el and A Certain Woman are deemed to be theological by virtue of their inclusion in a canonical text and "classic," because they have not been lost in a redactive shuffle.¹⁹ To present theological precepts within their violent plots, they employ a variety of narrative strategies. Chief among these are fantasy and humour, whose usage and interconnections indicate prejudices and theological inclinations worthy of review and consideration.

Biblical and theological studies over the past 30 to 40 years have, in general, moved towards narrative/literary studies and analyses to evince meanings from the text, liberating scholarship from historicist domination.²⁰ Archaeological discoveries have contributed to this debate.²¹ This does not mean that previous

¹⁷ Anthony W. Bartlett, *Cross purposes: the violent grammar of Christian atonement* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 18.

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur contends that Biblical texts have specific intentionality that overturns and extends interpretive imagination. "The God-referent interprets the reader's existence and is revelatory of it." David E. Klemm, "Philosophy and Kerygma: Ricoeur as Reader of the Bible," in *Reading Ricoeur*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 64. During this process, readers retain their individual humanity. Klemm, 67.

¹⁹ Following Northrop Frye's definition of "classic": "The word 'classic' as applied to a work of literature means primarily a work that refuses to go away, that remains confronting us until we do something about it, which means also doing something about ourselves." Northrop Frye, "The Double Mirror," *BAAAS* 35, no.3 (1981): 32-41.

²⁰ In 1987, David Jobling noted: "A profound change, everyone agrees, is coming over biblical studies, a change having much to do with literature -- narrative especially -- ..." David Jobling, "Right-brained story of left-handed man: An Antiphon to Yairah Amit," in *Signs and Wonders*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 129. Hans W. Frei supported this stance in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays Edited by George Hunsinger and William C. Plancher* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5-9.

²¹ *E.g.*, analyses of the Dead Sea scrolls, further excavations at Megiddo, Tel Rehov, Beth Shean.

perspectives are irrelevant. Divergent suggestions can be proposed, employing several evaluative techniques simultaneously and such diverse methodologies enrich narrative discussions.

The *Judges* narratives are centred around various Israelite leaders and their overthrow of successive invading forces. The subtleties of each tale indicate the clarity of the violence-of-God traditions and support the endemic nature of violence found within the entire Hebrew Bible.²² Some stories can be considered humourous and fantastic, under certain interpretations although not every story of the major judges involves humour and/or a fantastic, “unrealistic” overlay.²³ It is the interconnections among violence, humour and fantasy, that are important to this project and these are not always evident. Three stories do show humour and elements of fantasy along with violence: Ehud, Ja'el and A Certain Woman.

I propose that theological understandings of these texts hinge on an examination of each aspect of the narrative structure and the interplay between those elements, with other scholarly insights.²⁴ I make the assumption that each com-

²² Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Qur'an* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2003), 23ff. for the “violence-of-God” nuances.

²³ Major Judges are Othniel, 3:7-11; Ehud, 3:12-30; Deborah, 4-5; Gideon 6:1-8:32; Jephthah, 10:6-12:7 and Samson, 13:1-16:31.

²⁴ This is not meant to suggest that every violent biblical narrative must be replete with these components. Of the more than 40 murders in the Hebrew Bible where both the killer and the victim are individually named, most do not hint at humour or fantasy, except in the possibility of exaggeration or irony.

ponent can be viewed from more than one perspective without necessarily creating a contradiction.²⁵ Lack of certainty enhances a richness of interpretation, especially when other factors are considered.²⁶ I suggest that theological implications and insights within these pericopes should be weighed and considered within the entire range of theological ideas found the Hebrew Bible.

Imagination and Märchen

Imagination is an intrinsic element of each creative venture, whether oral or written. Because of its variant aspects, this will be extensively discussed in Chapter 3.

Stith Thompson proposed the word *märchen* as replacement for “folktale” and “fairy tale” because he saw *märchen* as less restrictive and more encompassing.²⁷

A *märchen* is a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world, without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses.²⁸

Märchen generally start with a formulaic beginning (“once upon a time”) setting the story in an indefinite time and place. Characters are stereotypes, including brave and clever heroes who defeat adversaries, rescue maidens and

²⁵ Scholars are inclined to “take a stand” and defend/define scholarship as “either/or” rather than “both/and.” Work by Liew and Kim supports the idea of opposition and inclusion of each distinct element within the contradictions of Biblical hermeneutics. H. C. P. Kim, “Interpretative Modes of Yin-Yang Dynamics as an Asian Hermeneutics,” 287-308; and T. S. B. Liew, “Reading with Yin Yang Eyes: Negotiating the Ideological Dilemma of a Chinese American Biblical Hermeneutics,” 309-335, both in *BibInt* IX, no.3 (2001).

²⁶ “Certain truths are only discernible as narratives where there is an absence of certainty ... Any text is not fixed but is a fluid set of readings.” Adam Gopnik, *The Larkin Stuart Lectures*, Trinity College, University of Toronto, March 2012.

²⁷ *E.g.*, If a story does not have a fairy in it, can it be a “fairy tale”? The word *märchen* solves that problem.

²⁸ Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York, NY: Dryden Press, 1951), 8.

become overlords/kings of some sort with a “happily ever after” summation. It will be interesting to see whether these specifications can be applied to the pericopes.

Humour

Alfred North Whitehead’s comment that the Bible lacks humour, has no validity.²⁹ I agree with Paul Shaffer: “If God is the ultimate being, I imagine he has the ultimate sense of humour.”³⁰ Academic works have a long tradition examining violence in the stories of Bible³¹ yet only since the 1960s have there been substantive articles and books seriously studying Biblical humour in all its facets.³² I see humour as an important and crucial constituent of theology, without which theology cannot exist. Humour, like violence, is never neutral. It can support or denigrate. In the latter case it could validly be considered a form of psychological or symbolic violence, allowing the writer to enhance and continue the narrative’s overt violence.³³ Humour with violence changes each story’s emphasis and therefore, its theology.

²⁹ A. N. Whitehead quoted in Radday, “On Missing the Humour”, 21ff.

³⁰ Shaffer was the band leader of the “Late Show with David Letterman” on CBS. The quote is from the *Globe and Mail*, Saturday November 19, 2011, R27. The statement proves every human is a theologian.

³¹ *E.g.*, Peter Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978); Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); Gerhard Von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); A. James Reimer, *Christians and War: a brief history of the church's teachings and practices* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

³² Substantive works include Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981/1965); George Aichele, Jr., *Theology as Comedy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980); J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1984); Radday & Brenner, eds., *On Humor and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*.

³³ These terms will be defined at the appropriate time.

Radday added a crucial caveat to his statement cited above (page 5):

“The foremost and perhaps the only aim of the Bible is the moral improvement of the world, essentially an educational undertaking ... *humour is indispensable* [to that learning].”³⁴

I propose to examine humour’s and imagination’s interconnectedness to violence, understanding that murder and other kinds of violent death are not normally considered “amusing” or “fantastic.”³⁵ I see a “creative use of language” within the plot lines, settings and characterization of each story that amplifies violence’s and humour’s impact. This embellishment moves individual accounts from the categorization of more-or-less historical narrative into the realm of fictionalized narrative that strays into the well-defined territory of the *märchen*.³⁶ I propose that the combination of humour, imagination and exaggeration is a deliberate narrative strategy that modifies each text’s meaning and understanding.

³⁴ Radday, “On Missing the Humour,” 32. Italics added.

³⁵ The change of attitude in the past generation towards violence and the resultant desensitization of North Americans to violence in the media and in cinema/television has been extensively studied. See Richard S. Randal, *Censorship of the movies; the social and political control of a mass medium* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968) or Charles Lyons, *The new censors: movies and the culture wars* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997). Jocular and fantasy as sub-themes are now apparent in many murder mysteries in movie theatres (e.g., *Charlie’s Angels*) and main stream television (e.g., *Elementary*).

³⁶ The term “more or less” is used advisedly as the historical veracity of the Hebrew Bible is being increasingly scrutinized. Since so many biblical narratives cannot be confirmed using independent sources, as would be preferred by modern historians, who favour a plethora of fact-based materials before drawing conclusions, they are now considered less historically accurate than they were several generations ago. See Megan Bishop Moore, *Philosophy and practice in writing a history of ancient Israel* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2006).

Violence

[T]he two topics that receive the most space in the Hebrew scriptures are (1) violence and (2) ritual and cultic practice (the centre of which is ritual sacrifice).³⁷

From the murder of Abel to the crucifixion of Jesus, there are many examples of individual, tribal or national violent behaviour. There are over 40 killings of individual people in the Hebrew Bible, where both the killer and the victim are specifically named.³⁸ In the many attempts to find theological or spiritual meaning in these texts, the identification of humour and fantasy/imagination in the same texts has often been ignored or lost. The study of violence in the Hebrew Bible has a long tradition,³⁹ while the investigation of humour and fantasy seems to be a more recent development.⁴⁰

A nuanced understanding encourages us to ask a number of theological questions. What creates a humorous interpretation of a violent killing? How does it affect a reader's interpretation? If their actions and stories are acceptable,

³⁷ S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: a theology of the cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 93.

³⁸ Not to mention the numerous battles and fights involving masses of people. "Murder" and its derivatives are used in this paper to refer to the death of a person in a violent situation when it is caused by another human being. This use does not imply the 21st century meaning as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, meanings tied to judicial and legal limitations.

³⁹ In the University of Toronto library system, see *Heaven taken by storm: or, the holy violence a Christian is to put forth in the pursuit after glory* [electronic resource]. By Thomas Watson, (d. 1668) Minister of the Gospel. Revised and corrected by the Rev. Mr. Armstrong, Lecturer of St. Michael, Crooked-Lane. Also, *The power of violence and resolution: when apply'd to Religion. A sermon Preach'd at the Morning Lecture in Exon, on Thursday Sept. 9. 1714* [electronic resource]. By William Bartlet (1678-1720).

⁴⁰ Good's book, *Irony in the Old Testament*, in 1965 is likely the first major 20th Century English language treatment of irony in the Hebrew Bible.

should Ehud, Ja'el and A Certain Woman be as revered as David, who kills Goliath and beheads him, or Samson, who brings down the temple of Dagon, killing thousands?⁴¹ If their actions are inappropriate, why are these stories in the Hebrew Bible? How does textual violence affect a Christian theological interpretation and can a theologian today explain and justify these stories in 21st Century Western society?⁴²

Judges has further challenges to compound such analyses.

Translation

Biblical and theological interpretation depends upon the meaningful translation of the Bible from Hebrew to English, appropriate to the cultural context.⁴³ Hebrew structural integrity, word plays and sound plays often do not translate effectively into English without extensive footnotes. Such discrepancies are frequently worthy of note because of their cleverness.⁴⁴ This is particularly important when examining the components and impact of potentially humorous situations

⁴¹ Neither David and Goliath (*1Sam.* 17) nor Samson (*Judg.* 16) is found in the RCL but the stories were taught in the Sunday School of my (albeit pre-feminist) era whereas Deborah, Judith, A Certain Woman, Esther and Ja'el were not.

⁴² An October 13 2012 report to the UN's human rights committee stated: "countries around the world are increasingly viewing capital punishment as a form of torture because it inflicts severe mental and physical pain on those sentenced to death." *Reuters*, ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCABRE89M1BB20121023?sp+ue accessed 24.10.12.

⁴³ Stephen Leacock could well have been a Biblical scholar with his insight: "Translation of humor from one language to another, from one age to another, from one thought to another is almost impossible. The effects are lost." Stephen Leacock, *Humor: Its Theory and Techniques*. (Toronto, ON: Dodd, Mead and Company [Canada], 1935), 226.

⁴⁴ Examples are apparent in the use of poetry and acrostics in the Psalms and in Lamentations. *E.g.*, *Psa.* 119, 112; *Lam.* 2, 4. The nuances of multiple meanings, shades of meaning, jargon and slang play vital roles in the appropriate interpretation of any text. All these comprehensions are fluid within any society through time, space, culture and society.

where cross-cultural interpretations become problematic. Advances in linguistic interpretations and changes in cultural norms further exacerbate exegetical challenges.⁴⁵

Another obstacle is significant. “[C]rowded into the space of a few verses [in the book of *Judges*] is the highest concentration of rare and unique vocabulary in the literature of ancient Israel.”⁴⁶ The ambiguity of the *hapax legomena* makes translation and comprehension speculative, permitting the possibility of many valid, imaginative exegeses.⁴⁷

My Perspective

There will always be a dichotomy between the reader and the writer, between intention and the reception of the written word.⁴⁸ I am viewing these texts as a 21st century Canadian female, feminist Christian scholar. My own contextual biases stem from a feminist perspective amplified by my particular interest in

⁴⁵ See Eric S. Christianson, “A Fistful of Shekels: Scrutinizing Ehud’s Entertaining Violence (Judges 3:12-30),” *BiblInt* XI, 1, 2003, 33-78; S. Gillmayr-Bucher, “Framework and Discourse in the Book of *Judges*,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 687-702; Tom A. Jull, “בִּזְקָרָה in *Judges* 3: A Scatological Reading,” *JSOT* 23 (1998): 63-75; Graham Ogden, “The Special Features of a Story: A study of *Judges* 3.12-30,” *BT* 42, no.4 (October 1991): 408-414; Gale Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2007; revised edition).

⁴⁶ Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1988), 58.

⁴⁷ In this work, the standard references will be software Accordance 12.2.5, its Masoretic Text, and the NRSV. Variant readings will be acknowledged as appropriate. Spelling will be Canadian. Within quotations, American spelling will be neither highlighted nor acknowledged, but other misspellings and grammatical errors will be confirmed with “[sic].” Biblical quotations from the book of *Judges* generally will be cited with the numbers alone, *i.e.*, “4:12” rather than “*Judg.* 4:12.” All other quotes will be full with appropriate abbreviations, *i.e.*, *1Sam.* 4:22. The Masoretic Text used by Accordance is cited thus: “Hebrew Bible (Biblia Hebraica) Tagged. Hebrew Masoretic Text with Westminster Hebrew Morphology (HMT-W4). Groves-Wheeler Westminster Hebrew Morphology, v. 4.20. J. Alan Groves Center for Advanced Biblical Research, 2960 Church Road, Glenside, PA 19038-2000 U.S.A. Copyright © 1991-2016 The J. Alan Groves Center for Advanced Biblical Research (“The Groves Center”). All Rights Reserved. Version 1.8.”

⁴⁸ “Readers manage their own contextual connections, thus creating their own message and their own text.” Alice Bach, quoting Roland Barthes, in a review of *Murder and Difference* by Mieke Bal, in *USQR* 44, no.3-4 (1991): 339.

social, ethical and literary theories within biblical studies. In trying to extrapolate meaning for this century, it is important to concede that any interpretation I substantiate may well have been irrelevant or immaterial to the textual and theological intentions of the original writer and the reception of any subsequent audiences, or tangential to another 21st Century scholar.

This thesis will explore imagination, humour and violence using the contributions of René Girard, Stephen Leacock, Northrop Frye, Bruno Bettelheim and Nossrat Peseschkian, among others, within a strongly interdisciplinary structure. It is my contention that the exemplars' ideas illuminate fresh theological insights of these specific pericopes. The various methodologies of storytelling are also worthy of careful consideration. It would initially appear to be unwise to base an entire, all-encompassing theology upon these three pericopes. It will be interesting to discern whether this is a valid assumption.

John Dominic Crossan provides momentum.

My point once again is not that the ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them symbolically but that they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally. They knew what they were doing, we don't ... The Bible always forces us to choose because the Bible is ambiguous, and ambiguity requires us to make a choice.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, *Who is Jesus: Answers to your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 79.

2-Storytelling As Theology

Everyday Occurrences as a Reflection of Society

A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species *Homo sapiens* – second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives ...⁵⁰

Everyone, everywhere, tells stories. Reynold Price's hypothesis is amply displayed in Biblical narratives, whose creation was the result of group social, historical and cultural agreements refined and edited over time. Hebrew Bible stories affirm Hebrew identity, its historical, social, cultural contexts, its moralities, its realities and its theologies.⁵¹ Because specific motives, morals, philosophical, social, psychological and theological truths were deemed important, narratives were devised, contingent upon the Narrator's perceptions of what was worth preserving and teaching.⁵² For my purposes, the Narrator in the Hebrew Bible is an amalgam: the person who originally told the narrative within the oral traditions

⁵⁰ Reynolds Price, *A Palpable God* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1978), 3.

⁵¹ Richard Kearney, *On Stories: Thinking in Action* (London: Routledge, 2002), 79. Also Jill Sinclair Bell, "Narrative Inquiry: More Than Just Telling Stories" *TESOL Quarterly* 36, no.2, (2002), 207ff.

⁵² Assuming that, at different times, different editors had different contexts, the identification of those contexts may be relevant. Following Bell, I argue that this position can be justified regardless of the Interpreter's theological stance. All narrative has some theological or religious rationale whether or not that theology is discovered by the Interpreter. "Religious" implies thoughts concerning a divine being. The idea that a person may be refuting or denying a belief in a divine being is also a "religious" thought. Bell, "Narrative Inquiry," 207–213; and J.L. Peacock and D.C. Holland, "The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process". *Ethos* 21, no.4 (1993): 367–383.

from which it originated, the writer of the script, its redactors, those who chose the materials for inclusion in the canon, the transmitter of the narrative at whatever time.⁵³ The collection, presentation and perpetuation of anecdotes, incidents and statements goes beyond cerebral interpretation and individual and collective memory, as it becomes implied, or implanted, reality.⁵⁴ All who read the text are Interpreters.

A story's survival indicates a collective understanding of its overall importance to, and acceptance by, those various societies over time. Narrative is a way in which individuals and groups cope with reality: reliving activities through story telling confirms one's individual existence as a participant or observer and affirms one's identity within a larger group.⁵⁵ Details recounted are those of personal importance to that story-teller, indicating who and what the Narrator chooses to think, however unknowing, uninformed, inaccurate and subconscious that may be. The disparate values, theologies and attitudes found within Biblical

⁵³ My general use of the singular is for convenience and not meant to imply singularity, either in individuality or era.

⁵⁴ Historical "accuracy" is not necessarily important or relevant to the development and evolution of a narrative. The instillation of false memories has been well documented. In the late 1880s, using the scientific method, psychologist/psychiatrist Hippolyte Bernheim, implanted fraudulent memories in a patient's mind. Current day research about false memories includes Charles Brainerd and Valerie Reyna, *The Science of False Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Julia Shaw and Stephen Porter, "Constructing Rich False Memories of Committing Crime," *Psychological Science*, January 2015, published on-line, January 14 2015. *Constructing Rich False Memories of Committing Crime* pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/01/14/0956797614562862.abstract . Accessed 14.5.2016

⁵⁵ Stories are the personal narrative identity individuals present to the world. "We trade stories of other people's lives and our own, both 'real' and fictional, not just to entertain, but to understand our own experience." Leah McLaren, "The narrative art of psychoanalysis," *Globe and Mail*, Globe Arts, July 13 2013, R9.

texts should be understood as valid and valuable, a reflection of the distinct eras in which each part was produced and redacted.

Narratives strive to trigger intellectual and emotional responses in each Interpreter, encouraging self-reflection, growth and maturity. Each element in a story is important because components inform and prejudice the Interpreter, as they modify the effects of the story's other aspects. Such details change the story's intention and impact as they amend, amplify, clarify and disguise set phrases, repetitive events or rigid structures within the plot, characterization, setting, mood and tone. An Interpreter draws meaning, intentionality and understanding, using the same kinds of skills, attitudes and knowledge as the Narrator. The presence of fantasy, violence and humour within the selected *Judges'* pericopes attests to their ongoing acceptability and relevance, adding insight to the creators' theological understanding.

The interconnection between history and story is inexorable and inescapable, whether one considers history as moderated through narrative, as proposed by Richard Kearney,⁵⁶ or history as storytelling, as suggested by Barbara

⁵⁶ From a literary rather than a historical perspective. "Because stories proceed from stories ... historical communities are ultimately responsible for the formation and reformation of their own identity ... The past is always present ... narrative memory cannot afford to be naïve for stories are never innocent ... history is mediated through narrative." Kearney, *On Stories*, 80 ff.

Tuchman.⁵⁷ History involves story-telling and no story telling is neutral or unbiased. Just as military history has long been assumed to be written by the victors and therefore biased in their favour,⁵⁸ each and every narrative is similarly structured. Because a story is a reflection of the society in which it was written, it becomes a philosophical and theological expression of the Narrator and that society. Some philosophers, including Renata Saleci, go so far as to propose that the concept of “nation” should be perceived as “narration.”⁵⁹ For these reasons in this work, historical understandings, reflection and discoveries are relevant to examine.

The three narratives may well have historical veracity, but it is not incumbent upon my argument to prove or disprove that.⁶⁰ One should not and cannot

⁵⁷ Tuchman, one of the foremost American popular historians of the late 20th Century, is credited with “turning history into story telling.” [Michael Enright, *The Sunday Report* (CBC Radio One), 29.1.12. Academics directly connecting narrative to historiography include Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” *Past and Present* 85 (Nov 1979), 3-24.

⁵⁸ A statement variously attributed to both Winston Churchill and Niccolo Machiavelli but of unknown origins. The idea that history consists of the event plus the historian is a commonly held belief.

⁵⁹ Kearney, *On Stories*, 79. Renata Saleci claims that the insurrection in the former Yugoslavia, specifically the targeted genocide was impelled by a desire to eliminate the cultural identity (and therefore existence) of the targeted minorities. [Quoted in Gerald J. Biesecker-Mast, “Reading Rene Girard’s and Walter Wink’s Religious Critiques of Violence as Radical Communication Ethics,” National Communication Association Annual Meeting, November 20-23, 1997, <http://www.bluffton.edu/~mastg/Girard.htm> . Accessed 12.9.2012.]

⁶⁰ The term “historical narrative” or “novelistic history” is one that has increasing credibility to describe narrative that could once have been considered “real” history. Ex., the cover blurb of *In the Garden of Beasts* by Erik Larson (New York, NY: Random House, 2011). I am not denying the possibility that these Biblical narratives had historical roots, but rather that whatever influences prompted the stories, in their present written form, they are, more *märchen* than historical recounting. Von Rad uses the word “saga,” but his comments are valid for narratives within the Hebrew Bible. “We shall certainly be led astray if we expect sagas to give us history; that is not their intention. The men who told and heard and then recorded sagas had not yet learned how to ask the historian’s questions ... Saga as a mode of communication is not necessarily inferior to history, nor is it superior; it is just different, based on a different set of assumptions and operating within its own framework.” Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1961), 31.

deny the historical conditioning and nuances of these texts while questioning their truth and accuracy.⁶¹ They are first, and foremost, narratives that have survived because of their importance to succeeding societies and each narrative detail is relevant to that understanding.

Northrop Frye has an appropriate comment:

What we have now is a conception of literature as a body of hypothetical creations which is not necessarily involved in the worlds of truth and fact, nor necessarily drawn from them, but which may enter into any kind of relationship with them, ranging from the most to the least explicit.⁶²

Frye labels the most relevant central stories of a culture, "myths," while considering folktales, legends and other narratives peripheral to a society's culture, calling them "fabulous" as opposed to "mythical." Narratives need not evolve into mythology, though mythology is based upon narrative. J.R.R. Tolkien, thought that myth and history were ultimately the same.⁶³

⁶¹ Frye states that "Myths are usually assumed to be true, stories about what really happened. But truth is not the central basis for distinguishing the mythical from the 'fabulous', it is a certain quality of importance or authority for the community that makes the myth, not truth as such." Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 16.

⁶² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, Volume 22. Edited by Robert D. Denham* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 92-93. He further sees "all commentary as allegorical interpretation," 89. He is referring to narratives as a broad category.

⁶³ Tolkien makes a connection between myth and storytelling and sometimes seems to intermix the two. J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories" in *Tree and Leaf*, J.R.R. Tolkien (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1964), 30.

There are definitely *mythic patterns* within the text of the Hebrew Bible, even if one might hesitate to label the texts mythic in their entirety.⁶⁴ Frye's detailed discussion of "myth" versus "narrative" is worthy of note,⁶⁵ and there are certainly parts of the Hebrew Bible that have mythological roots but while there is a great deal of academic discussion about the Bible's potential mythological interpretation, the overall discussion on the topic is moot in this work.⁶⁶

I concur with Michael McGee that "The people are the political and social myths they accept" regardless of the nuances of the understanding of "myth," with the specific use of the plural allowing dissension, competition and division within the overall umbrella of narrative and mythological understanding and the concept of "people" as an entity.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Many scholars consider Genesis mythic and closely related to Mesopotamian mythology. See Walter Brueggemann (*Interpretation of Genesis* [Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982], 380 ff.) and Joseph Blenkinsopp (*Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* [London: T. & T. Clarke International, 2011], ix).

⁶⁵ The Bible is the supreme example of the way that myths can, under certain social pressures, stick together to make up a mythology." Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 7, 14.

⁶⁶ See "Myths Today" in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers (New York, NY: Noonday, 1972), 109-159; Alan Dundes. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 41-51; Thomas Bulfinch, *Mythology: the age of fable, the age of chivalry [and] legends of Charlemagne* (New York, NY: T.Y. Crowell, 2004); Trevor Hart and Ivan Khovacs, eds., *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ McGee goes on: "The people exist, not in a single myth, but in the competitive relationships which develop between a myth and objective reality and between a myth and antithetical visions of the collective life." Michael McGee, "In Search of the People: a rhetorical alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rqjs20>, 247. Accessed 13.9.12.

Theology as Storytelling: Storytelling as Theology⁶⁸

“God made man because he loves stories.”⁶⁹

Story telling is one way to present theological ideas and supports the ideal that orthodoxy and orthopraxy should be interconnected, interdependent and interactive. Critical analysis of narratives is a foundation for “the task of interpreting and explaining the human condition.”⁷⁰ Most cultures employ thought-provoking and sometimes ambiguous narratives designed to present morals and models of appropriate behaviour, ways of thinking and theological and philosophical biases, so such narratives within the Bible are not unique.⁷¹

“It is the narratives not the laws [of the Hebrew Bible], that establish the roles of women” affirms Lillian R. Klein, a valid statement beyond Klein’s feminist limitations.⁷² What narratives may lack is the clear, obvious directionality of the

⁶⁸ “Theology” will be considered as a system of theoretical principles within the range of the opinions attested to by main-stream theologians, keeping in mind the Christian understanding of the word and concept, while, at the same time, avoiding discussion of the historical roots of the word, its derivatives and the many alternative appreciations of the term.

⁶⁹ Elie Wiesel, *The Gates of the Forest translated from the French by Frances Frenaye* (New York, NY: Avon, 1970), preface. The identical quotation is found on the book’s summative page.

⁷⁰ Andrew Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (London: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 27.

⁷¹ Whether North American native, [e.g., Basil Johnson, *The Bear-walker and Other Stories; Illustrated by David A. Johnson* (Toronto, ON: Royal Ontario Museum, 1995)]; or nationalistic: French [e.g., Charles Perrault, *The Complete Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)]; ancient Greek [e.g., Aesop’s Fables]; Japanese [e.g., “The Two Frogs,” in Andrew Land, *The Violet Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901)].

⁷² Lillian R. Klein, *Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 2.

Decalogue and other theological “lists” but an investigation of narrative components should hypothetically uncover theological intentions and religious meaning.

General theological sense of the book of *Judges* already have been proposed. For example, in his 1918 commentary, C.F. Burney distinctly affirmed and limited his interpretation of the book:

... this religious purpose stands out prominently in the main redactor's philosophy of history, according to which neglect of Yahweh's ordinances and the worship of strange gods lead to punishment, but true repentance is followed by a renewal of the Divine favour.”⁷³

Because an Interpreter can assume that inappropriate narrative devices would have been excised or minimalized, close scrutiny of all observable literary elements is germane to a discussion of the narrative's theological intention.⁷⁴

Analyses of stories using the markers of fantasy, humour and violence are valid theological endeavours and may amend any interpretation. I begin by introducing my exemplars and then move first to a discussion of fantasy and imagination because those permeate all other facets of every narrative study.

Bettelheim/Peseschkian, Leacock/Frye and Girard, as Exemplars

I chose my exemplars because each produced solid academic scholarship over a lengthy career. Each made unique contributions to the English-speaking

⁷³ C.F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes and Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings with an Introduction and Appendix, Prolegomenon* by William F. Albright (New York, NY: Ktav Publishing House, 1918, republished 1970), cxxi.

⁷⁴ Biblical texts seldom hint of external instructions so the Interpreter must hypothesize. *Judges* has no such external instructions as are found at the beginning of some Psalms. For example: *Psa. 6:0*, To the leader: with stringed instruments; according to The Sheminith.

scholastic world and, unlike many scholars, their thoughts and hypotheses moved from strictly academic circles to the main stream and are found in less academically-rigorous venues, including the popular media. Their influences have continued beyond their years of active research. All were intimately interested in, and involved in, an examination of the role that a story and storytelling had upon audiences, how “story” affects perceptions, imagination, understanding and overall philosophical development.

As a child psychologist at the University of Chicago, Bruno Bettelheim (1903-1990), was as well-known as Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson.⁷⁵ In contemporary psychoanalyst circles, he was as highly esteemed as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.⁷⁶ His book, *The Uses of Enchantment*,⁷⁷ was considered “the most prominent psychoanalytic study of fairy tales of the 1970s.”⁷⁸ The book remains important today because it introduced to the general

⁷⁵ Susan Willhauck, “Identity, Morality and Fantasy in the Works of Bruno Bettelheim: Implications for Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 93, no.2, 156.

⁷⁶ David James Fisher, *Bruno Bettelheim: Living and Dying* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008), 1.

⁷⁷ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York, NY: Knopf/Random House, 1976). There have been many hard cover and paperback editions since its initial publication, the latest in 2010. The book appeared erudite yet avoided any sense of scholarly exclusivity and seemed plausible and persuasive to the wider reading public. His ideas were subject to many newspaper and magazine articles in North America, and parts of Europe as well as public debates. See, among others, Richard Pollak, *The Creation of Dr. B: A Biography of Bruno Bettelheim*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 351; Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: from enchanted forests to the modern world, 2nd Edition* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002), 157, and Karen Zelan, “Bruno Bettelheim (1903-1990)” in *Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education* (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIII, no. 1/2, 1993, 85-100. ©UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2000.

⁷⁸ Besides being “one of the 159 most influential and frequently requested ‘Books of the Century’.” This came from the New York Public Library. It also won the 1976 National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism and the 1977 National Book Award in the category of “Contemporary Thought.” Vanessa Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between Fairy-Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retelling*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 123.

public, the significant role that fairy tales play in personal development.⁷⁹ It is valid to employ *Uses* as a reference in any discussion of this sort because of the book's continuing popularity and its "enormous impact on the didactic approach to fairytales."⁸⁰

Bettelheim worked primarily with Freudian ideas to develop a theory that the development of children's imagination is crucial to their well-being as adults.⁸¹ Exposure to fantasy stories, fairy and folk tales, and narratives with moral lessons encourage productive imagination, personal psychoanalytical and moral development, to help children prepare for the challenges of mature adulthood.⁸² He believed that these kinds of stories permit children to grapple with their deepest fears at a remote, symbolic level, at their individual stages of development.

Although his writings' originality has been discredited since his death⁸³ and his academic credentials are now suspect,⁸⁴ Bettelheim's overall influence

⁷⁹ Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives*, 185.

⁸⁰ Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives*, 184.

⁸¹ He was also influenced by Anna Freud, John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson. See Zelan, "Bruno Bettelheim," 85-100.

⁸² Bettelheim saw the importance of negativity in children's emotional development. Grimm tales are full of themes of darkness, abandonment, murder, betrayal, evil and injury as well as love, romance and personal fulfillment, change and growth. "The Grimms continue to be controversial." *BBC - Culture - Are Grimm's Fairy Tales too twisted for children?* Posted 1 August 2013. Accessed 30.09.2013.

⁸³ Bettelheim showed a lack of knowledge of relevant psychoanalytic studies and scholarship and little understanding of current research in some of his writings. "[Bettelheim's] analysis is surely insightful, but his scholarship is sloppy." Alan Dundes, "Bruno Bettelheim's Uses of Enchantment and Abuses of Scholarship," *The Journal of American Folklore*, 101, 411 (Winter 1991), 74-83, 76. Dundes, among others, maintains Bettelheim lifted passages from Julius Ernst Heuschler's *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy: Their Origin, Meaning and Usefulness*, (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1974) and put them in *Uses* without acknowledgement. See Sharman Stein, "Bettelheim Accused of Plagiarizing Book," *Chicago Tribune*, February 07 1991. Accessed 24.6.14.

⁸⁴ He claimed three PhDs *summa cum laude*, rather than the one he did have. He alleged he had studied with Arnold Schoenberg, met Sigmund Freud, taken psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic training, written

on North American culture persists with the continuing popularity of *The Uses of Enchantment* because he wrote well, lucidly and with passion.⁸⁵ During his lifetime, few people questioned his credentials, his background, his research ethics or his behaviours.⁸⁶ Even today, Bettelheim's is the first name the general public mentions in any critique of fairy tales, rather than Heuscher,⁸⁷ Rose,⁸⁸ Dundes,⁸⁹ Zipes⁹⁰ or Róheim.⁹¹

While Bettelheim's specific professional psychoanalytical emphasis and area of expertise was children, early in the Introduction of *Uses*, his comment, "nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to *child and adult alike* as the folk

books and worked extensively with emotionally disturbed children in Europe, all of which could not be adequately documented. Robert Gottlieb is sympathetic towards Bettelheim in his *New York Review* February 27, 2003 article, "The Strange Case of Dr. B" when he writes: "Bettelheim began to exaggerate his professional qualifications when he first arrived in America, immediately after his release from Buchenwald. He was without a job—without, really, a profession—and desperate to gain a foothold in a new world. I suspect he said what he thought it was necessary to say, and was then stuck with these claims later on, when he could neither confirm them (since they were false) nor, given his pride, acknowledge that he had lied." Gottlieb was Bettelheim's editor at Knopf. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2003/feb/27/the-strange-case-of-dr-b/> Accessed 23.06.2014.

⁸⁵ Over 5 000 citations of the work, according to Google Scholar.

⁸⁶ That is not to say that there was no critical analysis of his work prior to his death, rather that such criticisms remained within the academic milieu. Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives*, 184. See James W. Heisig, "Bruno Bettelheim and the Fairy Tales," *Children's Literature* 6, 1977, 93-114, which is a balanced critique of the book.

⁸⁷ Julius Ernst Heuscher published *Psychology, folklore, creativity, and the human dilemma* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2003).

⁸⁸ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

⁸⁹ Among Alan Dundes' many published works is *Interpreting folklore* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980). Dundes also edited a book on Freud so that his critique of Bettelheim has additional *gravitas*. [*Recollecting Freud* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press 2005)].

⁹⁰ Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: from enchanted forests to the modern world* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988).

⁹¹ Róheim's book likely influenced Bettelheim and is unacknowledged. Géza Róheim, *Psychoanalysis and anthropology: culture, personality and the unconscious* (New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1950, 2nd edition 1969).

fairy tale,”⁹² hints at his understanding of their importance for all people.⁹³ Several years after *Uses*’ publication, Nossrat Peseschkian was among the first psychoanalysts to make a scientifically substantiated connection between fairy/folk tales and *adult* psychoanalytical learning. His work was deemed “a new approach that taps fantasy and intuition and reactivates the individual’s potential for conflict-solving”⁹⁴ so that, while I will primarily refer to Bettelheim in the following discussion, Peseschkian’s work and conclusions give a universal applicability to Bettelheim’s conclusions and support his work.⁹⁵

Stephen Leacock (1869-1944) was the most celebrated and widely read Canadian author in the world in the early 20th Century.⁹⁶ Although he trained in political science and political economy, he was more generally famous for his humorous short stories. While his stories are widely ironic and biting, amusing,⁹⁷ his theorizing about humour is non-restrictive, broad and thoughtful.⁹⁸ In contrast,

⁹² Bettelheim, *Uses*, 5. Italics added.

⁹³ Bettelheim showed that he understood that such tales were appropriate reading for both adults and children, up until the 18th Century, although, he does not champion that as an acceptable 20th/21st Century concept. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Children of the Dream* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 53-54.

⁹⁴ The quotation is from the book jacket back cover. Nossrat Peseschkian, *Oriental Stories as Tools in Psychotherapy: The Merchant and the Parrot* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1986). Peseschkian (1933-2010) suggests that guided interpretations of the tales can be appropriate for adult patients. Although he uses Persian/Far Eastern fairy tales in his book, he stresses the universality of any appropriate tale in psychotherapy. Peseschkian founded “Positive Psychotherapy” in 1968. He was a major influence on European medical doctors and psychiatrists.

⁹⁵ Jack Zipes concurs: “[Fairy tales] were told in different social-cultural contexts as warning tales, initiation tales, celebration tales, ritual tales, worship tales and so on ... They could be amusing and edifying at the same time.” Bettelheim is prominently featured in a 2012 major article in the *Globe and Mail*, by Tralee Pearce, “Once Upon a Time,” March 16 2012, L1, from which this Jack Zipes’ quote is taken.

⁹⁶ Gerald Lynch, “Stephen Leacock,” *Canadian Encyclopaedia, Historica-Dominion, Stephen Leacock - The Canadian Encyclopedia*, accessed 11.02.2013.

⁹⁷ E.g., Stephen Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (London: J. Lane, 1912).

⁹⁸ Leacock, *H.* as well as *H. and H.*

as a highly esteemed literary theorist, and Canadian literary critic of note, Northrop Frye (1912-1991) was the author of two major books on the Bible from a literary perspective.⁹⁹ Frye's other works discussed and dissected the uses of narrative humour, particularly satire, parody and irony. He wrote extensively on imagination,¹⁰⁰ which complements Bettelheim's thoughts and observations. Frye proposes that ritual, myth and folk tales are manifestations of the imagination as a precursor for literary expression. Literature is the "central and most important extension of mythology ... every human society possesses a mythology which is inherited, transmitted and diversified by literature"¹⁰¹ Mythology and literature develop and work within the same imaginative world. Frye's writing was considered visionary and his ideas complement and enhance both Leacock's and Bettelheim's proposals.¹⁰²

René Girard (1923-2015) examined how violence affects the formation and manifestation of human culture. For him, human culture is based on violence that results in sacrificial offerings to end mimetic, or imitative, competition. Girard viewed Christianity as unique because of the way in which violence emerges and is resolved within the New Testament narratives in the presence of a non-violent

⁹⁹ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Books, 1990); *Words with Power: Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature*, edited by Michael Dolzani (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008); *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* Edited by Robert D. Denham (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁰ It is because of imagination that Frye was able to conceptualize his theories and the idea of the Bible as a great code of imagination. "The Educated Imagination" in *The Collected Work of Northrop Frye: Volume 21: The Educated Imagination and other Writings on Critical Theory 1933-1963* Edited by Germaine Warkentin (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press 2006).

¹⁰¹ Frye, *Words with Power*, xiii.

¹⁰² Frye's collected writings will encompass 30 volumes when completed for University of Toronto Press.

and loving God. In Christian writings, Girard claims the target of violence is an often-weak victim. When God is portrayed in a violent manner, Girard inferred it is a humanly imposed value that has been projected upon God rather than an innate attribute of the Divine.¹⁰³ Girard selected specific narrative pericopes from both books of the Bible to substantiate his theories. In the Hebrew Bible, in particular, he found supportive examples in the conversation of Cain with God and the tales of Joseph and Job.¹⁰⁴

Thus we have experts from entirely different disciplines, who had a detailed understanding of narrative, using imagination, humour and violence as their individual foci, with Frye's ideas encompassing both imagination and humour.¹⁰⁵ All have been world leaders in their fields, and their thoughts on the role and implications of narratives are worthy of examination, not only for their unique status in academia but also their long-term impact on the wider public.

It is particularly important to me that my national context and culture should be somehow reflected in my choices of paradigms. Because Leacock and Frye were preeminent influences on the Canadian popular and scholarly psyche

¹⁰³ See J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 48-49.

¹⁰⁴ *Gen.* 4; 39; book of Job. See René Girard, *I see Satan Fall like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 114, 107, 103-120.

¹⁰⁵ All were classically trained, of middle to upper class sensibilities working primarily within North American English-language academia. Bettelheim came from a well-to-do lumbering family and emigrated to the United States as a Jewish refugee in 1939. [Zelan, "Bruno Bettelheim (1903-1990)," 86]. While born and raised in Iran, Peseschkian lived in Germany from 1954 till his death. Leacock came from a wealthy English family. He was Canadian, politically active an upper-class Tory humanist. [Gerald Lynch, *Stephen Leacock* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 3-23, 63]. Only the Canadian Frye were trained formally as a theologian and Biblical scholar. French-born Girard studied in Paris during that Nazi occupation before going to the U.S. after WW II to do his doctorate. [Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Longman & Todd, 2004), 10-11].

for almost the entire 20th Century, I felt I would be remiss to ignore them. That their works continue to be read and discussed many years after their deaths, speaks to the universality of their ideas as a reflection of their Canadian cultural and linguistic individuality. To acknowledge and embrace a hermeneutical interpretation that is influenced by fellow Canadians is an intrinsic extension of my sense of nationality and academic being.

One must assume that, had I chosen different exemplars, I might reach different conclusions about my chosen texts. So be it. My analysis of the exemplars for this study begins with a discussion of fantasy, imagination and Bruno Bettelheim's and Nossrat Peseschkian's perceptions.

3-Fantasy, Imagination and Fairy Tales¹⁰⁶

*Imagination is a Raw Material*¹⁰⁷

“Men and women cannot subsist on the scanty satisfaction which they can extort from reality.”¹⁰⁸ However much we may deny it, humans cannot cope with the unvarnished, unembellished truth. We yearn for the “freedom from the domination of observed ‘fact’.”¹⁰⁹ Even in our daily converse, we seldom speak without some level of misrepresentation, distortion or overstatement, choosing words that enhance our narrative for the sake of poetic license, self-aggrandizement, or to engage the listeners’ creative thoughts and continuing interest.¹¹⁰

“Imagination” and its sibling, fantasy, have many meanings, inferences and exemplars.¹¹¹ At its most basic, imagination is an individual’s limitless intellectual ability to create ideas, concepts and mental pictures of situations, actions

¹⁰⁶ While I prefer the word “*märchen*” to fairy tale, the latter is the term employed by both Bettelheim and Peseschkian.

¹⁰⁷ Headline for a full-page advertisement for AECOM (an engineering, design, construction and management company) in the *Globe and Mail*, November 14, 2016, A13.

¹⁰⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. Translated and edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1974, c1964), 419.

¹⁰⁹ Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” 44. He calls the domain created by imagination and fantasy the “secondary world” or “secondary universe.” See also Ursula K. Le Guin, *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie* (Portland, OR: Pendragon Press, 1975), 27.

¹¹⁰ The “fish tale” involving the exaggeration in the size of the fish caught is classic.

¹¹¹ “What is it to imagine? ... shouldn’t we now spell out what they have in common? -- Yes, if we can. But I can’t.” Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: on the foundations of the representational arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 19. This book is considered by many to be the most important book on imagination of its era. [Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy]. Leslie Stevenson lists

and images that cannot be necessarily independently verified by the senses.¹¹²

Frye saw imagination as a way in which an individual interprets experience. He emphasizes the importance of imaginative reaction and reflection to stimulate creativity and innovation.¹¹³

“In the world of the imagination, anything goes that’s imaginatively possible but nothing really happens. If it did happen, it would move out of the world of imagination into the world of action.”¹¹⁴

Frye also contends that “[t]he imaginative or creative force in the mind is what has produced everything that we call culture and civilization” with the power “to transform with shape and meaning”¹¹⁵ because the mind is able to create something new, interconnecting imagination and reality.¹¹⁶ Frye differentiates between imagination and belief, acknowledging their interconnections.

Imagination is different from belief ... The play of imagination ... is condition[ed] only by the general trend of the mind at a given moment. Belief ... is immediately related to practical activity ... Belief endeavours to conform to the subject’s experienced conditions of faith ... whereas imagination as such is specifically free.¹¹⁷

twelve elements of imagination, although he does not claim exclusivity or all-inclusiveness. Leslie Stevenson, “Twelve Conceptions of Imagination,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43, no.3 (2003): 238.

¹¹² Frye, “Imagination,” 442-445. Frye contends that imagination and creativity, upon occasion, are motivated by “a rebellion against the tyranny of time and space,” (444-445).

¹¹³ Frye, “Imagination,” 441.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* Exaggeration is an intrinsic component of fantasy because it presumes a lack of, distortion of, or expansion of, realism to emphasize fictional (non-true) aspects.

¹¹⁵ Frye, “The Imaginative and the Imaginary,” in Frye, *The Collected Work: Volume 21*, 421. Leonardo da Vinci’s flying machines and submarines ceased to be fantasy upon their scientific creation. Some critics see science fiction writing as predictive of future creation(s). While scientists are often perceived by the wider public, to lack imagination, quite the opposite is true. Frye, “Imagination,” 442, 470.

¹¹⁶ The creation of Velcro is one example. George de Mestral observed the ability of burdocks to adhere to foreign objects and thought such adhesion had potential. Eight years later, he has a workable product. Claire Suddath, “A Brief History of: Velcro,” *Time Magazine*, June 15, 2010. Note that while imagination was the trigger of de Mestral’s invention with his ability to place disparate elements side by side, hard work, determination and perseverance were necessary to ensure his success.

¹¹⁷ Frye, “Imagination,” 463-64.

Fantasy is the intellectual amalgam of imagination, distortion, exaggeration.¹¹⁸

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason: and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity ... The keener and clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will make it.¹¹⁹

Fantasy is plausible and palatable and in no way restrictive; it transcends the literality of the words. Its use insinuates that there is, within the Narrator, a quest for escapism, or an inclination to elude routine realities (if only intellectually and/or in writing). Successful fantasy intermixes fiction and truth,¹²⁰ as a malleable, changeable abstraction, a particular way to portray the world and human existence, allowing and encouraging the Interpreter to engage with the story, to embellish and enrich understanding and the text's underlying theology. The world of the imagination contains all "unborn or embryonic beliefs" and is separate from the world of reality.¹²¹ Frye envisaged life as bi-polar. "We spend our lives partly in a waking world we call normal and partly in a dream world which we create of our own desires."¹²²

The most effective fantasy permits the Interpreter to engage individual imagination without limitations or restrictions. A narrative, by its very nature, may be

¹¹⁸ Fantasy contains imaginary things that are impossible or improbable. All narrative genres are enhanced by fantasy. See Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories"; Kearney, *On Stories* etc.

¹¹⁹ Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 50.

¹²⁰ See Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 36ff, 45.

¹²¹ Frye, "Imagination," 463-64.

¹²² Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," in *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Leonard F. Dean (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1961), 88.

prejudiced and discriminatory as a direct result of its Narrator's imagination and bias, and therefore fantastic. The purist may claim that all storytelling is fantasy because of the conflict between constancy and innovation. Invention and flexibility of thought impel the plot, characters and settings, while retaining the narrative's general literary coherence and internal consistency.¹²³ As Interpreters, we are aware of these proclivities from an early age when we are able to discern the possibilities of fantasy within the stories that we tell and are told.¹²⁴

Many stories in the Hebrew Bible tend to be minimalist lacking many identifiable details, personality traits, geographic particularities, and direct theological intentionality. There are few descriptors of persons, places or things in the text. This ambiguity encourages the use of imagination to suggest and enhance alternate intellectual and theological interpretations and meanings. The dearth of detail allows great latitude; each time they employ their imagination, Interpreters create an *Invisible Text*.

Invisible Text begins with the reader's imaginative formation of acceptable scenarios that are not contained within the writings but are consistent with its intent and meaning. Within the Ehud pericope, for example, the text says "The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (3:12). Nowhere is the

¹²³ The use of fantasy within narrative is common. For example, violence and humour become more extreme and would not be acceptable in reality but because the audience realizes they are fantastic, such narrative actions are accepted.

¹²⁴ By ten years of age most children are able to differentiate between fact and fantasy, although some children are able to discern the differences earlier. David Cohen and Stephen A. MacKeith, *The Development of Imagination: The Private Worlds of Childhood* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 27-45.

evil explained. The reader must supply the details from other Biblical texts, external readings and fantasy. The range of imaginative possibilities encourages a latitude of acceptable hypotheses, a diversity of interpretations and resultant scholarly discussions where credible academic scholarship is pivotal to support any acceptable or appropriate imaginative suggestions. The two, fantasy and scholarship, are meant to be interdependent and symbiotic.

In the Narrator's use of fantasy *and* the Interpreter's recognition and acceptance of that element, any tale may venture into the realms of fantasy while retaining an aura of truth and realism, theological and otherwise, a "multiple referentiality,"¹²⁵ ultimately making the fiction more interesting, engaging, challenging and exciting. Properly employed, fantasy does not interfere with place, time, plot and characterization but rather enhances them. Tolkien contends that all great stories have fantasy, escape, consolation and recovery¹²⁶ and such details do not preclude the use of other narrative tools.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ "Fantasy enables written words to transcend their literal meaning, to assume a multiple referentiality, and so to undergo the expansion necessary to transplant them as a new experience in the mind of the reader. In their archetypal aspects therefore, the images of fantasy lie at the origins of enchantment." William F. Touponce, *Ray Bradbury and the Poetics of Reverie: Fantasy, Science Fiction and the Reader* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), xvi.

¹²⁶ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 43ff.

¹²⁷ Like violence. In such movies as *The Three Stooges* the violence between the three men is fantastic (*i.e.*, impossible) and is considered humorous. The James Bond franchise, similarly portrays the violence so well, that it retains one level of believability while being truly unbelievable and fantastic. At the same time both examples prompt wonder and often laughter at their incredulity, showing clearly the interconnections between humour, violence and fantasy.

Tzvetan Todorov has useful insights for biblical scholars concerned with improbable, seemingly fantastic biblical incidents.¹²⁸ Todorov groups incredible or unbelievable incidents that might be considered supernatural, into two general categories: the “fantasy uncanny” and the “fantasy marvellous.” “Fantasy uncanny” involves an event or incident appearing, at first glance, to be miraculous, which upon further examination, has logical and intellectually valid roots so that the “rules of reality” are left in place.¹²⁹ The “fantasy marvellous” breaks the rules of reality and as such, comes within the “marvel” or “miracle” category. Rules of reality are unable to explain the situation.¹³⁰

A Biblical story need contain only a trace of the fantasy marvellous. With Balaam’s talking donkey (Num. 22), the story becomes fantasy only in the latter part of a credible and realistic plot. The story’s climax retains plausibility within the scope of the entire story, consistent with its overall theological intent as it ap-

¹²⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre. Translated from the French by Richard Howard* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).

¹²⁹ An example of the fantasy uncanny would be a character intermixing dreams and an awakened state and is unable to differentiate between the two. Depiction of madness, illusionary incidents, drug use etc. are examples of fantasy uncanny, where the character is deceived by external forces that are within the realm of reality. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 31-40.

¹³⁰ Jacob’s ladder and his wrestling match (Gen. 28) and Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishaël in the furnace do not work (4 Mac. 16:21) without a miracle, that which defies the rules of reality. They are, therefore, in the category of the fantasy marvellous. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 41-57.

appears to break the “rules of reality” with that talking animal. The incredulity of fantasy and its resulting humour come suddenly from a narrative which, to that point, was replete with the realism of *YHWH*’s spoken presence, grounded historical seriousness and theological import.¹³¹

Bettelheim and Peseschkian

Bettelheim and Peseschkian both acknowledge the crucial role of fantasy in their studies of the importance of fairy tales in human psychological development. Although they consistently use the term “fairy tale,” Bettelheim and Peseschkian present a psychoanalytical literary critique, employing the *märchen* genre. They are both cavalier in their use of “fairy tale” and “folk tale,” often confusing them. In reality they are both examining *märchen*.¹³²

As Freudian psychoanalysts, Bettelheim and Peseschkian assisted patients to discover meaning in their lives, to achieve balance and harmony, “so that one’s emotions, imagination and intellect mutually support and enrich one another.”¹³³ These skills begin with the development of an active and creative imagination, enhanced, amplified and intensified during an individual’s exposure to relevant literature, *i.e. märchen*, that provide alternatives of thought, behaviour and actions, present positive role models (heroes) and permit the reader to safely

¹³¹ The agnostic/atheist might claim that the characterization of God and God’s active involvement in the plot is fantasy uncanny.

¹³² See Thompson, *The Folktale*, 8, cited in full above.

¹³³ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 4.

grapple with their deepest fears at a remote, symbolic level, at their individual stages of development.¹³⁴

It is important to provide ... images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who ... find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence.¹³⁵

Bettelheim is talking strictly about *mental* images, the pictures that imagination creates in the mind, a crucial component in Biblical narrative, with its surfeit of physical depictions.¹³⁶ Bettelheim had unwittingly become a proponent of *bibliotherapy*, whose mandate proposes “that literature can treat a host of mental malaises; that reading can be deeply healing, and in predictable ways.”¹³⁷

The oral tradition from which each story sprang, and by which, its universal effect was modified, is important to Bettelheim as it is to Biblical texts.

¹³⁴ Bettelheim insisted that the children interact with the text without adult instruction, interpretation and direction, while Peseschkian guides adult patients within the individual story when they are under his direct psychoanalytical care. Bettelheim, *Uses*, 18, 65, 121. Peseschkian, *Oriental Stories*, 35-36. At the end of his book, Peseschkian posits stories for the reader to interpret, “didactic pieces that work without someone standing there with a raised finger; they are entertainment that does more than just entertain; they are guidelines, which each person can accept according to his needs,” 36. This is in accordance with Bettelheim’s attitude to personal, unguided reflection.

¹³⁵ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 11.

¹³⁶ Bettelheim was opposed to illustrations in books with fairytales because, for him, illustrations influence, impede and hamper the child’s imagination by imposing the artist’s rendition of the text, thereby limiting the reader’s imaginative interpretation. Bettelheim, *Uses*, 59-60.

¹³⁷ In the general understanding of the term, it applies to any knowledge that is imparted from a book rather than from personal experience or a structured teaching environment. The *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (2011) defines bibliotherapy as: “The use of books selected on the basis of content in a planned reading program designed to facilitate the recovery of patients suffering from mental illness or emotional disturbance.” Accessed 4.7.2014. Samuel Crothers coined the word in “A Literary Clinic,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, 118, no.3, (September 1916), 291–301 although the Pre-Christian Greeks saw books as spiritually and psychologically relevant to personal development. A. K. Sullivan and H. R. Strang, “Bibliotherapy in the classroom: Using literature to promote the development of emotional intelligence,” *Childhood Education*, 79(2), (2002), 74-80. It has no direct connection to Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy, which is more theoretical and broad-based, beginning with the idea that human behaviour is prompted by a search for meaning in life. [Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006)]. Bibliotherapy, instead, concentrates on reading materials as tools for learning, contemplation and healing.

Through the centuries (if not millennia) during which, in their retelling, fairy tales became ever more refined, they came to convey at the same time overt and covert meanings — came to speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality, communicating in a manner which reaches the uneducated mind of the child as well as that of the sophisticated adult.¹³⁸

Note Bettelheim's acknowledgement of the universality of the stories' influence, which is supported by Peseschkian. This lens allows the reader to identify and relate to exemplars of good and inappropriate behaviours and moral values in the Biblical tales, so that people will intellectually and emotionally mature as they discover theological and hermeneutical insights. For Bettelheim, "maturity" meant that people become "masters of their destiny" with implied independence and self-reliance.¹³⁹

Because I read and evaluate the three Biblical stories as folktale or *märchen*, rather than as historical renditions, Bettelheim's and Peseschkian's analyses have relevance. The reader comes to understand allegorically, as the ego gains control over the id.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 5-6. Bettelheim reiterates the importance of the oral traditions of the parent-to-child recitation of tales (150-54). Joosen contends that the fairy tale's healing and liberating power rests on its long oral tradition. "The fairy tale ... is ... the result of common conscious and unconscious content .. shaped by ... the consensus of many in regard to what they view as universal human problems, and what they accept as desirable solutions." Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives*, 125. Susan Niditch says something similar about the development of Biblical narratives. "... all of us who have worked in this area agree that one can never truly know whether or not individual pieces of Israelite literature were orally composed or based on oral compositions, nor can one reconstruct with certainty the social contexts so essential to understanding folk genres as oral performance and interaction." Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press 1993), 6.

¹³⁹ Bruno Bettelheim "Foreword," in *German Fairy Tales: Edited by Helmut Brackert and Volkmar Sander, Foreword by Bruno Bettelheim, Illustrations by Otto Ubbelodhe, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and Others* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1985), xv.

¹⁴⁰ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 65. The child is not expected to be able to recognize this dispute nor articulate it as an ego-id conflict. Bettelheim's book and its terminology are meant for adults.

[F]airy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence -- but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.¹⁴¹

The struggles and hardships that the child/hero encounters are a necessary element of emotional and intellectual development. The individual needs opportunities to develop ingenuity, initiative and independence in order to become self-reliant and mature. This also is one potential goal for those studying the Bible. All these elements require the ability to fantasize.¹⁴²

Bettelheim utilized specific Grimm fairy tales in his work because he believed their original intention supported his (Bettelheim's) theorization.¹⁴³

When the brothers Grimm spoke of the education children can derive from these tales, they had not school learning in mind, but education in the best, the highest humanistic sense, an education that, as it nourishes the child's mind, teaches him much about his very nature, aspects of which he can understand only when these are presented to him in the symbolic language of art which speaks directly to his deepest longings, relieves his anxieties, kindles his hopes so that he can meet the vagaries of life with greater confidence.¹⁴⁴

Fairy tales/*märchen* deal with inner processes that permit victory over the self. They "provided a place to explore the unconscious ... and help the child

¹⁴¹ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 8.

¹⁴² Bettelheim, *Uses*, xvi.

¹⁴³ Peseschkian used Persian/Iranian fairy tales.

¹⁴⁴ Grimms, *German Fairy Tales*. xii.

overcome irrational fears.”¹⁴⁵ It is the unconscious that is the most important influence on individual behaviour, for Bettelheim.¹⁴⁶ The reader is able to access the unconscious without being overwhelmed by it.¹⁴⁷ Moral standards and problem solving techniques within the narrative are extrapolated that assist the readers to deal with unspoken emotions, fears and desires to develop self-confidence and face reality.

Fairy tale boundaries are clear, the spaces manageable.¹⁴⁸ Good always triumphs.¹⁴⁹ Each character has a polarized personality with few ambiguities of personality or plot.¹⁵⁰ Many plots focus on normal, non-heroic people who triumph over evil situations and people. Predicaments are presented as existential in their most basic form: personal (or national) existence hinges upon the protagonist’s successful actions. Evil is defeated: “the wicked are punished in the end.”¹⁵¹ The finality and irrevocability of the result gives closure to the conflict, liberating the Protagonist and the reader, linking the reader to the universal good of the world.

[T]he fairy tale hero proceeds for a time in isolation, as the modern child often feels isolated ... The fate of these heroes convinces the child

¹⁴⁵ Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives*, 130-131, reiterated in Bettelheim, *Uses*, 147, and Peseschkian, *Oriental Stories*, 24-25.

¹⁴⁶ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 147. Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives*, 134, 213. Bettelheim discourages any intercession by supervising adults. “Adult interpretations ... rob the child of the opportunity to feel that he, on his own, ... has coped successfully with a difficult situation,” Bettelheim, *Uses*, 118-19.

¹⁴⁸ Joosen, *Critical and Creative*, 206. It is only when the reader deeply reflects on the plot that the nuances occur, and this happens *at each individual level of development*.

¹⁴⁹ “[E]vil is as omnipresent as virtue.” Bettelheim, *Uses*, 8.

¹⁵⁰ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 10.

¹⁵¹ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 147. Similarly, “simple selfish” behaviour is dealt with. Bettelheim, *Uses*, 148-150.

that, like them, he may feel outcast and abandoned in the world, groping in the dark, but, like them, in the course of his life he will be guided step by step, and given help when it is needed. ... the child needs the reassurance offered by the image of the isolated man who nevertheless is capable of achieving meaningful and rewarding relations with the world around him.¹⁵²

That success and “happy” ending permit the major characters to recover and consolidate. The struggle against evil may have been costly but “[m]orality is not the issue ... rather, the assurance that one can succeed.”¹⁵³ This allows readers to recall disturbing memories and desires, permitting them to have “revenge fantasies” without guilt, engaging only the individual’s internal dialogue and imagination.¹⁵⁴ Because of such healing and liberating power, readers become equipped to engage the “real” world with confidence. They develop an ability to deal with their own inner processes and defeat their own interior negative self in a non-threatening environment. Armed with this self-confidence and self-control they are able to figuratively “conquer the world,” because “the child feels that all’s well with the world, and that he can be secure in it, only if the wicked are punished eventually.”¹⁵⁵

Bettelheim and Peseschkian together provide evidence that *märchen* or fantastic stories play a crucial role in fostering personal development, promoting individual maturation processes and imbuing historical and cultural heritage for

¹⁵² Bettelheim, *Uses*, 11.

¹⁵³ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 10. G.K. Chesterton said “Fairytale is more than true not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.” A variant interpretation, from *Tremendous Trifles* (1909), XVII: “The Red Angel.”

¹⁵⁴ Joosen, *Critical and Creative*, 125, 135, 138.

¹⁵⁵ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 147

all age groups.¹⁵⁶ When the learner can use exploratory and autonomous tools or techniques that create independence, valuable learning has taken place. Meaning became most effective and valid when the individual has internalized the learning and can utilize the knowledge in other situations.

Both also suggest that the individual story delivers crucial information to the three levels of the mind, the preconscious, the conscious and the unconscious, information that will be appropriated at whatever psychoanalytical stage the individual is at.¹⁵⁷ They claim that all stories that involve elements of fantasy encourage positive healthy development and behaviours. Such stories provide “problem solving” techniques, implying moral guidance. Such knowledge helps the individuals identify acceptable values for the society in which they live from which religious and theological components are developed. The connection between moral standards and religious beliefs/theologies is one that Bettelheim identifies but does not examine in great detail.¹⁵⁸ He does, however,

¹⁵⁶ Bettelheim rejects “teacher-centred” models for a child’s learning, although he concedes that “[t]he adult’s sense of active participation in telling the story makes a vital contribution to, and generally enriches, the child’s experience of it.” Bettelheim, *Uses*, 156.

¹⁵⁷ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 6, 12, 16. Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives*, 125, 159. “As with great art, the fairy tale’s deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life.” Bettelheim, *Uses*, 12. People become aware of exemplars of both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. “... fairy stories represent in imaginative form what the process of healthy human development consists of ... [T]his book [*Uses*] explicates why fairy tales make such great and positive psychological contributions to the child’s inner growth.” Bettelheim, *Uses*, 12, 155.

¹⁵⁸ Bettelheim understands that possibility, while at the same time generally avoiding the topic, making statements meant to prompt a reader’s interest, without further explanation. *E.g.*, in discussing Hansel and Gretel, he describes the children being forced to cross a “big water” on their return home. “The children do not encounter any expanse of water on their way in. Having to cross one on their return symbolizes a transition and new beginning on a *higher level of existence (as in baptism.)*” *Uses*, 164. Italics added. See also 13-14. Peseschkian makes no direct mention of that potential.

acknowledge the literary connections between Biblical narratives and fairy tales.¹⁵⁹

All *märchen* help people deal with, and resolve, their own lives and realities through narrative discourse in their linguistic encouragement of the individual's imaginative capacities and do so at the deepest level with which the person is able to accept it.¹⁶⁰

Despite his appreciation that many people believe that the Bible contains all the answers to all the questions humans could ask and provides "prototypes for man's imagination,"¹⁶¹ Bettelheim found Biblical stories "did not offer solutions for the problems posed by the dark side of our personalities."¹⁶² He suggests that the Bible proposes repression as its only coping mechanism. For him, this technique would not succeed with children because they do not have adequate control of their *ids*. At this stage of their development, children need opportunities for fantasy and power/control over a situation. For Bettelheim, fairy tales provide this and the Bible does not. It causes similar challenges for adults. Keeping in mind his opinion about the usefulness of the Biblical text in his remarks of humans' darker side and his overall conclusions about repression, Bettelheim hints of the potential for moral and religious edification that can be deduced from a careful reading of Biblical narratives.

¹⁵⁹ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 53.

¹⁶⁰ Usually, the unconscious. Bettelheim, *Uses*, 12, mirroring the classic definition of bibliotherapy. Peseschkian concurs.

¹⁶¹ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 52.

¹⁶² Bettelheim, *Uses*, 55.

Lest one suspect that Bettelheim and Peseschkian were working in isolation, it is relevant to note that, since the 1970s, there has been an increasing interest in the universal role such tales play to “impart a knowledge of the self and the world that would otherwise be inaccessible”¹⁶³ to the entire population.¹⁶⁴

Adding support to Bettelheim and Peseschkian, Michael Metzger affirms:

... the fairy tale is the best model we have of the way in which the psyche integrates the experiential world with its own needs and desires and explicates its being in the world to itself. ... The value of fairy-stories is thus not, in my opinion, to be found by considering children in particular... and should not be specially associated with children.”¹⁶⁵

This is specifically germane since it was only in the 20th Century that these genres had become “children’s literature.” In previous times, the Bible and fantasy stories, folk tales, fairy tales, fables, parables, myths, and legends, were fodder for adults.¹⁶⁶

The important role that such fiction types can play in a reader’s moral education and development has a distinguished and ongoing history.¹⁶⁷ G. Ronald

¹⁶³ Michael M. Metzger and Katharina Mommsen, eds., *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing: Essays on Märchen in Psychology, Society and Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1981), 7.

¹⁶⁴ Examples include Jack Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes (New York, NY: Bantam, 1987), xxxi.; and Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Vintage Press, 1995), 211, 228. These authors see hints of Christianity within the Grimm collection.

¹⁶⁵ Metzger and Mommsen, eds., *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing*, 7-8.

¹⁶⁶ The Grimm Brothers’ original motivation in gathering the *märchen* was scholarly; several of their mentors considered their Household Tales inappropriate for children. Linda Dégh, “Grimm’s Household Tales and its place in the Household: The Social Relevance of a Controversial Classic” in *Fairy Tales*, 27, eds. Metzger and Mommsen, 32. Perrault wrote his fairy tales for the (adult) court of Louis XIV. Hans Christian Andersen wrote to entertain the families who subsidized him (*i.e.*, the adults).

¹⁶⁷ Academic publications in this area include: Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Noel Carroll “The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Narrative and Moral Knowledge,” *Journal*

Murphy examined the Grimm tales in relationship to his evaluation of Wilhelm Grimm's spirituality.¹⁶⁸ Martha Nussbaum proposes that while reading, one can learn to identify morally appropriate behaviours which can enhance learning.¹⁶⁹ Mark Johnson ties moral development and understanding to the individual's imaginative abilities encouraged through literature. An individual may envisage morally appropriate scenarios and their alternatives, come to an understanding of their ramifications and reach personally-developed moral concepts to the situation with imagination.¹⁷⁰ These scholars concur with Bettelheim's and Peseschkian's overviews in the role of fantastic literature.

Harvey Cox also suggests that "Fantasy is important to the psyche" and mythology, myths and fantasy are essential to any identification of religious intent as "the richest source of human creativity."¹⁷¹ He contends that they link the past, the present and the future together and are essential to human life. For Cox, "religion is to a civilization what fantasy is to an individual."¹⁷² Noting that myths often

of *Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 60, no.1 (2002): 3–26; G. Currie "The Moral Psychology of Fiction," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 73, no. 2 (1995): 250–259; Amy Mullin, "Moral Defects, Aesthetic Defects, and the Imagination," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62, no.3 (2004): 249–61; and Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion And Its Role In Literature, Music, And Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

¹⁶⁸ G. Ronald Murphy concludes that Wilhelm thought three crucial elements of Christian belief, the Holy Spirit, divine awareness of human events and the Resurrection, as well as the two great commandments, could be seen in various tales. G. Ronald Murphy, S.J., *The Owl, the Raven, and the Dove: The Religious Meaning of the Grimms' Magic Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vii. The five tales Murphy examines duplicate five of the seven choices Bettelheim made. Murphy, *The Owl*, 14, 39.

¹⁶⁹ Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 46-48.

¹⁷⁰ Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Ch. 8, "Moral Imagination," 185-216.

¹⁷¹ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1969), 59, 65, 68-69, 80.

¹⁷² Cox, *The Feast*, 68.

played a crucial part in the development of ritual, he sees ritual in its social dimension as “social” and “embodied fantasy.”¹⁷³ Cox envisages that narratives could be useful in assisting an individual to connect fact and fantasy as two aspects of reality, and could be applicable to Biblical narratives.¹⁷⁴

“Fairy tales for children [are] universal, ageless, therapeutic, miraculous and beautiful.”¹⁷⁵ People are strengthened and enabled to deal with life, using their imagination and conceptualizations of fantasy. Where better to exercise the imagination than in the Bible when it too is “universal, ageless, therapeutic, miraculous and beautiful” so that people are strengthened and enabled to deal with the life that will unfold for them?

A Summation

Bettelheim and Peseschkian believed that improving the individual’s capability to imagine beyond their personal experience was crucial to an individual’s personal intellectual and emotional growth and ultimate maturation to maximize personal and theological development.

¹⁷³ Cox, *The Feast*, 71, 73. While making the connection between religious meditation and “guided fantasy,” (77), he also issued a strong caution that “ritual becomes ideology when it is used to throttle creativity to channel religious fantasy into safely accepted molds” (71-72).

¹⁷⁴ Cox, *The Feast*, 78. The various authors in *Why Narrative?* link personal identity and moral and religious integrity to the story of the community. They emphasize the role of the narrative and its social significance where God is identified in, through and beyond the Biblical narrative. “We are concerned with suggesting that narrative ... is a crucial conceptual category for such matters as understanding issues of epistemology and methods of argument, depicting personal identity and displaying the content of Christian convictions.” Hauerwas and Jones, eds., *Why Narrative?* 4-5.

¹⁷⁵ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 2. Zipes’ book concerns “the fairy-tale discourse as dynamic part of the historical civilizing process.” (11) His final chapter involves “the liberating potential of the fantastic,” 170-192.

The intention of fantasy, the manifestation of imagination, is always to maximize narrative themes and overall impact.¹⁷⁶ Fantasy, allows the Interpreter to engage in and with a story, to experience challenging and unusual situations without the emotional and physical upheaval that would accompany any realistic equivalent. During their maturation process and their development of personal imagination, individuals learn to differentiate between human and non-human realities/worlds. It is a method of escapism, an encouragement or inclination to break free from the routine or unpleasant as a diversion from the surrounding world, which fulfills a psychological need of control or choice.¹⁷⁷

Fantasy is an internal and intellectual liberation that generates an alternate reality for the participant. It encourages and permits development of unorthodox thoughts and creative problem-solving techniques. It strengthens self-awareness and affirms, or reconfirms, the ideals that the text's creator intended. In the perfection of imagination, the reader can achieve the emotional and spiritual substitute s/he seeks.¹⁷⁸

To suggest that the Hebrew Bible contains fantasy is appropriate.

¹⁷⁶ Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 17-22.

¹⁷⁷ See Hart and Khovacs, eds., *Tree of Tales*, 21ff.

¹⁷⁸ Eric H. Erikson specifically names children in his support of daydreams (and fantasy). I would suggest that this view is too restrictive. Eric H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, NY: Norton, 1973), 183ff. Freud has a positive view of fantasy within daydreaming as valuable resources for psychological health and well-being for all ages. Freud, *Introductory Lectures*, 419. See also Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 55-61, in which he deals with the ideas of "Escape and Consolation."

Like Biblical stories and myths, fairy tales were the literature which edified everyone -- children and adults alike --- for nearly all of man's existence. Except that God is central, many Bible stories can be recognized as very similar to fairy tales.¹⁷⁹

The idea of an interconnection between *märchen* and the Bible is not a recent proposal.¹⁸⁰

To introduce folklore and the Bible is ... is a particularly important cross-discipline for contemporary Biblical scholarship ... Folklorists insist upon the importance of treating pieces of lore as valuable artistic wholes ... folklore is a means of enhancing the appreciation and understanding of Biblical texts.¹⁸¹

It is my contention that the Judges' stories have retained their fantastic elements through their various redactions because there was agreement among the text's consolidators that the stories and their fantastic elements had educational, canonical and theological worth as "stories that matter."¹⁸² The use of imagination is deliberate, identifiable and worthwhile¹⁸³ because fantasy in no way discredits such concepts as "miracles."¹⁸⁴

Fantasy within the Hebrew Bible supports Frye's evaluation of ideal literature:

¹⁷⁹ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 53.

¹⁸⁰ Tolkien believed that some scriptures' narratives contain the "essence" of fairy stories in 1964. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 19, 88-89.

¹⁸¹ Niditch, *Folklore*, 91.

¹⁸² "Stories that matter attract a ritual way of being told." Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Passover and Easter: The Symbolic Structuring of Sacred Seasons* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 5.

¹⁸³ William Blake connected the existence of God and human imagination. Frye, "The Imaginative and the Imaginary" in Frye, *The Collected Work: Volume 21*, 421-433.

¹⁸⁴ Todorov's definitions neatly solve this issue.

Literature gives us an experience that stretches us vertically to the heights and depths of what the human mind can conceive, to what corresponds to the conceptions of heaven and hell in religion ... No matter how much experience we may gather in life, we can never in life get the dimension of experience that the imagination gives us.¹⁸⁵

The fantastic elements identified in the three *Judges*' pericopes are valid enhancements to the plots, characterizations, settings, moods and tones and amplify and do not contradict their underlying theological and philosophical objectives. An individual pericope may have at its base a metaphorical or miracle-based theological intention, using fantasy as a narrative tool¹⁸⁶ but fantasy is only one narrative component of Biblical stories. At the same time, discerning fantasy or exaggeration does not demand exclusivity or preclude other narrative ploys.¹⁸⁷

"[W]hen fantasy is the real thing, nothing, after all, is realer" (sic).¹⁸⁸

From this consideration of fantasy as a component in the story telling, and the idea that these pericopes have *märchen* qualities, I move to the second part of the three-part puzzle: the use of humour in Biblical narratives and its role as a theological device.

¹⁸⁵ Frye, "Imagination," 472-473.

¹⁸⁶ "Christian Fantasy" has been a creative focus for many theologians. See Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories" and Lewis, "Myth becoming Fact" in C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*. Edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 63-67.

¹⁸⁷ George R.R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones* (New York, NY: Bantam, 2013) and the James Bond franchises are good examples where all three elements, fantasy, humour AND violence are employed.

¹⁸⁸ Le Guin, *From Elfland*, 28.

4-Humour: “The highest product of our civilization”¹⁸⁹

Stephen Leacock could think of nothing more valuable to humanity than humour, a necessary component of life and a remedy to vanity since, for him, vanity was intrinsically laughable.¹⁹⁰ Henri Bergson says something similar: a person must treat “comedy as the premise to civilization.”¹⁹¹ Northrop Frye concurs when he contends that humour is an integral element in all life and all literature. He proposes that humour can be a valid aspect of any narrative, history, drama or tragedy without contradiction or loss of literary integrity.¹⁹² Humour, for him, fulfills an integrated role in a relationship with the *entirety* of the critical analyses of narrative.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Leacock, “Humour As I See It: And something about Humour in Canada,” *Maclean’s*, May 1916, 113, quoted in *Stephen Leacock*, Lynch, 24. It is to be hoped that by analyzing humour we will not kill it, as E.B. White points out “Humor can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.” “Some Remarks on Humor” in *Essays of E.B. White*, E.B. White (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1977), 303.

¹⁹⁰ Lynch, *Stephen Leacock*, 181. Leacock, *H.*, 208-209.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Wylie Sypher, *Comedy: an essay on Comedy: George Meredith, Laughter/Henri Bergson. Introduction and appendix “The meaning of Comedy by Wylie Sypher* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956 [1980 4th reprint; originally published in 1877]), xvi. The role of humour in society continues as a contentious issue. *E.g.*, the terrorist attack in Paris on January 7 2015, on the offices of the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, and the attacks related to the Danish political cartoons.

¹⁹² Frye, “The Argument,” 85-88.

“What causes laughter to one person is anathema to another.”¹⁹³

The study of humour is a serious activity and much academic ink has been spilt to explain and interpret it. Like beauty and violence, humour's nature and functionality is “in the eye of the beholder,” which poses an intellectual and methodological conundrum.¹⁹⁴ There are diverse opinions of the origins, manifestations, understandings, implications and theories of “humour,” “comic” and “laughter” and it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop a definition that would be universally acceptable.¹⁹⁵ Frye particularly emphasized the importance of a reader's *imaginative reaction*, which thereby authorizes a multitude of reactions and interpretations.¹⁹⁶ Humour observed in Biblical texts would suggest that the Bible's Narrators felt the Bible's theological and philosophical mandates would be enhanced and enriched by humour's presence. “Biblical humour dissected is Biblical humour deconstructed. And that is indeed comical, even funny,” according to Radday and Brenner.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Yehudi T. Radday & Athalya Brenner, “Between Intentionality and Reception: Acknowledgement and Application (A Preview)” in, *On Humour*, eds. Radday & Brenner 19.

¹⁹⁴ Many academics consider humour indefinable, e.g. R. Escarpit, *L'humour* (Paris: 1963), quoted in Radday & Brenner, “Between Intentionality and Reception,” 23.

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, Victor Raskin, ed., *The Primer of Humour Research* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008) or the over 61 000 articles and e-journals that are currently available through the University of Toronto Library System.

¹⁹⁶ Frye, “The Imaginative and the Imaginary” in *The Collected Work: Volume 21*, Frye, 421.

¹⁹⁷ Radday & Brenner, “Between Intentionality and Reception,” 19.

Humour is one of the great equalizers in life and literature and should be treated seriously whether we enjoy it or not. I consider that "humour" can incorporate any or all concepts that comprise an ordinary understanding of the terms "playfulness," "comedy," "comic," and "laughter." Emotions of "fear, anger, pity, and sadness involve seriousness; playfulness is the opposite of seriousness."¹⁹⁸ One manifestation of playfulness is humour. Humour need not be a specific type of literature, it can be an element within. Humour can be connected to laughter, joy and mirth, but these components are not exclusive. Humour may also be observed in situations where laughter and mirth have no place.

Humour is found everywhere when an incongruous situation that may be "comically appropriate with an unlooked-for turn of meaning," creates a situation that is suitable and plausible, though surprising.¹⁹⁹ It should evoke an audience response.²⁰⁰ A contradictory situation is comically appropriate with an unforeseen change in meaning. Narrative truth is not compromised or impeded by an appropriate humorous scenario.

Frye's philosophical and theoretical discussion of "comedy" separates it conceptually from the ideas of "humour."²⁰¹ He uses the term "comedy" to refer to

¹⁹⁸ John Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17.

¹⁹⁹ Athalya Brenner, "On the Semantic Field," in *On Humour*, eds. Radday & Brenner, 40.

²⁰⁰ That may include an emotional reaction like laughter, an intellectual trigger that may encourage many responses including reflection.

²⁰¹ Frye, "Argument," in *Shakespeare*, Dean, 81-82.

one of his three categories of narrative.²⁰² Comedy, in narrative, concerns the protagonist's ultimate integration into the "new" society that he has helped create.²⁰³ Comedy was a light dramatic work that is often humourous or satirical in tone, with a happy resolution of the thematic conflict, sometimes having jokes, satire or humourous elements in the narrative.²⁰⁴ For Frye, "Comedy is designed not to condemn evil, but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge."²⁰⁵ Comedy could serve as a social stimulation and assist in the successful integration of society.²⁰⁶

The movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the end of the play, the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero ... when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery ...²⁰⁷

Humour was a more specific, narrative component, having the facility of seeing, expressing and/or appreciating that which is amusing or comical.²⁰⁸ For Frye, humour was a literary device with a universality and overall integration ra-

²⁰² Frye places fictional literature into one of three major or general systems: Tragic, Comic and The-matic, according to the hero's behaviour and power in comparison to the reader. Frye, *Anatomy*, 33. Frye's typology of narrative modes was flexible, paying attention to plot only as a tool with which to evalu-ate the protagonist.

²⁰³ Frye, *Anatomy*, 43.

²⁰⁴ Frye evolves five modes. In the first four, *myth*, *romance*, *high mimetic* and *low mimetic*, humour is based on the interactions of archetypal characters. Within the plot development, situations occur in which the audience can perceive humour. Humour is not a prominent feature. The *ironic comedy*, Frye's final mode, has the widest range of possible comedic outcomes, from the savagery of the fully developed Scapegoat scenario to a more benevolent satire/parody. (Frye, *Anatomy*, 38-40, 160.)

²⁰⁵ Frye, "Argument," in *Shakespeare*, Dean, 81-82. He further supports the idea that "Nothing human is alien to me."

²⁰⁶ Frye, "Argument," 81-82.

²⁰⁷ Frye, *Anatomy*, 163.

²⁰⁸ Frye, "Argument," 84 ff.

ther than a "type." Rather than spending time discussing puns, word plays, parody, wit, *et al.*, he assumes the reader is well acquainted with them as literary forms and concentrates on a broader overview of the philosophies, concepts and theories that are integrated into comedy.²⁰⁹ Frye identifies humour in its place, but does not examine its whys and wherefores nor its effects on the audience. "... humour was investigated only by reference to a larger whole ... rather than being related specifically to its social and psychological roots: why people are amused ..."²¹⁰ Humour was more specific within Comedy, as a narrative component, having the facility of seeing, expressing and/or appreciating that which is amusing or comical.²¹¹ Humour for Frye is based on the narrative interactions of archetypal characters.²¹² Situations occur in which the audience can perceive humour in the plot, but it need not be a prominent feature of the story. His emphasis in comedy evolved around the revolution and development of society.²¹³ The majority of his comments, and, therefore, his interest about humour, centres upon

²⁰⁹ Alvin A. Lee and Jean O'Grady, *Northrop Frye on religion: excluding The great code and Words with power*, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 558. Frye felt that humour fulfills an integrated role in a relationship with the entirety of the critical analyses of narrative. [John Parkin, *Humour Theorists of the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 177]. He does acknowledge the importance of puns in the original biblical text and how they are lost in translation. "On the Great Code: Interview with Don Harron, Morningside," in *Northrop Frye on Religion*, eds., Northrop Frye and Jean O'Grady (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 549.

²¹⁰ Parkin, *Humour Theorists*, 177.

²¹¹ Frye, "Argument," 84 ff.

²¹² The archetype imposter (the *alazon*) tries to be more than he is in contrast to the character who depreciates himself and his value (the *eiron*). Frye, *Anatomy*, 28-40, 160.

²¹³ Frye, *Anatomy*, 163.

irony and satire as literary devices. He was considered specifically a “formidable ironist.”²¹⁴

“In comedy, the moral norm is not morality but deliverance.”²¹⁵ Comedy within an otherwise “dramatic” narrative indicates the Narrator’s preference for a narrative conclusion that shows deliverance from adversity, rather than an exposé of moral lapses.²¹⁶ George Meredith was in complete agreement. “Comedy is the fountain of sound sense.”²¹⁷

Frye organizes and systematizes humour as a genre. By the conclusion of the comic narrative, the society that emerges becomes the norm, replacing the pre-existing, flawed community. “The essential comic resolution, therefore, is an individual release which is also a social reconciliation.”²¹⁸ The overall purpose of the comic is the ultimate integration of society.²¹⁹ Humour’s dramatic function becomes a mechanism within which one is able to express a state of ritual tension, through which the humour triumphs by breaking or destroying absurd or irrational expectations.

²¹⁴ Harold Bloom in the “Foreword,” in *Anatomy*, Frye vii.

²¹⁵ Frye, “Argument,” 87, referring to the role of comedy in two of Shakespeare’s works that others might consider “dramas.”

²¹⁶ Using Falstaff and Shylock, Frye concludes that the rejection of Falstaff shows appropriate moral norms -- the successful maturity of Prince Henry — and not humour while Shylock’s fall shows a humour with the deliverance from his “absurd and vicious bond” exemplified by an unreasonable imposition of usury.

²¹⁷ Meredith, “An Essay on Comedy,” in *Comedy*, Sypher, 14.

²¹⁸ Frye, “Argument,” 81. For him literary merit trumps any “message merit.” Frye, “Secular Scripture,” 168.

²¹⁹ Frye, *Anatomy*, 182.

The *ironic comedy*, for Frye, has the widest range of possible comedic outcomes, from the savagery of a fully developed Scapegoat scenario to a more benevolent satire/parody. The hero is deemed lesser in power or intelligence, permitting the audience to develop a sense of superiority. The archetypal figure, the *pharmakos*, the scapegoat, has one important role: to introduce and disseminate humour or frivolity throughout the narrative. The *pharmakos* is a social isolate, a social enemy and this dynamic induces the humour. This character is not integrated into the tale's society; his fate is undeserved, he is an innocent. Such a person is evaluated according to the values and morals of the society in which he is found and this evaluation often takes a ritualistic tone. He is socially identified, *not* self-identifying. He is "the target of the ironist ... an element within social consciousness not certain individuals who personify this element"²²⁰ and there can be no irony without him. Most actions directed towards the *pharmakos* are punitive, inflicting pain and tragedy while encouraging the reader to find humour in the entire situation.²²¹ The *pharmakos* is *not* the victim that he would become in a tragedy and this is an important distinction.²²²

The comedic interpretation and resultant laughter is based on persecution of the *pharmakos*, who must be driven out of the society. This humour presents amusement or entertainment, with a ludic quality, where the laughter has an im-

²²⁰ Parkin, *Humour Theorists*, 179.

²²¹ Frye, *Anatomy*, 45. This is a most negative humour. His theorization is not as developed as Girard's.

²²² Parkin, *Humour Theorists*, 188; Frye, *Anatomy*, 41-42, 46.

portant role: to rescue the entire episode “from the unpleasant, even the horrible.”²²³ Moral ambiguities abound. At one extreme, ironic comedy borders on savagery and mob violence, inflicting pain on a helpless victim. At the other extreme, ironic comedy may become a satire of a community obsessed with a sense of their own social (self) worth and intellectual superiority. Such narratives may even depict a *pharmakos* who is wiser than the society that rejects him and one of the plot twists may occur when he ultimately triumphs over that society.

Frye’s concentration on irony, parody and satire, limits his analysis. While attempting to integrate themes of “the comic” into an overall view of society, he considered comedy an integral, element of society, just as he considers the appropriate end result of comic narrative as social integration, not segregation.²²⁴ He contends that humour/comedy is an integral element of narrative and should be validly studied but not separated from the whole.²²⁵

The interplay of the reader’s interactions with the text often determines whether particular words are regarded as humourous or not because of particular contextual values and cultural limitations.²²⁶ It is understood that acceptance of humour in print has different receptors than oral humour, where the intention can be affirmed by visual and vocal clues. If Biblical texts were originally part of the

²²³ Frye, *Anatomy*, 46.

²²⁴ See Frye, *Anatomy*, 43 and Parkin, *Humour Theorists*, 182.

²²⁵ He does, however, appear to support George Meredith. “Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life.” George Meredith, *The Egoist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), “Prelude.”

²²⁶ Part of this interaction includes “the ability not to take oneself too seriously.” Doris Donnelly, “Divine Folly: Being religious and the exercise of humor,” *TT* 48, 1992, 390.

Hebrew oral tradition (a widely supported assumption), one can easily imagine the various ways in which a dramatic and/or comic presentation would influence listeners' narrative and theological interpretation.²²⁷ Some comedic types or techniques are not as comfortably transferred to the written page and not germane to our discussion because they cannot easily be portrayed in print.²²⁸ At all times, one must keep Leacock's truism in the forefront. "Translation of humor from one language to another, from one age to another, from one thought to another is almost impossible."²²⁹

In the search for "theological validity," many readers miss the playful nature of a Biblical story and its humour because of their unwillingness to accept that humour *might* be there and *might* be important to the narrative's theological implications and impact. They think that to have humour, there must be laughter. This is not so.

Humour and the physical action of laughter are distinctly separate. "Laughter" is a physiological response: "a (physical) movement that produces sound"²³⁰, a "biological imperative, a complex cognitive and physiological re-

²²⁷ Brenner, "On the Semantic Field of Humour," in *On Humour*, Radday & Brenner, eds., 41.

²²⁸ Comedians such as Charlie Chaplin and Rowan Atkinson use physically- and presentational-based humour. These examples of humour are difficult to record in words.

²²⁹ Leacock, *H.*, 26.

²³⁰ Robert R. Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (New York, NY: Viking, 2000), 5.

sponse to the human condition” that is linked to the human’s innate ability to survive.²³¹ Humour, in contrast, involves intellectual, cultural interpretation and contextualization to prompt an intellectual response. There can be laughter without humour and humour need not be the source of laughter.²³²

Stephen Leacock’s definition of laughter highlights laughter’s instinctive nature: “a sort of natural physical expression ... of one’s feeling suddenly good, suddenly victorious ... a primitive shout of triumph.”²³³ Laughter’s connection to humour is unintended and accidental: “Laughter is the mere beginning of humour, both in time and in significance. The end [of humour] ... is nearer to tears.”²³⁴ At the same time, he acknowledges that laughter does not necessarily signal humour *nor* is it always inspired by humour, sometimes it is used to hide reality.²³⁵

Because he considers a sense of humour to be an individual developmental attribute that occurs together with the maturation of emotions and language, Leacock places laughter on the lower end of his taxonomy of humour. As humour

²³¹ Ron Jenkins, *Subversive laughter* (Toronto, ON: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994), xii, 208. Jenkins believes that without laughter, civilizations and individuals do not survive, 206-208.

²³² Both imply some extent of social interaction and contextualization, as well as a power dynamic. Cultural and gender differentiation can be interconnected but need not be. Both have linguistic and social triggers where non-verbal communication between participants may be crucial. See Provine, *Laughter*, 1-54. Provine’s acknowledgement of different sorts of humour is relevant.

²³³ Leacock, *H.*, 8. Bergson goes further, proposing that laughter is an experience unique to humans. Henri Bergson, *Laughter; an essay on the meaning of the comic. Authorized translation by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell*, Permalink through Portal Books, University of Toronto, <http://books.scholarportal.info/viewdoc.html?id=/ebooks/oca5/33/laughteresayonm00berguoft>, 6.

²³⁴ Leacock, *H.*, 7. Leacock quotes Thomas Hobbes who says “[L]aughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the inferiority of others or with our own formerly.” Leacock, *H. and H.*, 22.

²³⁵ Leacock, *H.*, 7; Leacock, *H. and H.*, 86.

becomes more “developed” or sophisticated, the need and desire for laughter decreases.²³⁶

Joan Chittister has similar insights.

Humor and Laughter are not necessarily the same thing. Humor permits us to see life from a fresh and gracious perspective. We learn to take ourselves more lightly in the presence of good humor ... Laughter, on the other hand, is an expression of emotion ... a loud demonstration of a lack of self-control.²³⁷

John Parkin agrees with Chittister and Leacock:

[Laughter and humour are] ... two connected but in fact independent phenomena. Humour can succeed perfectly well without generating laughter even though laughter is often an excellent measure of its success ... At the same time laughter can be generated by other things than humour.²³⁸

For Leacock, higher forms of humour do not excite laughter but instead, pity, pathos and empathy where the Interpreter may reflect on life with its lost illusions.²³⁹ For this reason, Leacock sees the clown as an ideal example of the divergent properties of humour in one being, because the clown can encompass humour, pathos, cruelty, make-believe and reality as it is and as it is not.²⁴⁰ This is not meant to undercut or diminish the importance of laughter as a response to situations, rather to differentiate between the two, in their symbiotic, yet separate, relationships.

²³⁶ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 24.

²³⁷ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993), 72. This is an amplification of Benedict's Rules 9, 10 and 11 and a reflection upon it. Chittister capitalizes “laughter.”

²³⁸ Parkin, *Humour Theorists*, 9.

²³⁹ Leacock, *H.*, 261.

²⁴⁰ Leacock, *H.*, 11.

Components of Humour

In written texts, humour is likely to be intentional since the creator has had the opportunity to revise and edit. Criteria that assist in the evaluation of texts with humorous potential follow.

1) Surprise and Incongruity

Intrinsic to *all* forms of humour and its most important aspect, is an incongruity or peculiarity of a situation or a character. An *anticipated* action and the action that occurs are different and create a disparity between expectation or appearance and reality. This results in a “turn of meaning,”²⁴¹ a surprise, where appreciation is confounded or reversed. The more plausible the scenario, the better the impact because the Interpreter may have been lulled into a state of mental relaxation, which makes the surprise more unexpected. Within the course of the plot, the Interpreter may become aware of the potential for incongruity before the event, anticipatory humour. On the other hand, it may be a complete, unexpected shock.²⁴²

Absurd behaviour, unusual characters, bizarre interactions or dialogue are potential triggers. In such cases as a talking donkey, or a ladder to the clouds, it is the unexpected nature of the detail that brings the promise for humour. Jean Morreall points out that

²⁴¹ Brenner, “On the Semantic Field,” in *On Humour*, eds. Radday & Brenner, 41. Also Brenner, “Who’s Afraid of Feminist Criticism? Who’s Afraid of Biblical Humour?” *JSOT* 63 (1994): 38-55.

²⁴² “Without surprise, life has a numbing sameness.” Robert Darden, *Jesus Laughed: The Redemptive Power of Humor* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 7.

[t]o enjoy incongruity ... is to enjoy a violation of our normal conceptual patterns and our expectations, and this requires a lack of practical concern, an emotional disengagement from what is here.²⁴³

Morreall's "emotional disengagement" implies the Interpreter's lack of personal empathy for the situation or person. Bergson likewise suggests people must "escape self-centeredness and practicality," and have "a momentary anesthesia of the heart."²⁴⁴ An absence of individual empathy, personal feeling or emotion as a necessary component in the evaluation of humorous situations is also suggested by Provine and Chittister.²⁴⁵

Leacock also acknowledges the importance of incongruity and surprise. Early in his career, Leacock proposed that "the basis of the humorous, the amusing, the ludicrous, lies in the incongruity, the unfittingness, the want of harmony among things."²⁴⁶ Twenty years later, "unfittingness" had become "disharmony."²⁴⁷

In *Humour and Humanity*, Leacock, for the first time, articulates a sensitivity to the feelings of others, a distinctly Christian view and a more positive emotional sentiment, within his preface and amplified in the first sentence.

²⁴³ Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion*, 15-16.

²⁴⁴ Bergson, *Laughter*, 118, 111–112.

²⁴⁵ Provine, *Laughter*, 72; Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict*, 72.

²⁴⁶ Stephen Leacock, *Essays and Literary Studies* (London: John Lane, 1916, reprinted 1925), 86. Bergson saw comedy and laughter as "a solution for vanity." Sypher, *Comedy*, xv.

²⁴⁷ Leacock, *H.*, 11. "[a] general notion of contrast, of incongruity, of a disharmony between a thing and its setting, between its present and its usual accompaniment, like a naked savage in a silk hat." On 94, he amplifies incongruities to include the "antitheses of circumstance and character."

The author has given to his book the title *Humour and Humanity*, rather than the obvious and simple title *Humour*, in order to emphasize his opinion that *the essence of humour is human kindness*. It is this element in humour which has grown from primitive beginnings to higher forms: which lends to humour the character of a leading factor in human progress and which is destined still further to enhance its utility to mankind.²⁴⁸

and

“Humour may be defined *as the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life*, and the artistic expression thereof.”²⁴⁹

Presentation was the key. Leacock felt it was not necessarily important that any particular reader or audience perceive or understand the humour because he believed that someone, sometime, *would* understand the humour and that person was his target.²⁵⁰ He classifies the misuses of words,²⁵¹ contradictions of characterizations,²⁵² ambiguities of relationships or confusion of gender²⁵³ as potentially humorous. He observes that a situation in which a character “breaks or bends” rules can cause surprise, incongruity, a sense of oddity, and therefore could be considered a kind of humour.²⁵⁴ Unrelated ideas placed in

²⁴⁸ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 9. Emphasis added. He ignores the detail that he had already written a book titled *Humor*.

²⁴⁹ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 11. Emphasis added. Also *H.*, 94. Leacock likely did not follow his own guidelines. “... frequently [he was] unfaithful to his credo that humour be kindly - he was at times racist, anti-feminist and downright ornery ...” Gerald Lynch, “Stephen Leacock” in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia* (online), accessed 14.01.2013. In *Stephen Leacock*, Lynch affirms “For Leacock, ‘kindly’ described primarily the attitude of the author of the work and the vision of humanity the work offers,” 27.

²⁵⁰ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 73.

²⁵¹ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 11, including verbal “trickery” such as that employed by Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan), 159.

²⁵² Leacock, *H. and H.*, 189.

²⁵³ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 109, 144.

²⁵⁴ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 115.

a juxtaposition that prompt a new meaning or understanding can create humour.²⁵⁵ He reflects upon the lowest of humours that “It seems a sad commentary ... to think that the original basis of our amusement should appear in the form which is called demoniacal merriment,”²⁵⁶ in which physical, emotional or spiritual damage or misfortune was inflicted upon at least one participant. Throughout, he retained a sacrosanct attitude to religion.²⁵⁷ Death, physical or mental misfortunes that resulted in pain and/or cruelty, and anything malicious were also unacceptable.²⁵⁸ Leacock does indicate that humour in any situation cannot be adequately unravelled without a clear knowledge and understanding of the narrative situation and the nuances and shades of the language’s meaning, in other words, the society that created it.²⁵⁹

We will see in the three pericopes occasions where linguistic challenges and surprise, in its several manifestations, are crucial to the plot and to the overall successful conclusion to the story, serving as a potential comedic trigger.

²⁵⁵ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 64. He had strict guidelines of topics to avoid when telling humorous stories or jokes. Vindictiveness, injustice, cruelty, unkindly humour and mockery were not appropriate. Leacock, *H.*, 11, 12, 181-192; *H. and H.*, 11, 190. Athene Syler says something similar. “Comedy is inextricably bound up with kindness ... [and] must be charitable and compassionate at heart,” in *The Craft of Comedy* (London: Theatre Arts Books, 1946), 5.

²⁵⁶ Leacock, *Essays*, 87.

²⁵⁷ Sacred symbols, in whatever form they might be, e.g., hymns or icons, were to be excluded from humorous consideration.

²⁵⁸ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 197-198, 203. Thus “a broken leg” could be construed as humour in the proper setting because it is temporary, whereas an amputated leg, as a permanent incapacity, would not be. *H.*, 11. This emphasis on an incapacity he considered “primitive humour.” *Essays*, 90.

²⁵⁹ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 129. Remembering that Leacock felt that it was not necessarily important whether all in the audience understood. See Leacock, *H. and H.*, 73. Bergson, whom Leacock cites in his bibliography, strengthens this when he says, “To understand laughter [he really means humour], we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society.” Bergson, *Laughter*, 7

2) Commonality and Community

The acceptance of humour often implies a group dynamic of cooperative interpretation and temporary solidarity that may not appear with solitary individuals.²⁶⁰ Power rests with the Interpreters,²⁶¹ who have a common understanding of the language and society, often considering themselves to be superior to both the non-Responders and the subject of the humour.

Humour, thus, can be divisive and alienating. The discriminating feature is information: the “Ins” have the knowledge necessary to interpret the information/joke/situation; the “Outs” do not. Humour, therefore, can aid in the establishment of at least two specific communities, who have the potential to band together in self-defense with the establishment of one group’s power and authority over the other.²⁶² The premise of much of the Hebrew Bible is that it was written specifically for the Israelite/Hebrews. With this as focus, a commonality of community has been created to the general exclusion of non-Israelites. The Israelites were meant to be the Ins and everyone else the Outs, making the Outs often the butt of humorous interactions by linguistic and plot design.

²⁶⁰ See Bergson, *Laughter*, 111-112, and Provine, *Laughter*, 24-27.

²⁶¹ I am using the term “Interpreter” to refer to a person who recognizes humour rather than the more cumbersome “Person-who-gets-the-joke.”

²⁶² “Self” defense representing a range of behaviours for the protection of the integrity of the group using tools that run the gamut: from exclusion of undesirable individuals from activities to more complex activities, such as violence and warfare.

The Motivations for Written Humour

Several distinct, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, causal groupings can be categorized within written texts to show the potential rationale for humour.²⁶³

Generally speaking, humour used to poke fun at oneself could be referred to as ***humour as good will***, self-effacing or unobtrusive humour, that may diffuse tensions. Reinhold Niebuhr points out the relevance of this kind of humour in indicating an individual's maturity of life and attitude:

To meet the disappointments and frustrations of life, the irrationalities and contingencies with laughter, is a high form of wisdom. Such laughter does not obscure or defy the dark irrationality. It merely yields to it without too much emotion and friction. A humorous acceptance of fate is really the expression of a high form of self-detachment.²⁶⁴

Self-deprecating humour is a technique that encourages empathy within the audience and may provide psychological and physical healing.²⁶⁵ An individual who sees humour in her own behaviour and being may trigger an empathic

²⁶³ The following categories of humour are less evident in written work since text is usually created with thought and care, not as an instantaneous reaction. Accidental humour, where the Narrator has no original intention of presenting a humorous situation, *e.g.*, spoonerisms, "Freudian slips," a spontaneous misplaced word. As such, they are less common in written work as a humorous device, unless they are part of a dialogue. Leacock places great importance on the wit and merit of puns as instruments of humour [Leacock, *H.*, 21.] Humour as instinct to exhibit aggression, nervousness or fear, an animalistic response, is also less likely in written works, except as a narrative device.

²⁶⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Discerning the Signs of the Times: Sermons for Today* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 126.

²⁶⁵ Recent scientific research investigating laughter and health has concluded that laughter is not only a stress inhibitor, but also positive for cardiovascular fitness and other illnesses. One example is Kim R. Lebowitz, Sooyeon Suh, Philip T. Diaz and Charles F. Emery, "Effects of humour and laughter on psychological functioning, quality of life, health status and pulmonary functioning among patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: A preliminary investigation," *Heart and Lung*, 40, no.4, (July/August 2011): 310-319.

reaction among other individuals, encouraging group unity, commonality and community among the laughter, establishing an emotional connection with the audience. This may involve the acknowledgement that a truth has come forward that seems to be either ridiculous or amusing as it strikes at the heart of reality within the Interpreter. The Interpreter confirms the creator's place in that shared commonality. Laughing *with* others is an unobtrusive, empathic or compassionate humour, sharing the experience, having the ability to diminish tensions and is generally Christian, keeping with Jesus' messages of love and acceptance.

In support, John Morreall states:

Humor is especially useful in getting people to see themselves and everything in their lives with emotional disengagement, from a higher, more objective perspective. They can poke fun at themselves, and at the traditions and authorities they follow. They think flexibly and critically, even iconoclastically.²⁶⁶

When Leacock differentiated between kindly and cruel humour, he suggests that the former involved good will while the latter involved triumphant superiority.²⁶⁷ He emphasizes that humour could involve self-discomfiture and that human kindness could lead to "good" humour and good will.²⁶⁸ The highest level of humour, in Leacock's opinion, involves personal emotional involvement, empathy, pathos and humility.²⁶⁹ William H. Willimon concurs.

²⁶⁶ Morreall, *Comedy*, 123.

²⁶⁷ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 11.

²⁶⁸ Leacock, *H.*, 119-120; 144; *H. and H.*, 3, 97, 105-106.

²⁶⁹ Leacock, *H.*, 261.

... the very essence of grace is to receive the gift of laughter, especially when the joke is on us, particularly when the most laughable incongruities consist of the gap between who we are and who God would have us to be.²⁷⁰

Humour as an expression of triumphant superiority, emphasizes the person's sense of primacy and separation from the "mere mortals" who are otherwise involved. This humour is an oblique social criticism that de-humanizes the people who are the focus. It is a pretentious, self-important humour, that increases tensions, because it implies a hierarchical superiority in which the instigator(s) and the Interpreter(s) are at the apex.²⁷¹ Bergson moves laughter and by extension, humour, to a negative stance when he ties laughter to this quest for superiority:

In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently, to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed ... we laugh not only at the faults of our fellow-men, but also, at times, at their good qualities.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ William H. Willimon, Compiler, *And the Laugh shall be first: A Treasury of Religious Humor* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 10.

²⁷¹ Such an example is found within the cartoon *Peanuts*. While the empathic Interpreter may sympathize with Charlie Brown and his hapless attempts to kick a football, one still feels the humour of the predictability, the repetitiveness and the hopelessness of the situation, while at the same time, questioning Charlie's persistence and continuing faith in Lucy, who humiliates him at every opportunity, affirming and maintaining her superiority and intellectual and emotional control over Charlie Brown. The Interpreter's superior assumption is that she would never fall for Lucy's ploy. While I am showing an "either/or" polarity, this does not preclude the possibility of a "both/and" condition.

²⁷² Bergson, *Laughter*, 136–137. This is apparent in audience response to the antics of the Three Stooges, where major physical violence generally evokes laughter rather than anguish.

I quarrel with the absolutism of "always." I contend laughter and the humour behind it can be a binding feature, encouraging cooperation, even within triumphant superiority. For Bergson, this humour involves emotional detachment, a lack of human involvement or empathy:

Indifference is its [laughter's] natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion ... in such a case we must ... put our affection out of court and impose silence upon our pity ... highly emotional souls ... in whom every event would be sentimentally prolonged and re-echoed, would neither know nor understand laughter.²⁷³

Bergson here views humour and its result, laughter, as a negative, derivative reaction. An Interpreter will not, or cannot, enjoy the humour if s/he has any kind of emotional involvement or empathy for the situation. One may laugh at the discomfort of a stranger, or a person for whom one has little regard or esteem.²⁷⁴ Laughter for Bergson is dependent upon group interactions and interconnections, which implies a community understanding so that laughter is "always the laughter of a group" rather than of the individual.²⁷⁵ In the Hebrew Bible, a great deal of the humour falls within this category, group humour directed at strangers or Others.

Leacock calls this type of humour "demoniacal merriment,"²⁷⁶ "archeocomical" or "paleo-ridiculous."²⁷⁷ He classifies the triumphant superiority, "Merry

²⁷³ Bergson, *Laughter*, 4.

²⁷⁴ When the object of humour is someone or something to whom the listener has an emotional attachment, there can be a positive empathic reaction rather than a tendency for pejorative amusement.

²⁷⁵ Bergson, *Laughter*, 6.

²⁷⁶ Leacock, *Essays*, 87; Leacock, *H.*, 59-64.

²⁷⁷ Leacock, *H.*, 8.

Ha! Ha!” [I have defeated you] category as the oldest and most primitive of reactions and behaviours. For him, this humour reinforces one’s personal sense of primacy and class superiority as the Narrator chooses to deride and ridicule those attributes considered inferior. Such a hierarchy ranks and targets *differences*, accenting again an In/Out dynamic. Humour as a form of social criticism or vindictive mockery can disguise underlying social anger, which require an understanding of common values and therefore community: “triumphant superiority.”²⁷⁸

Comedy, for Frye, was a light dramatic work that is often humorous or satirical in tone, with a happy resolution of the thematic conflict, sometimes having jokes, satire or humorous elements in the narrative. The humour was not intended to condemn evil but rather ridicule those who lacked self-knowledge,²⁷⁹ another nuance of triumphant superiority.

Satire, parody, irony, ridicule and scorn can be seen as either triumphant or peace-making humour depending upon the manner in which they are presented but they always retain an expression of superiority. Any comparison that underscores idiosyncratic behaviours, dress, gait, manners or accents has the potential for humour because of the hierarchical understanding of social regimen-

²⁷⁸ Leacock, *H.*, 59-64.

²⁷⁹ Frye, “Argument,” 81.

tation, sameness or consistency in specific class or general societal expectations.²⁸⁰ Both Bergson and Leacock disdain malicious humour and humour based on “active destruction” of a person or situation as reality, but at the same time condone the role of imagination as a way to envisage such destruction.²⁸¹ What must be done to make something humourous is to go from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Humour as subversive implies challenging and undermining the *status quo*, to prompt laughter and amusement.²⁸² It involves hidden, nefarious, or at the least, non-conformist usage and meanings: disruptive, inflammatory, insurrectionary, seditious, revolutionary, rebellious and full of dissidence, involving tricksterism or exaggeration, satire or mockery, accenting anomalies, inconsistencies, abnormalities and oddities, poking fun at the characters and the situations. The “court jester” found today in television pundits like Rick Mercer and Stephen Colbert, use humour and truth to hold up a mirror to society. Their humour is disruptive when it is used for information transference to the uninformed, to enrich their understanding of specific situations. Regardless of the motivation,

²⁸⁰ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 117. Parody is most successful when employed as a method of gentle criticism but not if it highlights permanent infirmities, oddities or incongruities. Leacock, *H. and H.*, 11, 64. Leacock, *H.*, 11

²⁸¹ Leacock, *H.*, 8-9. There becomes, therefore, the conflict of imagination over reality. He deems mockery as “hideous” when it is prompted by vindictiveness. Leacock, *H.*, 99. Bergson agrees: “A deformity that may become comic is a deformity that a normally built person can successfully imitate.” [emphasis: *imitate* not *duplicate*]. Bergson, *Laughter*, 23.

²⁸² Jenkins contends that laughter is way in which one expresses relief and is therefore a physiological necessity when people are experiencing oppression and/or exclusion. Jenkins, *Subversive Laughter*, x-xii.

humour, laughter and joking in the face of adversity is a declaration that the Narrator has retained her inner sanctity and superiority.

Humour in this case, is an affirmation of personal intellectual, imaginative and spiritual freedom, a tangible demonstration that no system, event, or being can contain the human spirit, a sign of the presence of hope in the mind of the humour's creator.²⁸³ When there is no emotional connection between the two parties this humour may minimize or trivialize the realities of the pain, diverting attention from the targeted individual's true suffering.

Nowhere does Leacock specifically indicate that he saw humour as subversive, but throughout his entire body of short stories, his parodies of pretentiousness and naïveté are definitely subversive as he protested the over-sentimentality and inaccuracies of peoples' lives and recollections of small-town life. At the same time, he used humour to suggest the hidden truths of those settlements and their inhabitants.²⁸⁴

Humour as peace-making is less commonly apparent in written work and most effective in direct personal interactions where there is an emotional component, as a safety valve to alleviate tensions. This humour is specifically aimed to

²⁸³ The creator of this humour thinks: "You can control certain aspects of my existence but you cannot control my mind and I am determined to create an environment to spite you." Jenkins cites several apartheid South African examples. *Subversive Laughter*, 79-106. This attitude is also reflected in the American spirituals of the 18th and 19th Century. While they did not necessarily reflect humour, they were seditious. Codified information, hidden messages, could be passed from slave to slave without the slaves' owners' knowledge. Humour here would be an indirect result, as the singers exert superiority over their owners, undermining their authority and power, incongruously. Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water, the wisdom of the spirituals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 51, 45-46.

²⁸⁴ Specifically, Orillia, Ontario ("disguised" as Mariposa). Leacock, *H. and H.*, 70-72, 80, 152 ff.

defuse or deflect a situation or person from developing into a more aggressive, threatening stance, when one participant may make a joke or quip, said comment being unexpected, incongruous and, most importantly, appropriate.²⁸⁵ In other circumstances, a similar humour may show blunt or brute force and accentuate the futility of further resistance, utilizing exaggeration, hyperbole or irony. With the flawless Benjaminite slingers of Judg. 20:16, the hyperbole works as a *potential* peace-making device by posing the question to any opposition “How could you defeat such a powerful force? Save yourself: surrender now.”

Evidences of Humour

The following linguistic machinations create the humour found in various narratives of the Hebrew Bible, including the three pericopes.²⁸⁶

1) Manipulation of Language

The choice of vocabulary is crucial to the atmosphere being generated and reflects the Narrator’s linguistic creativity. There are many manifestations of this and word play is one technique, where words become a focus of the story because of the ways in which they are employed. Leacock, for one, placed a high value on linguistic integrity, insisting that humourists must have “an exact knowledge of the value of the words” they employ.²⁸⁷ Puns, spoonerisms, *double*

²⁸⁵ Jane Brody suggests humour and laughter as weapons to deflect attacks and ease the stress of feeling defensive. She calls this technique “tongue fu.” Jane Brody, Personal Health column, *New York Times National Edition*, April 7 1988, 18.

²⁸⁶ Radday has an extensive list that I have adapted. Radday, “On Missing,” 22ff.

²⁸⁷ Leacock, *H.*, 209.

entendres, palindromes, anagrams, tongue twisters, rhymes, limericks, oxymorons, and other verbal machinations can be humorous as well as thought-provoking. When examining the original language, often such incongruities become more apparent. Because an understanding of the original Hebrew is important to a nuanced interpretation of the three pericopes I will spend time examining the language's unique nature and its relevant *hapax legomena*.

2) Hyperbole

Exaggeration or hyperbole involves the embellishment of some factor in the story to the point that the entire scenario seems unbelievable, where fantasy is apparent or there is an “artful elaboration” of the details.²⁸⁸ This is especially apparent in personal “truthful” or pseudo-historical accounts where details are added or interpreted, when the story teller did not or could not accurately quantify some portion of the tale, and wants to indicate a psychological, rather than a quantitative/qualitative, truth.²⁸⁹

Repetition can be considered hyperbole, especially when extravagant terms are employed.²⁹⁰ In other cases, the artful elaboration of details can be

²⁸⁸ Robert Darden’s delightful turn of phrase. Darden, *Jesus Laughed*, 12. This is more nuanced than the present-day political pundits with their “alternate facts” and “fake news.”

²⁸⁹ In recounting a battle, the raconteur generally does not have access to a person-by-person tally of the battle forces so that saying “there were thousands” may well be a historical inaccuracy but reflects instead the psychological impact of the massed body of warriors. The overall effect implies “a big group of threatening people.” There is also the possibility of bravado or boasting: “Look at all the warriors there were, and I had to deal with them ALL!”

²⁹⁰ In *2Kings* 18 and 23, the Hebrew is practically duplicated where two separate kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, are defined in almost identical terms. There is a possibility for a humorous interpretation. We are, of course, ignoring such possibilities as scribal error by repetition or scribal embellishment for contrast or comparison. The fact remains that both these passages passed into canon for some reason, which could validly be a humorous intent.

used for comic or heroic intentions. “The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley as thick as locusts; and the camels were without number as the sand of the sea” (7:12), is both metaphor and poetic exaggeration at their most florid and effective. To recount the story otherwise, deprives the reader of the opportunity to use imagination and visualization skills, besides being linguistically boring.²⁹¹

To appreciate such embellishments, the Interpreter must have an ability to discern nuances, details and turns of phrase. “Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men left-handed; everyone could sling stones at a hair's breath, and not miss.” (20:16). The idea of a 100% success rate implies an infallibility humans lack. The Interpreter must immediately consider this text to be exaggeration to enhance Israelite bravado, to frighten the opposition and the reader.²⁹²

The shock value, creativity and amusement of exaggeration/hyperbole is most readily apparent the first time it is read. For that reason, the reader who is familiar with a tale often misses the humour. Blind acceptance or overfamiliarity with the text often preclude the use of critical insights.

3) Irony

²⁹¹ “There were lots and lots of threatening people from all sorts of scary places in that valley with lots and lots more camels.” Metaphor, with its implied comparison(s), potentially contains a type of “categorical mistake” with the attributes being compared. While recognizing that all comparisons have limitations, metaphors and similes are the humourist's valid tools.

²⁹² See also the hyperbole of *Josh*.10:40; 11:12-15.

“What is said is not what is meant, OR what is meant is not what is said.”²⁹³

That is irony, which depends upon ambiguity and incongruity where there is an incompatibility between the expectation and the reality. Perceptible disparities between elements create ironic situations. Timing is crucial. Under normal circumstances,

[I]rony cannot be grasped until the statement has been read (or heard) completely, at which moment the non-ironic meaning first springs into existence, all at once. The opposite and ironic meaning likewise comes into existence not over a period of time, but immediately upon comprehension of the original statement.²⁹⁴

The significant phrase is “upon comprehension.” Irony creates a disparity between the person who has the ability to detect the essence and the person who does not. With this ambiguity of word or phrase, the Ironist invites a particular rendition/exegesis. Because it need not be the major focus of a text, like most humours, irony can be downplayed or ignored while the major design or intention of the text remains intact.²⁹⁵ There are generally two types of irony that are not mutually exclusive: speaker irony and situational irony.

²⁹³ Adele Berlin in her review of Carolyn J. Sharp’s *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009) in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no.1 (Jan 2010): 129-131. Good concurs, “Irony, like love, is more readily recognized than defined.” Good, *Irony*, 13 ff. In the past 20 years, irony has been extensively discussed in scholarly Biblical literature. Examples include Walter Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel’s ironic icon of human achievement* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2005).

²⁹⁴ Lillian R. Klein, *The triumph of irony in the book of Judges* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1988), 195.

²⁹⁵ It is plausible to suggest that ironic comments are not always decoded. One *Judges*-example of irony is the story of Gideon, whose saga, in many respects, is parallel to Moses’ while being contradictory in outcome and interpretation, and therefore ironic. See Klein’s Chapter 4: “Complications: Gideon,” Klein, *The triumph of irony*, 49-68. Most theological interpretations of this pericope make no mention of the possibility of this kind of interpretation.

When, in speech acts, a suggestion or hint and truth interact, *Speaker Irony* materializes. Words signify the exact opposite of what their literal interpretation may be, and the result can be both tragic *and* comic at the same time.²⁹⁶

Situational Irony need not be identified by participants just as the ironic interplays between characters can generate humorous effects without being obvious to the characters. Truth continues as an indispensable component within the sometimes accidental circumstances.²⁹⁷

A delightful example of specific 21st Century Biblical irony can be found in a footnote within David T. Lamb's *God Behaving Badly*.

The Old Testament never tells us what happened to the ark [of the Covenant], but most scholars assume that it was taken (or destroyed) when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and sacked the temple in 587 B.C. As we all know, it eventually was found by Indiana Jones and now rests in a U.S. government warehouse.²⁹⁸

When an informed reader, who need not be any kind of Biblical or theological expert, peruses the note, a chuckle automatically occurs. This is humour and irony at its most subversive: troublesome, provocative, insurrectionary, mutinous, rebellious, defiant, recusant, clever and, most of all, funny. BUT it is only amus-

²⁹⁶ In *Gen.*, YHWH naming Jacob's son Isaac is ironic as well as witty. Klein, *The triumph of irony*, 195 ff. In *Gen.* 17:1-20; 18:1-15; 21:1-8. God suggests to Abraham that he will father a son with Sarah. Sarah laughs out loud, dismissing the idea. God ordains that the child will be called Isaac (יִצְחָק), He (who) Laughs. This word play continues throughout the story.

²⁹⁷ In *Esther* 3-8, King Ahasuerus' advisor, Haman, is ironically hung on the scaffold he had constructed to kill Mordecai.

²⁹⁸ David T. Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 189, footnote 5.

ing if one has the information necessary to interpret the information as Lamb presents it. Lacking that knowledge leads to disaster of many sorts. Imagine this footnote being cited by some researcher to support a demand for transparency within the U.S. governmental apparatus. What will happen in 200 years, should Lamb's book survive, and the movie not? While this potential situation might prompt shivers of academic horror, it also inspires gales of laughter: Have people been similarly duped in their research over the past two millennia? Is there the likelihood that there are similar situations within the Hebrew Bible? Of course there are. We just don't know because we lack the relevant information.²⁹⁹

Ironical elements will be identified as much as possible and compared to other Biblical situations with the understanding that we do not have complete knowledge. This is particularly important when one considers that irony can be both tragic and comedic. For many Biblical scholars, irony is so pervasive the reader can read few narratives without seeing the "ironizing distance between the narration and the narrated characters."³⁰⁰ Mark E. Biddle sees irony as "the most theological form of humor because it calls for one to look deeply into the obvious for signs of a somewhat veiled but more fundamental truth" and is therefore "the

²⁹⁹ Of course, none of this paragraph makes sense to someone who does not know the 1981 movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which is amusing and ironic too.

³⁰⁰ R.P. Carroll, "Is Humour also among the Prophets?," 170. Carroll cites M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1985) and Good's *Irony*.

substance of faith ... It is the joyful laugh of recognition when God brings good out of evil.”³⁰¹

4) Tricksterism

Tricksterism involves deception and prevarication. Its intent is to defeat and/or humiliate the Other, when the Trickster exploits the differences between knowledge and ignorance or naiveté in the same manner that irony does. Tricksterism, like all humour, depends on surprise and incongruity. A character’s behaviour and achievements are unexpected (a surprise) and incongruous when considered in relationship to the individual’s previous behaviour or characterization, the *status quo* and/or the mood of the narrative itself.³⁰²

Carl Jung expounded at length about the Trickster as an archetypal figure who creates incongruity, amusement and amazement.³⁰³ Niditch makes clear that the “ideology of tricksterism” can encompass God in the Old Testament and is frequently found where there is a “contest between those occupying a marginal place in society and the powerful, those at the center of society with the capacity

³⁰¹ Mark E. Biddle, *A Time to Laugh: Humor in the Bible* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2013), 53, 55.

³⁰² Loki, the Scandinavian trickster, reverses the hierarchical order, creates destruction and chaos, yet is ultimately considered the “saviour” because his actions impel the plot line to its successful conclusion with the triumph of the protagonist. John Lindow, *Handbook of Norse Mythology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13, 83, 115, 137, 153, 174-175.

³⁰³ C. G. Jung, *Four archetypes--mother, rebirth, spirit, trickster, translated [from the German] by R.F.C. Hull*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970, c1969. 1st Princeton/Bolingen pbk. ed.), 135-152. For Jung, the Trickster motif in mythology is personified by the demigod, Mercurius (Roman Mercury; Greek Hermes; or Scandinavian Loki). There are more than 30 cultures that have clearly defined and labelled trickster figures.

to oppress.”³⁰⁴ A *benevolent* Trickster uses requisite skills for the betterment of a person or society and can be found in the birth narrative of Moses where Moses is saved by his Trickster sister (Exod. 2:1-10).³⁰⁵ Within the *Judges* pericopes, the Trickster is an easily identifiable character in at least two of the three narratives, if one applies Jung’s criteria.

5) Finally, there is Wit, a linguistic manipulation that is motivated by the Interpreter’s intentional humorous intention.

Wit ... is applied to a brief and deftly phrased expression, intentionally contrived to produce a shock of comic surprise. The surprise is usually the result of an unexpected, but plausible, connection or distinction between ideas, or of the sudden frustration of expectation ... Wit is always intentionally comic.³⁰⁶

Wit requires a cleverness of intellect and implies an intellectual effort on the part of the creator to be amusing. An author who creates a witty written passage is showing not only ingenuity, but also an understanding that the target audience will be able to identify the humorous message. Biblical wit is *more* likely to be calculated and highly structured with a deliberateness that is not always

³⁰⁴ Niditch, *War*, 119. There are human characters in the Hebrew Bible who take that trickster role. The tricks Jacob plays on his twin brother Esau, his father Isaac and his father-in-law, Laban, in Gen. 25-27 are unprincipled by conventional standards. Yet the Biblical narrative clearly takes Jacob's side and the reader is invited to laugh and admire Jacob's ingenuity and creativity.

³⁰⁵ Moses’ knowledgeable sister presents a viable alternative to the princess, and in the process, preserves her brother’s life and manipulates the circumstances to allow Moses to be safely raised by his birth-mother.

³⁰⁶ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 103-104. Abrams differentiates several kinds of wit. “[Freud suggests there is] “harmless wit” evoking a laugh or smile without malice. “Tendency wit” ... is derisive, directing the laugh at a particular object or butt...” Stephen Leacock considers wit as “the presentation of the humorous in a way involving an unexpected play on words, or, as it were, taking fun out of the words themselves.” Leacock, *H.*, 12.

possible in speech acts because speech is often spontaneous, whereas the biblical creators have had the opportunity to revise their words.³⁰⁷

Radday and Brenner insist that any work on humour in the Hebrew Bible must acknowledge “admitted subjectivity and a polyvalence of opinions,”³⁰⁸ with the possibility of differences between the Narrator’s intentionality and the Interpreter’s response. The individual’s value judgments and personal imaginative interpretations play critical and influential roles in the reception/perception of literature and humour.

The Challenges of Biblical Humour and Theology

The world has a contempt for the man who amuses it. You must be solemn, solemn as an ass. All the great monuments on earth have been erected over the graves of solemn asses.³⁰⁹

There is a potential for humour’s presence in any and every aspect of life,³¹⁰ yet humour is culture-specific, language-specific and time-specific so we may fail to recognize it.³¹¹ Society’s overall view of the world tends to minimize the importance and role of humour in situations such as politics and religion.³¹²

³⁰⁷ The naming of Isaac and the many uses of the word “laugh” show the writer’s wit and the manipulation of the vocabulary. *Gen.* 17:19; 21:3, 4, 5.

³⁰⁸ Radday & Brenner, “Between Intentionality and Reception,” in *On Humor*, 14.

³⁰⁹ Tom Corwin (1794-1865), quoted in Stephen Leacock, *H. and H.*, 15. Leacock contends that Corwin, a brilliant American intellectual and politician, would have been elected president had he not been full of laughter, fun and jokes.

³¹⁰ Soren Kierkegaard says that “the comical is present in every stage of life, for wherever there is life there is contradiction and wherever there is contradiction the comical is present,” quoted in Sypher, *Comedy*, 196.

³¹¹ Radday, “On Missing the Humour” in *On Humour*, 35.

³¹² Lawrence Martin notes politicians are humourous in private but not in public. “Canadian Politics: We like a chuckle with our cut and thrust.” *Globe and Mail*, June 5 2012. The denigration of public political humour continues. Justin Trudeau’s remarks about Canadian fighter jets on October 2 2014, were, at one

Humour is easily ignored or spurned when the Interpreter does not comprehend its implications. This is certainly applicable to biblical and theological studies when the scholar does not understand that *any* use of humour is an indication of the Narrator's objective to influence the Interpreter's perceptions. Humour directs theological judgments about the characters and the narrative. The redactors did not excise humour from *Judges*, just as they left in the fantasy and the violence when they had at least three opportunities to do so.³¹³ One must conclude, therefore, that the humour was left in place because of its validity as a theological teaching mechanism.

The ability to see the humor in things, or to create comic tales and rituals, is among the most profound and imaginative of human achievements. The comic sense is an important part of what it means to be human and humane. Without it we return to brutishness and the Philistines are upon us.³¹⁴

Radday posits that the perception of the Bible as "serious," with the resultant loss of an understanding of its humour, began when Christianity became the official Roman Empire's state religion in the 4th Century CE. He ties this attitude

level, quite funny and appropriate, but were universally condemned by the media. Toronto Star website. http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/10/02/canada_has_options_in_iraq_besides_combat_justin_trudeau_says.html . Trudeau made an obscure, but easily recognizable, allusion to male genitalia as a comparison to the arms race.

³¹³ Robert G. Boling, whose hypotheses have widespread support, suggests there are at least three layers of construction and redaction to the book of *Judges*. Robert G. Boling, *Judges: introduction, translation, and commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 30-31.

³¹⁴ Conrad M. Hyers, *The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith* (New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), 11.

to the initial image of the Passion, to binary Manichaeism and to a theological unwillingness to accept an anthropomorphized God, who shows a variety of emotions.³¹⁵ This does not imply that theologians and laity have been completely humourless over the following seventeen hundred years, but rather that “official” Christian doctrine tended to discourage, downplay, ignore and negate humorous passages and interpretations.³¹⁶

The 4th Century theologian, John Chrysostom demanded absolute solemnity in religious worship.³¹⁷ Two centuries later, the Rule of Benedict directs that control of laughter and verbal restraint are elements in the quest for humility.³¹⁸ Benedict of Nursia, however, does not forbid humour *per se*, only the specific kinds of humour that are derisive and negative towards other human beings.

³¹⁵ *E.g.*, laughter (*Psa.* 2:4 etc.), celebration (*Psa.* 104:31) and reprimand (*Psa.* 2:4). Radday, “On Missing the Humour,” 34-36. Radday also contends that, at the same time, “Within Jewry ... [the Hebrew Bible] became literarily and literally smothered with reverence” (37).

³¹⁶ Christians had no further need for the subversiveness that some kinds of humour imply because they were now no longer Outsiders, they were the Elite. One hypothesis is that the Christian leaders, in their new-found power, wanted *gravitas*, a solemn demeanour and attitudes, which they felt was more in keeping with that power. Ergo, the role of subversive humour is minimized within the political and religious classes. The humour continued to be acceptable to the marginalized majority, who lacked all official authority.

³¹⁷ In Homily XVII, Chrysostom has an extensive diatribe about inappropriate behaviour that begins “It is not meet that he who has the advantage of such hearing be partaker of the table of devils” and includes “Why need I reckon in detail all the indecency that is there? All there is laughter, all is shame, all disgrace, revilings and mockings, all abandonment, all destruction.” HOMILY XVII. JOHN i. 28, 29. http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0345-0407,_Iohannes_Chrysostomus,_Homilies_on_The_Gospel_Of_John,_EN.pdf . Accessed 8.9.2018.

³¹⁸ “When a monk speaks, he does so quietly without laughter.” *Rule of Benedict*, 7:60. The Rule of Benedict on line (sponsored by the Order of St. Benedict) OSB. Rule of Benedict. Text, English. Table of Contents. Accessed 18.5.12. The Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh rules are foremost in importance in the discussion of laughter.

Later interpreters often misread the original intentions and insisted that *all* laughter was inappropriate for a Christian.³¹⁹

In contrast, during the 15th Century, the tradition of the *Risus Paschalis* (Easter laughter) and *Laetare* Sunday, (“Rejoice/Holy Humour Sunday”) developed.³²⁰ The anthropomorphized Satan was believed to have no sense of humour so that humour, laughter and jokes theologically spurn Satan. This humour is meant to represent the believers’ outward surprise and wonder at the Resurrection, with the joy of Satan’s overthrow.³²¹ With such laughter, humanity could conquer Satan, affirming God’s triumph of the Resurrection and the annihilation of death. To encourage this attitude of good humour, the priest would tell jokes or funny stories within the sermon.³²² In the 16th Century, Martin Luther concurred: “The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to

³¹⁹ Benedict wanted his followers to develop their spirituality. This precludes all kinds of humour that are intentionally harmful or contemptuous.

³²⁰ Either the 4th Sunday in Lent, Easter Monday or the Sunday after Easter. Also called “Holy Hilarity Sunday.” Catholic Encyclopaedia copyright © 1913 by the Encyclopedia Press, Inc. Electronic version copyright © 1997 by New Advent, Inc. While sometimes ascribed to a Bavarian origin, some folklorists trace it to pre-Christian sources. According to James Martin, the roots within the Christian tradition go back to the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. James Martin, *Between Heaven and Mirth* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 22ff.

³²¹ The Patristics thought this aspect of the Resurrection showed God as a Trickster. God fools Satan and, in bringing Jesus back from the dead, defeats death. “Like a good joke that catches us off-guard and puts an irrevocable smile on our faces, the resurrection of Jesus can bring lightness to life’s burdens and gives our souls a life with new hope and promise.” Rainer Warning, *The Ambivalences of Medieval Religious Drama Translated by Steven Rendall* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 112.

³²² In recent manifestations, the congregation contributes humorous tales for general consumption. This 21st Century twist is evident in bulletins found on many church websites. For the historical interpretation, see: “Easter Laughter in ‘Images of Hope: Meditations on Major Feasts’ with permission of Ignatius Press.” Translated from German into English by John Rock and Graham Harrison. German original: Copyright 1997. English translation: Copyright 2006 on website, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2007/04/Easter-Laughter.aspx>; accessed 15.6.18. See also Martin, *Between Heaven and Mirth*, 22ff.

jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.”³²³ As an expression of the presence of the Holy Spirit, congregational laughter is often considered a hallmark of some Pentecostal church traditions today.³²⁴

Despite these exceptions, the general pattern of negativity and neglect of various aspects of humour and laughter in the Bible continued into the 20th Century. Radday maintains that, because Hermann Gunkel had an ambiguous relationship with the concept of humour and the philosopher, A.N. Whitehead, claimed there was no humour in the Hebrew Bible at all, Biblical scholars did not actively question these pronouncements until the 1960s.³²⁵

Later 20th Century theologians, though, find no conflict between humour, laughter and God. C.S. Lewis places great importance on laughter as a theological indication of God’s presence and uses a quote from Martin Luther at the beginning of *The Screwtape Letters*.³²⁶ Jurgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-

³²³ “Jeering” and “flouting” implies a kind of humour, albeit negative. From Martin Luther’s *Tischreden* (*Table Talk*). *Joannes Aurifaber’s edition, first published in 1566* (facsimile reprint 1968), Chapter 25, “Vom Teufel und seinen Werken” (“Of the Devil and his Works,” Fol. 278-307). Identified by Arend Smilde (Utrecht, The Netherlands) in his website <http://www.lewisiana.nl/screwtapequotes/>. [Smilde is a C.S. Lewis specialist, who has translated Lewis’ work into Dutch.]

³²⁴ The Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, now part of the “Catch the Fire” network appears to be one focal point of “Holy Laughter” as a theological movement. Provine, *Laughter*, 133-137.

³²⁵ “The humourlessness of the Bible is amazing ... and we are forced to do our laughing almost entirely outside of our religion.” This Whitehead citation is found in Lucien Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1954), 59, 351-252, and quoted in Radday, in “On Missing the Humour,” 21ff. Radday further suggests other impediments to the discovery of humour: there are too many ways to define humour and people who lack a sense of humour cannot find it. Radday, “On Missing the Humour,” 33-35.

³²⁶ Luther purportedly said, “If God doesn’t have a sense of humour, I’m not going to heaven.” In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape instructs his acolyte devil, that Christianity without laughter is considered the Devil’s work and should be used to Hell’s advantage. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Toronto, ON: Saunders, 1945), Letter XI, 50ff.

Wendel also affirm *Risus Paschales* and Easter hilarity. "The laughter of the universe is God's delight. It is the universal Easter laughter in heaven and on Earth."³²⁷ Karl-Josef Kuschel suggests that God laughs with humans, and humans with God in faith and loving trust. Such laughter must be free of negativity, must always be ethical and must be clearly within the values of Christianity.³²⁸

A theology of laughter deserves the name only if it can understand the reality of God himself in light of the category of laughter and define the function of such talk of God for men and women and their existence in the world.³²⁹

William H. Willimon ties laughter to grace as does Karl Barth,³³⁰ and Reinhold Niebuhr affirms that "Humour is ... a prelude to faith, and laughter is the beginning of prayer"³³¹ while Hyers connects humour to positive humanity, and therefore Christianity.³³²

³²⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God: Theology in Two Voices* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2003), 85.

³²⁸ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Laughter: A Theological Reflection. Translated by John Bowden* (London: SCM Press, 1994), xviii, also Ch. 11, "Human Laughter and God's Laughter-A Biblical Tableau."

³²⁹ Kuschel, *Laughter*, xviii.

³³⁰ William H. Willimon, *And the Laugh Shall be First: A Treasury of Religious Humor* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 10.: "Laughter is the closest thing to the grace of God." A statement attributed to Karl Barth as quoted by Robert I. Fitzhenry in *The Harper Book of Quotations* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1993), 223, but of unknown origins.

³³¹ Niebuhr, *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 111.

³³² Hyers, *The Comic Vision* 11-12.

Donnelly proposes that being a Christian requires laughter: "If *that* [being in the service of the Lord] doesn't require a sense of humor, nothing I know does."³³³

[I]t is safe to say that divorcing humor from religion is potentially destructive of true religion. Even when the separation is done with the best of motives, or in ignorance, the results are disastrous because we rob ourselves of the lightness and freedom necessary to notice and then to adore God ... it is lightness that allows us to appreciate God; seriousness and heaviness tend to force us to concentrate on ourselves ... Religion is supposed to free the spirit from gravity, raise it, lighten our loads and enlighten our minds. We all lose when this does not happen.³³⁴

Arum Kumar Wesley also argues persuasively that humour and spiritual awareness are so closely linked that humour may be religious in *essence* even when initially appearing to be irrelevant. An active sense of humour indicates an internal attitude that may border on the philosophical and theological. Humour can be used to impart valid and appropriate spiritual lessons with a theological intent and meaning. Wesley further contends that humourous literary devices exist in the Biblical text to be read *to increase understanding of their theologies*.

Theology, being the articulation of the reality of faith necessarily endorses life in which the perceptions and conceptions of belief and religion are centred ... Thus joy and sorrow contrive to have their mark on these perceptions which in turn shape and form relationships, attitudes, feelings and thinking. *Humour is the innate human trait that undergirds these relationships and feelings*. It is that capacity in the human that enables one to weather and withstand life's vicissitudes and provides courage and hope to look beyond them. *It enables one to reflect theologically on these issues*

³³³ Donnelly, "Divine Folly," 395.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 388.

*with maturity and objectivity. To be humorous then means to be humane.*³³⁵

The emotional positiveness and involvement, “to be humourous is to be humane”³³⁶ verifies Leacock’s and Frye’s understanding that the civilization therein had validity.

“Christian theology, by its very nature, is likely to make Christian theologians and exegetes blind to the humour of the Bible,”³³⁷ is confirmed in many 20th Century Biblical dictionaries and commentaries. In 1990, there were none that had references to humour, according to Radday³³⁸ and this pattern continues.³³⁹ I agree with Frances Landy’s observations:

Humour in the Bible is sophisticated, but it is also specialized ...
One of the reasons why we do not associate humour with the Bible is that the Bible is meant to be a “serious” document and insofar as humour has

³³⁵ Arum Kumar Wesley “Mere Frivolity: an analysis of humour for a theological enterprise,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 17, no.1, (April 2003), 180-181, 156. Italics added.

³³⁶ Wesley, “Mere Frivolity,” 156. In contradiction, Bergson required collective complicity and interaction along with the suspension of empathic emotion to have a successful comic encounter. Bergson, *Laughter*, Chs. 1, 2. The lack of emotional involvement means that the Interpreter may laugh at something that is physically harmful, like Moe of the Three Stooges hitting Curley.

³³⁷ Radday, “On Missing the Humour,” in *On Humor*, 35.

³³⁸ Radday, “On Missing the Humour,” 24 ff.

³³⁹ Most introductory texts have limited references to humour. In Henry Jackson Flanders, Jr. *et al.*, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible 4th Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), there is one reference to humour within 560 pages, 81-83. Other selected examples: George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Bible Vols. I, II* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1953), the section on Judg. 3 talks a lot about treachery, but nothing on humour. (Vol. II, 676-826). Dominic M. Crossan is similarly silent. “The book of *Judges*” in Raymond E. Brown, ed., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary: I. The Old Testament* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 149-62. Even J. Cheryl Exum says nothing about humour in “The book of *Judges*” in James L. Mays, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000, revised edn.), 223-239, although she admits that, in the story of Ehud, “The details are related with relish” (228). An exception is the article by C.D. Linton, “Humour in the Bible,” 778-780. In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed.

content, it is subversive. Indeed nonsense is the most subversive and threatening of statements.³⁴⁰

Humour is a natural element in human life but many Christians today continue to assume that anything “religious” must not be amusing because they think humour and laughter violate God’s majesty and dignity. Supporters of the anti-humour stance hold that Jesus and God did not and do not laugh, nor participate in jokes, or amusing scenarios. They cannot see or do not understand the texts that include uses of humour.³⁴¹

Within academic Biblical studies circles today, there is general acceptance that the Bible has examples of humour³⁴² although the systematic scholarly examination of Biblical text to discover and explicate the humour would seem to be a “relatively” new concept.³⁴³ Continuing barriers to finding humour include the individual reader’s general lack of Biblical knowledge, uninformed interpretation of Biblical texts, limited positive pastoral modelling and the selective readings of the Common Lectionaries, which take verses out of context. It has been found in empirical studies that humans seldom laugh or react to humorous texts when

³⁴⁰ Francis Landy, “Humour as a Tool for Biblical Exegesis” in *On Humour*, 102.

³⁴¹ These people hark on the Biblical passages that appear to discourage humour in daily life like *Eccl.* 7:3-6.

³⁴² Radday’s and Brenner’s book begins with that premise, *On Humour*, 13ff. See also Athalya Brenner, ed., *Are We Amused? Humour about Women in the Biblical Worlds* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2003). There are no references to Ja’el or A Certain Woman in Brenner’s book.

³⁴³ 1984 seems to be watershed year, with *Semeia* 34, *Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible*, although Good did write *Irony in the Old Testament* in 1965.

they are alone,³⁴⁴ so that the reading and study of the Bible in such isolated situations could well influence a scholar's interpretation and impose psychological and sociological limitations.³⁴⁵ In the pseudo-academic field that populates the Internet today, this negative attitude continues.³⁴⁶

Scholarly and populist writings confirm that in the Bible a) there are general and specific kinds of humour; b) such humour is intentional; c) the humour is sophisticated and specialized; and d) the humour is sometimes subversive and covert. Translators now seem more open to these possibilities.³⁴⁷ Most importantly, there is now acknowledgement and recognition that humour can be another exegetical tool in the study of the Hebrew Bible.³⁴⁸ One may therefore summarize that, within mainstream Christian theology and Biblical studies, humour

³⁴⁴ Since it is a (learned) social behaviour within a neurological response. Provine, *Laughter*, 5.

³⁴⁵ The Jewish tradition of group study, discussion and debate extends to laypeople, who regularly form small groups for the study of the Torah using scholarly sources. They often do so independent of a rabbi. Such group discussion and interactions may well be one of the reasons why such Jewish scholars had a longer tradition of identifying humour than Christian scholars.

³⁴⁶ Undoubtedly this has a great influence on people, the numbers of which cannot be easily quantified. One example: "I've heard people say, 'I think God has a sense of humor.' I do not believe that they speak wisely concerning this. What we call a sense of humor is nothing more than foolish talking or jesting -- these things are not funny to the Lord ... People don't need no jokes, [sic] they need the pure doctrine of Jesus Christ." <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/humor.htm>; no author given but the identification includes "Jesus is the only Way to God; Internet Bible Church." There are, of course, other internet sources that have more scholarly, theological perspectives, like Fr. Rodney Kissinger, S.J. ESSAY - GOD'S SENSE OF HUMOR http://www.frksj.org/homily_gods_sense+of.htm, for example. Accessed 16.5.12.

³⁴⁷ Kelly Iverson of the University of St Andrews (Scotland) examines the humour in the language and intention of the Gospel of Mark in "The Redemptive Function of Laughter: Performance and the Use of Humor in the Gospel of Mark," *SBL Annual Meeting* presentation, San Francisco, November 2011.

³⁴⁸ Landy, "Humour as a tool," 13.

and laughter are increasingly being recognized as important components in all theological discussions of Christianity.³⁴⁹

Appropriate humour and laughter does not contradict Christian spirituality and religious thought; instead it enriches Scripture and its theological interpretive processes. It is important to identify and qualify humour found in the Bible, understanding that humour and laughter, while intrinsically connected on many occasions, are not the same and often serve entirely different purposes.

Biblical humour, like all humour, depends on incongruity, ambiguity and surprise to encourage community cohesion. “[B]iblical humour is never scatological or frivolous, but intelligent, subtle, and implicit rather than explicit.”³⁵⁰ The search for a theology of humour requires an acceptance that, like Ehud’s sword, humour has more than one edge.

Humour ... enabling one to grasp the reality as a whole provides the opportunity to not only enlarge the horizons of understanding but also helps to harmonize the different facets of understanding ... to take in one’s stride different perceptions and articulations for example of truth or God or reality to arrive at a comprehensive conception of the same recognizing and acknowledging these different insights as complementing one another.³⁵¹

Biblical humour is neither superficial nor vacuous as a method of communication. Identifiable humour helps indicate authorial attitudes and prejudices

³⁴⁹ This does not imply that the presence of humour in the Bible and in Christian theology is a universal belief or understanding within all Christian Churches or denominations.

³⁵⁰ Radday, “On missing,” 38.

³⁵¹ Wesley “Mere Frivolity,” 180.

within this theologically didactic book. Wesley sees humour as a way in which theological education can be accomplished:

Humour ... provides the opportunity to not only enlarge the horizons of understanding but also helps to harmonize the different facets of understanding ... to take in one's stride different perceptions and articulations for example of truth or God or reality to arrive at a comprehensive conception of the same recognizing and acknowledging these different insights as complementing one another.³⁵²

The first and most important quality in the search to locate humour within the Bible is a willingness to admit that it is there. Our search begins when we identify the humour and quantify the interactions and interrelationships between humour, violence and fantasy in each story. From that point, one may hypothesize on individual purposes, intentions and theological insights.

Unlike humour, violence in a narrative was usually easily established because it lacked the nuances that disguise literary humour. With the advent of definitions of violence that go beyond the physical, violence also has developed contentious definitions and subtleties that influence interpretation.

³⁵² Wesley "Mere Frivolity," 180-181.

5-Violence

A Common Narrative Device

“Violence has always been endemic to religion.”³⁵³

Violence is so common in the Hebrew Bible that it would appear to be revered as an appropriate narrative device and life choice, almost a behavioural exemplar.³⁵⁴ The ages of the creation of the books of the Hebrew Bible were violent times, or, quite possibly, were times in which the recording of violent incidents was an intrinsic and esteemed feature of the society, deemed appropriate and historically pertinent. Biblical stories presented and extolled these specific cultural realities, as a tool of political intimidation, at the least.³⁵⁵ Violence in print is always enhanced by individual imaginative interpretation and changes according to cultural imperatives. The relationships between war and religion in the Bible is long-standing, close and seemingly inscrutable although I would not call the Bible a “book of war.”³⁵⁶

³⁵³ Mark Juergensmeyer, “Editor’s Introduction: Is Symbolic Violence related to Real Violence?” in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 1. See also Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, Third Edition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), especially part 2: “The Logic of Religious Violence,” 121-249.

³⁵⁴ “[T]he two topics that receive the most space in the Hebrew scriptures are (1) violence and (2) ritual and cultic practice (the centre of which is ritual sacrifice).” Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 93.

³⁵⁵ The majority of the Hebrew Bible appears to have been written by people who were recording what they thought was theologically and historically important. Significantly, in most cases, the author(s) had no idea that their creations would become canon.

³⁵⁶ From an interview of a “Christian Identity activist,” Michael C. Teague, in Kim Murphy, “Last Stand of an Aging Aryan,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 10 1999, quoted in *Terror*, Juergensmeyer, 149.

Beyond the Physical

In general terms, violence is “any action which contravenes the rights of others, injury to life, property or person.”³⁵⁷ With this definition, violence need not be physical; it can be emotional, intellectual, psychological, spiritual and verbal. Pierre Bourdieu contends that the societal controls that individuals have over each other (*e.g.*, parent to child; boss to employee) ultimately restrain behaviour, a social/cultural domination that could also be considered unconscious violence under some circumstances. He calls this “symbolic violence,” sometimes referred to as “soft power.” Symbolic violent actions can be benign, less physically harmful conduct, such as hate speech or exclusion/ isolation of an individual from the group.

These kinds of actions and behaviours show that the instigators are prepared to invest time and energy to ensure the destruction or denigration of the individual at levels beyond the physical. To speak negatively about people is to honour them with thought, energy and time, which is an interesting contradiction to the intention the perpetrator may have to minimize the people as human beings. Personal feelings of superiority are enhanced and encouraged for the perpetrators by the extended use of imagination and fantasy to visualize an existence where this supremacy is extended *ad infinitum*. Symbolic power is the imposition of particular thoughts and perceptions by the dominant factions upon the

³⁵⁷ Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1999), 162.

entire societal unit. The authoritative group then takes their position as the only acceptable model of behaviour. Bourdieu also suggests there is a dialectical relationship between symbolic violence and physical violence.³⁵⁸

Violence, War and the State

Violence is often triggered by a misunderstanding of the standards and values of one group by the other, when they have limited moral, ethical or spiritual commonality. Even in groups with common belief systems, violence is precipitated when one faction is unable or unwilling to negotiate or compromise. War is an organizational escalation of violence and gives a moral rationale to individual and group violence.³⁵⁹ Many acts of war have not only theological and philosophical origins, they also mimic religious rites in their symbolism, systematization and ritualization.³⁶⁰ From one perspective, war may seem liberating in its capacity to “quickly” elicit the changes that the successful side wants, and therefore is preferable to peace because of the almost instantaneous emotional, intellectual and theological power it provides the victor through the physical conquest of an adversary.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ See Claudio Colaguori, “Symbolic Violence and the Violation of Human Rights: Continuing the Sociological Critique of Domination,” *The International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 3, no.2, (2010). <https://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/ijcst/issue/view/1791>. Accessed 22.10.12. Also, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1984), 41 ff.

³⁵⁹ See Juergensmeyer, *Terror*, 152-160.

³⁶⁰ Both sides pray to their God(s) for support before battle and assume that the God(s) are “on their side.”

³⁶¹ That is entirely illusory. So much depends upon the philosophical commitment of the victors and whether they intend the vanquished nation to continue to be downtrodden, or to be rebuilt.

Philip Bobbitt's insights on the interconnections between war and organizational government are pertinent:

The State is born in violence; only when it has achieved a legitimate monopoly on violence can it promulgate law; only when it is free of the coercive violence of other states can it pursue strategy ... [warfare is] a key to understanding the development of the State for it connects the ever-present intrusion of international pressures (the outer) to the political anatomy of the State (the inner).³⁶²

Violence and war are components of every organizational political structure as tools to assert dominance, power and intimidation, regardless of religious and theological bases and biases. War played an essential role in the development of the Israelite state and psyche, as culturally determined, contextually rooted concepts.

War is not a pathology ... War is a natural condition of the State, which was organized in order to be an effective instrument of violence on behalf of society. Wars are like deaths, which, while they can be postponed, will come when they will come and *cannot be finally avoided*.³⁶³

Hebrew Bible narratives appear to mirror Bobbitt's ideas with the evolution of Israelite society from family to tribe to the consolidation of the nation, "Israel," to its devolution to "Judah and Israel" and its ultimate eradication as a political unit, all based on the success of their wars. Bobbitt does not define the *size* of the State to which he refers, leaving the reader open to the proposal that the internecine squabbles between the various tribes of Israel could qualify as "war."

³⁶² Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: Peace, War and the Course of History* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2002), 336. Bobbitt's thesis involves the evolution of society through the mechanisms of violence/war.

³⁶³ Bobbitt, *The Shield*, 819, emphasis added.

All war in the Hebrew Bible was triggered by a philosophical and theological motivation linked to the quest to establish, preserve or enhance the Hebrew/Israelite way of life. In *Judges*, there are three kinds of large-group physical conflict. Wars of conquest begin the book as the invading Hebrews consolidate and conquer the territory of Canaan. The war for freedom for the Israelites from a counterbalancing country's physical and military oppression, is the focus of all 12 judges' pericopes, Israelites seeking liberation from occupying military forces. The final category is the civil war of Chapters 17 to 21, when tribes of Israelites battle each other.³⁶⁴

Theologies of Violence

"All war represents a failure of diplomacy."³⁶⁵

The inclusion of so much violence in the Hebrew Bible is an indication of its importance in the evolution of Biblical theology. Violence and war as a problem-solving technique implies that the instigating group has a generally positive philosophical attitude towards it, rooted in its theology, expressed through language, mottos and narratives.³⁶⁶

Beyond Bobbitt, the motivation(s) for the use of violence within an organizational structure/state typically involves a perceived threat against that state, its

³⁶⁴ Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 59-67.

³⁶⁵ Tony Benn (b. 1925) British Labour politician in a speech to the British House of Commons on February 28, 1991, the day the First Gulf War ended.

³⁶⁶ For example, *Pro Deo et Patria*, continues to be a common motto in the 21st Century for military units like the Victoria Rifles of Canada. Chaplaincy mottos include such militaristic sentiments as: *In hoc signo vinces*, "In this sign (of the Cross) you will conquer."

power and/or authority. The governmental unit is attempting to preserve, consolidate or extend its power. Justifications may include religious fervour, a quest for religious conversion, military, economic and/or territorial expansionism, or an expectation that war would consolidate power within the targeted area.

There is a theatricality to war: violent actions are organized, staged and executed to present a performance spectacle, meant to be observed and evaluated to elicit an intellectual, emotional and spiritual response from both present and future audiences.³⁶⁷ A specific person or artifact is sometimes targeted as a symbolic, metaphoric representation of the entire society on the assumption that the entire structure will collapse once the symbol is trounced.³⁶⁸ If that structure remains viable, violence on a larger scale will follow. Recorded emphasis on particular aspects of a conflict, *e.g.*, the number of enemy deaths in battle, the compilation of war tribute and booty, images of triumphant warriors, are all common expressions of this imaginative theatrical presentation of the violence.³⁶⁹ Such in-

³⁶⁷ The observation of major battles is a longstanding tradition: many civilians observed the Battle of Waterloo, which had been preceded by a magnificent ball hosted by the Duchess of Richmond. Max Hastings, "Anecdote 194," *The Oxford Book of Military Anecdotes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 230–234. After the First Gulf War ended (1991), the American military hierarchy admitted that some military incidents were orchestrated for the benefit of the imbedded journalists. *CBC News*, January 17 2016.

³⁶⁸ As in the quest to capture the enemy's flag. See Juergensmeyer, *Terror*, 124–128. It is generally agreed that the September 11th 2001 attack on the Twin Towers of New York, and the Pentagon were instigated by Al Qaeda with the intention to defeat capitalism, the Twin Towers being the representation of capitalistic "evil" and the "evil" American military complex, the Pentagon. The plane that was diverted to a Pennsylvania field is thought to have had the White House or the Capital as its target, "evil" democracy.

³⁶⁹ Accounts of the dead are generally considered to be inflated in the Hebrew Bible. *E.g.*, *Is.* 37:36: "Then the angel of the LORD ... struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand ... all dead bodies." Similarly, the portrayal of enemy armaments is likely overestimated: *Judg.* 4:13: "Sisera called out all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron ..."

cidents are orchestrated to strike fear, respect or submission in the general populace and establish military superiority.³⁷⁰ With the theatrical behaviours of the three Protagonists in our pericopes, their narrative presence and identity are guaranteed and determined by their violent actions as the defining element of their character.

There are many examples of particular battles and their strategies in the Bible³⁷¹ but military *tactics* must be garnered from the narratives, rather than from a set of rules. Scattered references refer to appropriate behaviour *before* and *after* the cessation of hostilities³⁷² but there is no code of *battle* conduct *per se*.³⁷³ This seems an anomaly for a people who spent so much time in armed conflict and yet had so many other rules about food, clothing, their environment and their patterns of worship. This deficiency is notable and a clear example of theological intent by omission. It implies that the three stories in *Judges* have military justification and theological integrity within the entire corpus simply because there are no instructional guidelines for “acceptable” individual “wartime” behaviour.

³⁷⁰ The atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki in August 1945, was theatrical and considered psychological warfare. The USA was parading its scientific superiority to intimidate the Japanese, save a costly land war, and hasten the Japanese surrender. Henry L. Stimson, “Least Abhorrent Choice,” *Time Magazine*, 3 February 1947. [Stimson was the American Secretary of War 1940-1945]. The choice of time to sign the treaty ending the First World War was similarly theatrical: the 11th minute of the 11th hour of the 11th month.

³⁷¹ See *Gen.* 14, *Josh.* 6, for example.

³⁷² *Deut.* 20:1-20 and 23:10-14 address these issues.

³⁷³ What are legitimate war tactics? To win, the commanders have to not only deal with their own rule-book (limitations imposed by political, economic and popular expectations and other constraints) but, also, discover and deal with the opponents’ rule-books.

Millard C. Lind addresses this contradiction when he examines the power of *YHWH* as a military force and a theological guide.³⁷⁴ Lind suggests that the Biblical text presents *YHWH* as the pre-eminent and only important warrior, the instigator and perpetuator of violence and warfare because the text minimizes descriptions of the role of the human combatants, their rules of engagement and their achievements.³⁷⁵ *YHWH* alone guarantees victory, regardless of *YHWH*'s narrative presence or absence. This is a distinct, yet abstruse, theological message: human offensive weaponry, training and other preparations for battle are less important than the appropriate cultic activities and rituals. Religious rituals take precedence over other human activities and are crucial because they solicit *YHWH*'s approval, support and intervention to guarantee success. The triumphs of war hinges on the theatricality and completeness of the pre-battle ceremonial activities.

Lind's hypothesis, in part, could explain why there is so little direction about battle/war preparation and behaviour in the Hebrew Bible.³⁷⁶ The Israelites needed nothing more than *YHWH*'s approval to win. While they may well have been impressed with, and fearful of, their enemies' weapon technology, such as Sisera's 900 iron chariots (4:13), their religious training was such that they *should*

³⁷⁴ Millard C. Lind, *God Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1980), 15, 23, 24-35, 170.

³⁷⁵ Some theologians, Anabaptists, in particular, contend that when *YHWH* is portrayed as violent it is because human violence has been projected upon *YHWH*. See "Ch. 4: Is God NonViolent?" in *Embodying the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-first Century*, Ted Grimsrud (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 47-56.

³⁷⁶ There is also the possibility that the rules of engagement were understood so deeply in the society that there was no need for them to be recorded in written form. Alternatively, they might have been recorded but were not considered appropriate for canonical inclusion at a later time or were lost.

have been secure and safe knowing that *YHWH's* overwhelming power and direct intervention would prevail as long as they instituted the cultic rituals. Any sense of personal unease would be eradicated by the understanding of *YHWH's* ultimate success *through human agency*. Since this was a consistent pattern (*YHWH* always succeeded eventually), the Israelites should have understood that such rituals guaranteed military success and presented and extolled theological realities. Losses could be blamed on lack of ritual commitment, not human or divine deficiencies.

YHWH, as the warrior God, is also the donor of peace. Peace becomes a product of *YHWH*-supported conquest. For the Israelites “peace” or more specifically, שלום, *shlm*, is a concept that involved security and well-being and was solely *YHWH's* gift. It had little to do with the individual Israelite’s decision-making, thought processes or involvement. Justification came from *YHWH* via prophetic pronouncement and all actions that freed the covenanted land from oppression (“oppression” being defined as “under the control of anyone other than the Chosen People”) would automatically qualify as “morally acceptable.”

If war was a validation of the Hebrew concept of justice, as Bainton proposes,³⁷⁷ an enduring ethos and ethic must be that violence is a necessary component of life and its presence in the “day-to-day” society is not a contradiction, if

³⁷⁷ Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 39.

theologically justifiable. Individual acts of violence become apt³⁷⁸ and violence as a problem-solving technique could therefore be found in other Israelite narratives beyond war scenarios.

One way in which to analyze a biblical scenario involving violence would be to employ the methodology proposed by René Girard, particularly if the narrative configuration appears to mirror the structure that Girard finds optimum.

René Girard's Theoretical Proposals

René Girard regarded himself as an "anthropologist," a "cultural theorist" or a "deconstructionist," a post-modernist, utilizing "the scientific method."³⁷⁹ Others considered him an "anthropological philosopher."³⁸⁰ There is debate whether his ideas about mimetic desire are a theory but I shall employ that term.³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Where a choice is made to be violent beyond the auspices of an official (*i.e.*, state-motivated and state-sanctioned) mandate. David behaved in a such a manner after he fled from Saul. *1Sam* 18 ff.

³⁷⁹ Girard used very little, if any, work from sociology and psychology, although he dealt with Sigmund Freud extensively in one book. Two psychiatrists, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, and Guy Lefort, were involved with his research for *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. While Girard may not cite current scientific work in support of his theorization, like Skinner and Maslow, the reverse is not true. For example, Scott R. Garrels, "Imitation, mirror Neurons and Mimetic desire: Convergent Support for the Work of René Girard," <http://girardianlectionary.net/covr2004/garrelspaper.pdf> . Accessed 1.5.2011 and Kenneth Westhues, "At the mercy of the mob." *OHS Canada, Canada's Occupational Healthy and Safety magazine* 18, no.8 (2002) about mobbing as a form of sociological scapegoating.

³⁸⁰ Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, 10-15. Because most scholars tend to stay within only one particular academic discipline, they are not always comfortable with Girard's eclectic and broad-ranging interests and interdisciplinary work that overlaps several academic subject areas. Kaplan, *René Girard*, 1. Girard is treated with suspicion because he attributes so many human conditions to his theory of "mimetic desire." While there are many contemporary theologians who engage with Girard's ideas, including John Milbank, Rowan Williams and Sarah Coakley, he is not without critics, including Hans Urs von Balthasar. [Grant Kaplan, *René Girard: Unlikely Apologist: Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 2].

³⁸¹ Although Girard's personal insights and reflections are based on writers such as Aristotle, Nietzsche, Stendhal, Proust and Dostoevsky, Paisley Livingston claims "the hard-nosed reader may question whether there is a 'theory' here at all. ... Girard frequently asserts that mimetic desire functions as a mechanism, yet he has never backed this contention by presenting anything remotely approximating a

For Girard, all human behaviour is learned and the first non-instinctual, conscious learning is desire, a longing to imitate/emulate those whom one admires.³⁸² Desire is "metaphysical," having to do with an individual's essential being. To admire is to wish to imitate or to possess what the other person has.³⁸³ Humans imitate or copy because they are incapable of initiating, generating or originating desire. They have a deficiency within their lives at the most basic level so they look to others to fill that deficiency and give them validity, status and values. The ultimate product of that desire is competition. Girard concluded that this process began in the Creation story when Eve desired the fruit from the tree of knowledge only because the serpent suggested that it was desirable.

There are three major components in Girard's theory: the *Subject*, the *Model* and the *Object*, all of which can be singular or multi-faceted. Subject and Model are traditionally human. An Object can be a person, a thing, or something intangible (e.g., social status) that the Model possesses and the Subject desires. Relationships are therefore triangular.

calculus, grammar or algorithm" Paisley Livingston, *Models of Desire: René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xiv. Notwithstanding, the AAR offers more than one Girard seminar at its annual meetings. There is a separate organization and journal devoted to Girardian thought as well as an annual international meeting concentrating solely on his ideas.

³⁸² This is similar to the Social Learning Theory (SLT) of Albert Bandura. SLT explored aggressiveness that Bandura claims "relies on role modelling, identification and human interactions." In SLT, a person learns by observation and develops behaviours by imitation. If the person is surrounded by role models with "healthy" values and behaviours, the person will develop into a well-adjusted individual. Bandura proposed that aggression is a learned behaviour. Girard makes no reference to this theory or to other such social science work. Harold I. Kaplan, Benjamin Sadock, and Jack Grebb, *Synopsis of Psychiatry* (Baltimore, MD: Williams and Wilkins, 1994), 169.

³⁸³ If this is human nature, as Girard envisages it, it is possible to desire without influencing a plot or individual behaviours, but it remains a human characteristic. Mimesis is neutral in value until it is assigned one by the society in which it occurs. It is when the desire is acted upon that consequences are modified.

The Model has symbolic power over the Subject because the Subject desires that Object *or* the Subject desires the life style, ambience or *being* of the Model.³⁸⁴ “[A]ll desire is a desire to be.”³⁸⁵ Although he does not use this terminology, Girard connects imitation with power “over” another and refers to it as “mimesis.”

Mimesis is “a ‘mechanism’ that generates patterns of action and interaction, personality formations, beliefs attitudes, symbolic forms and cultural practices and institutions.”³⁸⁶ It is an imitative process based upon personal individual feelings and wishes that are observable and relational. Mimesis is the category of imitation that fosters rivalry and negativity. Interpersonal dynamics change and diverge so that rivalry and violence may result under any of these conditions of desire.³⁸⁷ Mimetic desire may deteriorate to “mimetic conflict” or “mimetic rivalry,” a progression of intensity, when the Subject is blocked from the achievement of the Object.

Mimetic desire promotes rivalry. Rivalry, conflict and violence occur sequentially when the innate human yearning to possess something that someone else has, overtakes other emotions and societal restraints. Rivalry, conflict and

³⁸⁴ Girard proposes that, because the Subject’s desire may be aroused by a wish to imitate the Model, rather than to possess the Object, the Object upon occasion may be forgotten or ignored by both Subject and Model in their consequent behaviours and interchanges. *CBC “Ideas: The Scapegoat,” a five-part audio series on René Girard, Part IV, 2002.*

³⁸⁵ René Girard, *Quand ces choses commenceront ... Entretiens avec Michel Treguer* (Paris: Arléa, 1994), 28, quoted in René Girard, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/René_Girard. Like many philosophers, Girard is upon occasion, ambiguous. Does he mean “All desire is a desire to be ... someone else?” or “... something else?” or “... somewhere else?” He does not clarify.

³⁸⁶ Livingston, *Models of Desire*, xii.

³⁸⁷ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 8-9.

violence become the core of human behaviour when competition ensues as humans try to fulfil that desire. For Girard, envy and possessiveness are acknowledged in the Decalogue's final commandment, "You shall not covet" (Ex.20:17). Here he claims *YHWH* is recognizing and featuring humans' destructive nature while, at the same time, showing a commitment to eradicate it.

Girard's definition of violence is broad, all-encompassing and directly linked to mimesis and symbolic violence: "Violence is the process itself when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means."³⁸⁸

Mimetic desire is the first active stage in the relationship, the one with the least likelihood of personal interactions between the Subject and the Model. If the Object and Model are impossible for the Subject to attain, there is little or no likelihood of violence because there is no face-to-face interaction or contact and therefore no opportunity for direct interactions. Indirect rivalry can take place, if the Subject is able to copy, or duplicate the behaviour of the Subject or possession of the Object. This condition is called *external mediation*.³⁸⁹

It is here that Bourdieu's proposal of symbolic power and violence has relevance to Girard's definition of violence. Symbolic violence can be more powerful than physical violence because it is embedded in individuals' styles of action and

³⁸⁸ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 9. Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence is implied.

³⁸⁹ *E.g.*, a Subject teenager's desire to emulate the behaviour, clothing, attitudes (Objects) of a rock star (Model). Violence between the two, teen and star, is unlikely because of the physical distance between them. With mass marketing, the Subject may be able to attain products that reflect the Model.

behaviour and imposes the spectre of legitimacy upon the social order the symbolic violence has created.³⁹⁰

Internal mediation takes place when the Model is at the same level as the Subject with no social differentiation between the two.³⁹¹ There is the *possibility* of conflict, because the two are apparent to, or in close contact with, each other. Subject and Model may become direct competitors for the same Object. There is the potential that the Subject may be able to take the Object from the Model. Mimetic rivalry and mimetic conflict become negative only when it evolves into *acquisitive mimesis* or *scandal*,³⁹² when the Subject desires the *possession* of the Object to a point where the Subject's behaviour contains the potential for physical conflict with the Model.³⁹³

Rivalry progresses from mimetic conflict to *mimetic crisis*, as the possibility of violence increases when Subject and Model become closer in location or contact. There are fewer social variances; other physical, psychological, social, emotional differences are suppressed and violent conflict becomes rationally feasible

³⁹⁰ "Sociology is a Combat Sport, a study of Pierre Bourdieu's life." ["Obituary," Douglas Johnson, *The Guardian*, January 28, 2002.]

³⁹¹ When the Subject is within the same grouping as the Model/Object. Mr. Smith may admire the Rolex of his boss, Mr. Jones.

³⁹² Based on the Greek *skandalon* something that trips someone, causes someone to fall or blocks that person from achieving the goal or acquisition. Girard's idea is that "Scandal is the unobtainable that desire wishes to obtain." Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 136.

³⁹³ It would be unlikely that Mr. Smith would attack Mr. Jones to steal the Rolex, considering societal restraints. Lacking such restraints, violence is a possibility. For Girard, the Subject's use of aggression at this stage is part of the problem of the process of mimesis and not part of the cause.

and sometimes inescapable.³⁹⁴ The Subject continues to desire the Object and the Model continues to desire to retain it.

Scandal and violence occur when both parties are deflected to inappropriate behaviour, expressed by societal standards. The Subject's desire transforms into antagonism towards the Model, as Subject and Model move to a more advanced stage of mimetic rivalry. Violence may occur because human power and violence are interconnected. Girard does not clarify which person is the original instigator of the violence.³⁹⁵

Girard suggests that desire is contagious and the desire to imitate becomes more complex if increasing numbers of people come to desire the same Object. This may lead to a larger scale conflict and *communal violence* as the contagion spreads. While the conflict may begin at an intellectual level, physical violence becomes more possible. The focus shifts to an antagonism between groups, rather than a rivalry between individuals. It is at this point that "The Scapegoat Mechanism" may come into play.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Girard does discuss the nuances of the philosophical differentiation of choice. *E.g.*, a) whether the Subject chooses to imitate because of a desire to copy for expedience or b) the Subject views the Model as an exemplar of a perfection that the Subject wishes to duplicate or c) because of an emotional attachment to the Model for some other reason.

³⁹⁵ Girard emphasizes the violent aspects of the entire process, rather than the possibility of positive behaviours. For example, an admiration or desire may lead to positive imitation rather than aggression. A Subject's admiration and emulation of the particular clothes style of an acquaintance, (who becomes the [Girardian] Model), places the Subject in direct competition, since they are on the same level. However much Girard may insist that such mimesis, competition or rivalry is negative, he does not delve into the possibilities that such imitation could be entirely prompted by admiration and respect for the Model or the Object and therefore could be considered positive. Even "competition" is subversive violence.

³⁹⁶ *Leviticus* 16:21ff, is the Biblical reference to which Girard refers and on which he bases his theory. See Girard, *I see Satan*, 154-160.

A third party, the ultimate victim or Scapegoat becomes apparent to both Subject and Model. This innocent, random victim³⁹⁷ is deemed responsible for the pre-existing situation, becoming the focus for the combined antagonism of Subject and Model. This person or being is *arbitrarily* chosen and is generally selected because of social distinctiveness and vulnerability.³⁹⁸ As Subject and Model unite to destroy the Scapegoat, the power, status and authority of both are combined and consolidated, their antagonism no longer is adversarial but cooperative.³⁹⁹

The scapegoat is only effective when human relations have broken down in crisis, but he gives the impression of effecting external causes as well, such as plagues, droughts, and other objective calamities.⁴⁰⁰

Subject and Model together agree that this third entity, the Scapegoat, should be punished for the misdeeds they envisage the Scapegoat caused, but which, in reality, they created. In spite of this mistaken reasoning, their feelings and behaviours become contagious and infect the larger populace, rallying all against the Scapegoat. While the Scapegoat is innocent of the collective blame ascribed by the mob, it does not mean the Scapegoat is absolutely innocent or

³⁹⁷ "Random," not originally targeted, but rather, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The scapegoat is always innocent of the charge that prompts the scapegoating.

³⁹⁸ The victim has any or all of the following characteristics: physical or mental disabilities; a different religious group; in some societies, a single female; family- or friend-less; isolated from the group with no powerful advocates.

³⁹⁹ Girard does not address the role of individual leadership beyond his understanding that the decision to scapegoat a particular individual is a community commitment, from the verdict to the ultimate sanction. Who begins the process, Subject or Model, is not clarified.

⁴⁰⁰ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 43.

guilt-free, rather that he/she is innocent of the specific cause for the scapegoating. The persons(s) may well have already been excluded from society or socially and politically marginalized.

The scapegoat situation is a five-part cycle and certain features are always evident. First, there is some kind of social crisis, *the initial crisis*, prompted by mimetic desire, that increases in severity.

Second, some transgression occurs that challenge certain essential social differences within the group and appear to be insolvable, which lead to a potentiality of unacceptable or *profane* violence.⁴⁰¹ Because profane violence is considered destructive, retributive, uncontrollable and self-sustaining, it is dangerous for the group's continuing survival. Sanctioned violence against one individual or group avoids this conundrum.⁴⁰²

Third, the identification of a potential, appropriate Scapegoat/victim is crucial. It must be someone or thing that clearly displays weakness or vulnerability compared to the "norm." The Scapegoat becomes the focus for the larger group's insecurities and tensions, distracting and diverting their attention from the real

⁴⁰¹ Profane violence is the unauthorized violence by individuals and groups beyond the sanction or auspices of a legitimate authority or governmental structure.

⁴⁰² Girard asserts this is unique to the human domain. In conflict, with other animals, the weaker animal will submit to the stronger. For Girard, the "victim's process" is the missing link to the boundary between animals and the human world and is meant to explain the origins of the variety of human forms. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 95, and Girard, *I see Satan*, 94. See also Gerald J. Biesecker-Mast's article "Reading Rene Girard's and Walter Wink's Religious Critiques of Violence as Radical Communication Ethics, <http://www.bluffton.edu/~mastg/Girard.htm> . Accessed 08.07.2014.

cause(s) of the conflict, to become the focus for *the collective* and *group-sanctioned* violence.⁴⁰³ This controlled, constructive, sanctioned violence appears to end the profane, uncontrolled violence suggested by mimetic rivalry. The Persecutors (the Model and Subject united) are able to convince everyone, including themselves, that the Scapegoat, is responsible for the original "problem."⁴⁰⁴ Mob violence and death (of the Scapegoat) are considered justifiable to save and preserve the larger group and control profane violence. People never blame themselves.

Following this collective, group-sponsored and group-supported violence, peace or equilibrium is established because the Scapegoat's punishment produces a temporary unifying experience for the remaining people. The union of the two divergent groups is applauded as a manifestation of their actions against the Scapegoat. The concluding stage begins, *the religious epiphany* or *the sacred revelation*.⁴⁰⁵ The Scapegoat is given credit for the feelings of relief and the return to equilibrium.

The effect of the scapegoat is to reverse the relationships between the persecutors and their victims, thereby producing the sacred, the founding ancestors and the divinities ... In order not to renounce the victim's causality, he is brought back to life and immortalized, temporarily, and what we call the transcendent and supernatural are invented for that purpose.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ The classic example is two small children. A is playing with a toy; B enters the room, sees the toy, which B immediately desires because it is the focus of A's attention. Conflict ensues (because they are "equals" it is an internal mediation) until Child C enters. A and B switch their conflict from being centred around the toy and each other, to ally themselves with each other so that they focus their hostilities upon C. C, being the outsider, becomes the Scapegoat.

⁴⁰⁴ The Scapegoat may be a group of people rather than an individual as in the Tsarist pogroms.

⁴⁰⁵ Girard, *I see Satan*, 104, 106.

⁴⁰⁶ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 44.

The scapegoating death elevates that same victim to a high social, spiritual, “sacred” level imbued with magical powers, a god-figure. It is then suggested that the Scapegoat has been able to defuse the crisis and bring peace to maximize society’s cohesion, through death. These actions become divinely sanctioned because of their perceived success and may form the beginnings of a “religiosity.”

Neither the groups’ unity nor the peace that the Scapegoat brings are long-lasting. The scapegoating must be repeated until it becomes a cultural/religious rite re-enacted on a regular basis, as a ritual. The mimetic violence becomes a collective religious transformation, mythologizing the Scapegoat victim. The distinction between the victim and the communities, the separation that originally alienated and targeted the victim, continues.

Girard has traced this pattern of behaviour among many foundational mythic stories and he considers the idea of mimetic violence to be “proven by” the universality of ritual sacrifice in human communities within their foundational narratives. The crowd’s perspective is always considered a positive force; the Scapegoat is always in the wrong. Girard has found a consistency with the culpability of the victim-god that he attributes to this scapegoating pattern.⁴⁰⁷ He also

⁴⁰⁷ Girard quotes extensive anthropological and literary evidence, particularly Greek and Incan myths and Shakespeare’s writings. See René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991).

contends that, for scapegoating to succeed, the parties involved must be unaware of the entire process. He claims that once the scapegoating process is exposed to the general public, it will lose its efficacy.⁴⁰⁸

Girard considers violence to be a human creation, the foundation of language and culture, a product of mimetic desire. To provide socio-cultural stability, violence is fetishized, and scapegoating appears to be a successful solution to control communal violence. The mob does not reflect critically on the situation and absolves itself from any direct responsibility in the decision making that results in the death of the Scapegoat. Because the victim is not pro-active in his own defence, an inaccurate mythology evolves. The Scapegoat's death cannot be seen for what it is, the murder of an innocent, because the Scapegoat has no effective advocates. This is extremely important in the selection of the potential Scapegoat and is likely part of the subconscious and unconscious thought processes of Model and Subject as a reflection of a bullying philosophy: "Whom can I target who will not fight back?" For Girard, scapegoating is a rationalized, sanctioned, religious violence that defines the human condition, whose collective sin is the mechanical impetus for the entire process of violence.

⁴⁰⁸ Girard contends that the scapegoating mechanism collapses when it is exposed as a technique so it is important that the wider public be knowledgeable about scapegoating. His assumption that the people who learn about the scapegoating situation will accept it as valid, which will trigger their change in behaviour, attitude and understanding. He expects that all people will react in a positive affirming manner. He does not seem to acknowledge alternate reactions. Unfortunately, for his theorizing, this reasoning does not work.

Girard and The Bible

Mimesis of desire and the Scapegoat mechanism theory are keys to

Girard's understanding of Biblical literature and Christianity.⁴⁰⁹

... most religions are too completely dominated by their scapegoat *mechanism* to accede to a scapegoat *theme* in any form. The main assumption of the new scapegoat theory is that the most intense and primitive versions of the *mechanism* are responsible for the genesis of religions and of the social bond itself.⁴¹⁰

Using mimetic desire and mimetic violence as analytical tools, Girard deems the narratives of Christianity and Christianity itself unique when put in juxtaposition with stories of other religions or mythological sagas. For him, the issue of orchestrated death to maximize society's cohesion has specific ramifications for Christian scripture as he contends that there are profound differences between Biblical and other mythological narratives. The *entire* Bible's perspective reflects attributes and attitudes that defend the victims rather than celebrate the victors. For Girard, the Bible stands out as "anti-myth," even though the passion story may superficially appear to be a universal foundational folk tale.⁴¹¹ He rejects any identification of the majority of the Bible as "myth," for he connects myth

⁴⁰⁹ See Girard "Are the Gospels Mythical?" http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article+3856. Accessed 12.9.2012.

⁴¹⁰ Foreword by René Girard in *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred: liberation from the myth of sanctioned violence*, James G. Williams (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), vii-viii. Original italics.

⁴¹¹ The majority of foundational myths have a similar scenario: *e.g.*, the founding myth of Rome with Romulus and Remus.

with scapegoating and the Bible with a rejection of scapegoating even though the Bible appears, at first glance, to contain a universal mythology.

... myths are based on a unanimous persecution. Judaism and Christianity destroy this unanimity to defend the victims unjustly condemned and to condemn the executioners unjustly legitimated. As incredible as it may seem, no one made this simple but fundamental discovery before Nietzsche - no one, not even a Christian.⁴¹²

It is within the Passion Narrative in the New Testament that Girard identifies the ideal example of his Biblical scapegoat theory. Girard views Jesus as the ultimate innocent scapegoat who, through his pacifism and self-sacrifice, puts an end to scapegoating with his bodily resurrection, unlike other examples of religious-like scapegoating. In those cases, cyclically, a potential Scapegoat is slain and not bodily resurrected. He maintains Jesus's resurrection contradicts the Scapegoating scenario. The story of the Christian Passion is told from the perspective of the potential Scapegoat, Jesus, rather than the aggressors, the Roman and Jewish hierarchies. The dénouement, Jesus' resurrection, defeats the entire scapegoat mechanism because the expectation, within the scapegoat scenario, was that Jesus would remain dead while the Subject and Model deified him. Instead, Jesus is resurrected and deified *later*. When God raised Jesus from the dead, it is an irrefutable statement that Jesus was innocent. This resurrection proves the futility of the entire process of scapegoating and affirms that the God of the Bible responds to violence in an entirely different way than the gods of

⁴¹² Girard, *I see Satan*, 172. While giving Nietzsche credit for the initial discovery of this attribute, Girard claims Nietzsche does not identify, examine or reflect upon this injustice.

other religions. The scapegoating system thus should collapse because it has been exposed.⁴¹³

Examining several narratives in the Hebrew Bible, Girard concludes that these accounts also tell their story from the victim's perspective unlike mythology, where the narrative is always on the side of the victor. The victim's voice is the primary emphasis, yet its prominence is hidden by other layers of meaning and action.

For example, in the Cain and Abel story (Gen. 4), the Subject is Cain, the Model, Abel, and the Object, YHWH's approval. Note that there is no third party whom the Model and the Subject target together; the Model (Abel) becomes the Scapegoat. After the fact, the discourse between YHWH and Cain includes: "The LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!'" (Gen. 4:10). In no other mythical story does the victim have the support and sympathy of the deity to recount the truth of the incident: Cain killed Abel. The victim is heard and revealed; the perpetrator is remembered as a murderer and *YHWH* was not a participant in the violence. At the same time,

⁴¹³ "The Passion reveals the scapegoat mechanism ... By revealing that mechanism and the surrounding mimeticism, the Gospels set into motion the only textual mechanism that can put an end to humanity's imprisonment in the system of mythological representation based on the false transcendence of a victim who is made sacred because of the unanimous verdict of guilt." Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 166.

the Scapegoat, Abel is not resurrected. The cycle of the scapegoat is halted because the actions are not sustained. "Violence is identified, denounced, and finally forgiven."⁴¹⁴ The perpetrator is not punished by death, but banishment.

Girard has several important provisos in the use of his theory in the Bible. Any Biblical story that shows a truly scapegoating component, is part of the "mythological" Bible, rather than the theological Bible.⁴¹⁵ At no time is the victim divinized nor the Deity victimized in Girard's "theological Bible."⁴¹⁶ The ritual repetition of the sacrifice, is always noticeably absent in Biblical texts.⁴¹⁷ Each violent narrative in the Hebrew Bible is not necessarily an example of the scapegoating mechanism. Stories that hint of the mimetic cycle need not be complete or as successful as Cain, Job or Joseph.⁴¹⁸

Girard roots the entire notion of mimesis within the Bible to Satan as a discernible entity, the mechanism that accomplishes the entire cycle. Some religions have their roots and organizational structures in sacrifices; for Girard, these obscure that Satanic collusion. Satan accuses, describes the process, selects the victim, promotes the violence and convinces the audience to behave in a mimetic manner. Satan is not only the cause but also the cure: Satan provides the temporary solution with the selection and elimination of the victim and the ensuing calm, relief and tranquility that follows. This makes Satan the master of human

⁴¹⁴ Girard, *I see Satan*, 114, 107. Girard similarly shows how the stories of Job and Joseph are told from the weaker person's standpoint, the "potential" victim. Girard, *I see Satan*, 103-120.

⁴¹⁵ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 54-56.

⁴¹⁶ Girard, *I see Satan*, 119.

⁴¹⁷ Girard, *I see Satan*, 106; 117-121.

⁴¹⁸ Girard, *I see Satan*, 115.

culture, based on, and revolving around, acts of murder. This sacrificial system works to bind the mob into a functioning community because all is accomplished in a spirit of harmony and co-operation when the mob consolidates around the scapegoat. Humans are deceived by Satan's plan because of their ingrained human tendency to blame others.

Girard connects Satan to mimetic contagion, as a "metaphorical embodiment of mimetic desire" who gets "credit" for promoting violence.⁴¹⁹ Satan is the source of "the structural principle of human existence in which both disorder and order are built upon untruth and violence."⁴²⁰ Girard argues that Christianity exposes the cycle of mimetic violence for what it is, breaking Satan's spell of mimetic contagion over human nature.⁴²¹

He affirms that the Biblical God is not a god of violence; violence comes from the people, not the deity. Girard claims that God exposes the faulty logic of the scapegoat process, thereby declaring the end of that kind of violence. The Christian Cross thus serves as the symbol of the end of violence rather than a reminder of the use of violence as an appropriate tool. "Humankind is never the victim of God; God is always the victim of humankind."⁴²² By extension, God could be considered the ultimate-scapegoat, the completely innocent one.

⁴¹⁹ Williams, *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred*, 205.

⁴²⁰ René Girard in an interview with Brian McDonald, "Violence and the Lamb Slain" in *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, December 2003, also on the web, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-10-040-i>, accessed 23.1.2016.

⁴²¹ Girard, *I see Satan*, 182-83.

⁴²² Girard, *I see Satan*, 191.

Girard shows no concerns about parallels with the scapegoating rituals of other societies and the Christian doctrine of the Atonement because his theory proposes a fundamental difference between scapegoating and Christ's victimhood. Because of the doctrine of the Atonement, Christianity is uniquely placed to recognize these episodes as deviations from its true message. It is from Christianity that society has learned to take the side of the victim. Girard says Christianity took a wrong turn with substitution atonement. It is humankind, not God who has the problem with violence.

Girard has attracted criticism with his idea of humanity's basic violence that gives little acknowledgement to the natural goodness found within humanity. With his emphasis on acquisitive mimesis's almost inevitable resultant conflict and violence, it appears that Girard views human nature as more negative than positive. His approach to society's founding violence and its resolution also remains abstract and theoretical because it is not supported by substantial tangible scientific evidence, in spite of his extensive literary research in many cultures and languages.⁴²³ This is an especially important criticism since Girard claims to be using scientific methodology.

Nowhere does Girard discuss ethics or morality nor current sociological, psychological or empirical studies. Paisley Livingston goes so far as to state that

⁴²³ Richard Golsan, *Rene Girard and Myth: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1993), especially "Girard's Critics and the Girardians," 107-127.

“his basic hypothesis has suffered from an absence of analytic rigour.”⁴²⁴ Lucien Scubla compares Girard to Freud, Huber and Muass and calls Girard’s speculations “an agnostic theory of religion.”⁴²⁵ Some critics claim that John Milbank “misread” Girard in *Theology and Social Theory*.⁴²⁶ Jean Greisch finds Girard’s thoughts to be a Gnosis.⁴²⁷ Scott Lewis contends Girard’s work claims the New Testament is superior the Hebrew Bible, that Girard ignores a good proportion of modern scholarship and that his work is “too simple to be useful.”⁴²⁸

Edward T. Oakes contends that Girard’s work lacks a theological structure, and that to discuss sacrifice and violence one must always consider, and analyse ethics, justice and morals, which Girard does not. Oakes quotes Urs von Balthasar extensively to support his contention that

Girard’s synthesis is a closed system, since it wants to be “purely scientific,” jettisoning all “moribund metaphysics.” All philosophy is secularized religion, and religion owes its existence to the covert scapegoat mechanism. There is therefore no such thing as a “natural” concept of God. For Girard, religion is the invention of Satan.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ Livingston, *Models of Desire*, xv. Livingston is Durkheimian when he assumes the explanation of matters of religious phenomena should be sought exclusively at the sociological and psychological levels of description (xi-xx).

⁴²⁵ Lucien Scubla, “René Girard ou la renaissance de l’anthropologie religieuse” in *René Girard* (Paris: Cahiers de l’Herne, Paris, 2008), 105-109.

⁴²⁶ James Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* quoted in James Alison’s website, <http://www.jamesalison.co.uk/texts/eng05.html#top>, originally in *The Tablet*, 29 June 1996, accessed 23.7. 2010.

⁴²⁷ Jean Greisch, “Une anthropologie fondamentale du rite: René Girard,” 89-119, in *Le Rite*, Jean Greisch (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), especially 117-119.

⁴²⁸ Scott Lewis, “The Bible and Violence,” February 2008 lecture.

⁴²⁹ This quote is from *Balthasar’s Theo-Drama, volume 4*, subtitled “The Action.” <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2007/04/rene-girard-for-holy-week>.

In contrast, there are scholars who suggest that Girard should be read "theologically," especially Kevin Mongrain, who submits that Girard's anthropologic assumptions are instead "fundamentally theocentric and Christocentric," although Girard did not refer to himself as a theologian.⁴³⁰

Other supporters like Brian McDonald claims that Girard

combines a "deconstructionist" and "debunking" analysis of the origins and bases of human culture with an essentially traditionalist affirmation of Christianity ... he "debunks" the propitiatory view of Christ's death.⁴³¹

James Alison proposes that

Girard has given us an understanding of desire and of human violence which corresponds to each other exactly as a theology of grace does to the understanding of the incarnation, passion and resurrection of Jesus and enables us to rediscover an anthropology ... making Christian orthodoxy fresh and liveable.⁴³²

Theologians such as Walter Wink, J. Mark Heim and Denny Weaver have been substantially influenced by Girard's thinking. In keeping with their pacifist views, these three scholars have developed alternative conceptualizations of atonement. Weaver's *Narrative Christus Victor*, for example, is a non-violent alternative to *Christus Victor*.⁴³³ With such work, they have helped give credence to

⁴³⁰ Kevin Mongrain, "Theologians of Spiritual Transformation: A Proposal for Reading René Girard through the Lenses of Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Cassian," *Modern Theology* 28, no.1 (2012), 83. In Biblical and theological thought, Girard's theory is often labelled the Myth of Sacred Violence, Violence of the Sacred or the Anthropology of the Cross, e.g., Paul J. Nuechterlein, "René Girard: The Anthropology of the Cross as Alternative to Post-Modern Literary Criticism" http://girardianlectionary.net/girard_postmodern_literary_criticism.htm, accessed 06.04.2013.

⁴³¹ Brian McDonald, "Violence and the Lamb."

⁴³² James Alison, in *The Tablet*.

⁴³³ See Wink's "Power" trilogy, *Unmasking the powers: the invisible forces that determine human existence* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986); *Engaging the powers: discernment and resistance in a world of domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); *Naming the Powers: the language of power*

Girard's theorizations and moved the Scapegoat Scenario, as Girard envisages it, into the main stream of theological consideration.

An inter-relationship between violence and humour might initially appear to be an oxymoron and yet many narratives include both elements. Frye contends "In laughter itself, some kind of deliverance from the unpleasant, even the horrible seems to be very important."⁴³⁴ Scolding or teasing can be one step in the progression towards bullying or scapegoating that in certain contexts indicates a direct link between humour, in the teasing, and symbolic violence, which can lead to active violence.⁴³⁵

Stanley Pranin has germane comments:

Much of the "humorous" dialogue included insults, threats, and in general, comments heavily laden with innuendo. I began to inventory those things we usually consider "funny" and found that a surprising number of them were thinly-veiled forms of verbal attacks or counter-attacks ... Philosophically speaking, there is little difference between this form of hostile word-use and a physical attack.⁴³⁶

A deliberate intention to humiliate someone physically or mentally/emotionally to evoke laughter or a humorous response implies that the person is capable of both symbolic violence and physical violence.⁴³⁷ Humour becomes a

in the New Testament (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984). Also, Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, or Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*.

⁴³⁴ Frye, *Anatomy*, 46.

⁴³⁵ It is necessary to differentiate between the gratuitous verbal comment and the pejorative, disrespectful remark. "Always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed, laughter is, really and truly, a kind of social 'ragging'." Bergson, *Laughter*, 135.

⁴³⁶ While this is in a discussion of movies that are considered "comedies," it bespeaks my point. Stanley Pranin, "Humor: a Veil for Verbal Violence," *Aiki News* 14 (November 1975).

⁴³⁷ Bergson, *On Laughter*, 136-137 and Colaguori, "Symbolic Violence and the Violation of Human Rights."

form of aggression and/or violence.⁴³⁸ If some kinds of humour can be deemed a form of aggression, it is relevant to examine ways in which violence can be qualified and otherwise examined and Girard's methodology allows for this possibility.

To my knowledge, no scholar has applied Girard's ideas to the three *Judges'* pericopes I am examining. Whether or not his theory is complete or applicable within the stories will become apparent. If they are to be valid examples of the Biblical Girardian Scapegoat theory, they must display all components of his Scapegoating theory and there must be evidence of the positive voice of the victim as well as some observation of the victim's perspective within the text.

⁴³⁸ Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction 1998), 67.

6-Parameters Summary

The continuing transcendental importance of the transfer of knowledge and values to help people develop into good and productive citizens of a particular society or theological community is a given. Optimum learning depends upon successful communication: storytelling continues to be a valid teaching tool, an effective strategy to perpetuate religious, theological ideals, beliefs, attitudes and understandings.

For a long time, stories were traditionally used in education. They were vehicles by which values, moral views, and behaviour models were transmitted and anchored in man's consciousness.⁴³⁹

Girard, Leacock, Frye, Bettelheim and Peseschkian agree that cultural parameters influence interpretation. They comprehend that value-loaded, theological standards of thought, action and attitude are taught through example, some of which are facilitated by exposure to narrative. They recognize that readers deal with text at the level with which they are able and such learning may be active and evolving. They also understand that the Interpreter who appraises a story may draw insights and conclusions that are contrary to the Narrator's original intention.

Humour, imagination and violence, three universal factors of human life, are difficult to define, ambiguous and dissonant in the best of circumstances.

⁴³⁹ Peseschkian, *Oriental Stories*, 4.

Surprisingly, they share a common link: their concern with the incongruities of life.⁴⁴⁰ The challenge for the Biblical scholar and the theologian is to interpret each Biblical story keeping in mind the secular and theological character of the text as an entity, while explaining seemingly dissimilar features. A conscious understanding of the nuances within a narrative should lead to theological precepts.

All five exemplars explore the hidden and ambiguous mastery of narratives. Girard, Bettelheim and Peseschkian identify disguised emotions and attitudes that lead to personal understandings. They advocate the use of narratives to encourage emotional growth and communal understanding and solidarity. Frye and Leacock promote the commonality and coalescence that humour can provide, a moral value at the least, Christian values at its best. For them, humour was dependent upon hidden and ambiguous intimations, available only to those who understood. Girard supports the efficacy of Christian values with its anti-scapegoat viewpoint and morals, as an instrument of positive personal growth and long-lasting group cohesion, which can decrease the importance of violence as a tool of social control.

To varying degrees, the five scholars stress the importance of imagination in the individual's ability to engage with reality and in the healthy development of a person's existence. Without imagination, nothing creative exists.

Art ... begins with the world we construct, not with the world we see. It starts with the imagination, and then works towards ordinary experience: that is, it tries to make itself as convincing and recognizable as it can.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴⁰ Morreall's entire thesis rests on this concept in *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion*.

⁴⁴¹ Frye, *Imagination*, 23.

The successful transfer of moral and ethical attitudes and behaviour from one generation to the next, to preserve society's values, was the goal of each scholar and literature could be expected to play some role in the perpetuation of theological learning, interpretation and beliefs. With imagination and reflection, insights and challenges can be explored, and moral and religious debates can be envisaged especially if the Interpreter has an extensive knowledge base. What one brings to the texts depends on the individual ability to perceive nuances and polarities and discern interpretative diversity. The reader internalizes the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the moral/theological training presented within the narratives and may accept them as valid as part of an ever-evolving, never-ending intellectual process.

Bettelheim ties the maturation process, personal imagination and the successful integration of each child into society, to the reading of fairy tales or *märchen*. Peseschkian broadens that focus to include people of all ages. They both accent the importance of moral behaviour as a positive component of such experiential education. Like Leacock and Frye, they avoid a detailed discussion of any theological implications to their work but acknowledge the relevance of theological understandings in the fairy tale-*märchen* genre. Bettelheim finds only one coping mechanism in the Bible, "repression." He considers Biblical narratives, therefore, to be problematic as a learning tool or appropriate role models for children because, for him, a skillful story should present more than one coping

alternative. With that one limitation, Bettelheim suggests that Biblical narratives have a similar structure to fairy tales.⁴⁴²

Leacock categorizes humour hierarchically, from the “primitive” to “high class” and understands the wide range of emotions humorous stories can evoke.⁴⁴³ Frye has no such ranking but contends “In comedy, the moral norm is not morality, but deliverance,”⁴⁴⁴ implying an affinity to Leacock’s concept that the best humour involves self-discovery and can involve a range of emotional responses at the same time.

Frye takes a broad theoretical and philosophical view of comedy and humour as he differentiates between them. For him, humour is a literary device that cannot be separate from the narrative and is integral to many narratives. He emphasizes the role of imagination in creativity and the interpretation of texts and reality. His thoughts about victims parallel Girard’s ideas about the scapegoat but are not as fully developed. He envisages that religion begins with myth that leads eventually to theological belief. He evolved a three-part system to classify literature, one group of which he labels “comedy” but he contends that humour can be found in any kind of literature.⁴⁴⁵ Comedy, as a literary system, involves the positive change in the protagonist’s status and is designed “to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge.”⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² Bettelheim, *Uses*, 11.

⁴⁴³ “[T]he humour that lies in this highest class ... is not of necessity the best known nor the best. It is the quality of the class that is high, the level, but not of necessity the sample.” Leacock, *H. and H.*, 204.

⁴⁴⁴ Frye, “The Argument,” 87.

⁴⁴⁵ Tragedy, Comedy, Thematic grouping.

⁴⁴⁶ Frye, “The Argument,” 81-82.

Stories assist in the consolidation of the group that hears them, helping that bloc of people differentiate itself from the rest of society and become a cohesive unit based on common values, morals and philosophical attitudes. Because Christian theological education begins with, but is not limited to, the Bible, it poses moral and theological challenges because the Bible is neither simplistic nor unambiguous. Values are imbedded in the writings and the discovery of such values is solely dependent on the Interpreter's ability to identify them.

All five scholars saw the potential for, and importance of, moral and religious education within Biblical narratives. Each espoused the validity and importance of imagination to decode theological meaning and enhance learning. Girard and Bettelheim, in particular, underscored the importance of imitative behaviours for learning as well as ingenuity, imagination and independence. For Leacock and Frye, imagination, imitation and humour played roles in successful group consolidation and social reconciliation.⁴⁴⁷ All five deal with the range of good and evil. They contend that no matter how experienced a person may be, nothing in life can give the dimension or depth of understanding, that imagination can⁴⁴⁸ although Frye alone articulates a clear understanding of the differences between belief and imagination.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ "... in the imagination anything goes that can be imagined, and the limit of the imagination is a totally human world. Here we recapture, in full consciousness, that original lost sense of identity." Leacock, *H.*, 444. See Frye, "The Argument," 81.

⁴⁴⁸ Frye, "Imagination," 472-74.

⁴⁴⁹ See Frye, "Imagination," 472-473.

Each scholar makes some reference to theological considerations, however minor they may be. At the one extreme, Girard's entire premise emphasizes the unique structure of the Bible, especially the New Testament, as a non-violent alternative in the development of personal and group maturation and consolidation. He claims that violence is endemic to society and is a universal expression of humanity because of its commonality in every civilization. For him, violence is the cause and source of most religions. In his analyses of non-Biblical theological texts, Girard claims that violence controls non-Christian religions as they lead their adherents to a temporary unity using the Scapegoat's death. Only Christianity is different, when it rejects Scapegoating, recounting stories with bias towards the weaker, or less advantaged characters, rather than that of the bully. Girard places emphasis on the role of Satan, as a force in theological reckoning and considers that it is humans, not God, who espouse and support Biblical violence. He highlights the importance of a detailed examination of texts to expose evils, specifically the scapegoat mechanism. As far as Girard is concerned, only Christianity as a society and religion, has the hope of maturity where there is no need for the Scapegoat mechanism. In my opinion, he is overly optimistic in his contention that once the mechanism is exposed to the wider public, it will disappear. A society's understanding of the scapegoat mechanism does not immediately cause it to disappear.

Frye and Leacock make lesser mention of the theological implications of their analyses but highlight the importance of non-hurtful, non-destructive humour, which coincides with the Christian ethic and morality of kindness and emotional goodness within a cohesive group dynamic. Leacock stresses compassion and incongruity in humour, which ideally involves reality, truth and, in its highest achievement, pathos. He does, however, generally disconnect humour from laughter *per se*. He delineates the role of culture, language and individual interpretation in the recognition of humour but says little about the recognition, or role, of humour in the Bible. We accept Northrop Frye's contention that "There may be meaning beyond the literal [in the Bible] ... there is a unity and consistency of its narrative and imagery.

Hebrew Bible narratives exemplify the best in storytelling, modelling

Thornton Wilder's opinion:

[t]o survive, a story must arouse wonder, wonder in both senses in which we now employ the word: astonishment at the extent of man's capacity for good and evil, and speculations as to the sources of that capacity.⁴⁵⁰

In the next section I will investigate the stories of Ehud, Ja'el and A Certain Woman beginning with the linguistic implications of the texts and the ideas posed by Bettelheim, Peseschkian, Leacock, Frye and Girard.

⁴⁵⁰ Thornton Wilder, *Jacob's Dream: Introduction by Thornton Wilder*, ed. Richard Beer-Hofmann (New York, NY: Johannes Press, 1946), Introduction.

7-The Texts Themselves

“Writing history is not just noting the facts. It is selecting what the writer finds relevant for his own purposes.”⁴⁵¹ Mieke Bal’s comment is equally applicable to narrative and theological analyses. The important question is “Which story of what happened is being told and for what theological and ideological purpose(s)?”

The Bible is the product of many societies, encoding many ideologies, some⁴⁵² of which can be discovered by what it says (content) and how it says it (rhetoric).⁴⁵³ Divergent opinions and interpretations become possible and plausible for many reasons, one of which is that language is at times ambiguous and untranslatable.⁴⁵⁴

It is within the content and rhetoric of each story that the characters and the theological power of these stories shine. While the primary focus will remain on the three designated pericopes, taking the tales completely out of the contexts of the entire Bible destroys their broader narrative and theological meaning.

⁴⁵¹ Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: the politics of coherence in the book of Judges* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 241.

⁴⁵² I use the word “some” advisedly as it is impossible to identify *every* ideology of a text. The ideology is not the property of the text, rather the text is an expression of the ideology. The author portrays the ideology by the way in which she creates the text (content and rhetoric) while the reader discerns an ideology by the manner in which he considers the text, based on his own ideologies, prejudices, concerns and interests. See David Clines, *Interested Parties: the ideology of writers and readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

⁴⁵³ See Gale Yee, “Ideological Criticism,” in *Judges and method*, ed. Yee, Chapter 7.

⁴⁵⁴ Multiple causalities are clearly evident in *Judges*. Jobling asserts that “the co-presence of divine and human causality is ... a universal characteristic of the Bible.” Jobling, “Right-brained story,” in *Signs and Wonders*, ed. Exum, 128.

It is clearly evident that these are stories of violence. The individual deaths are crucial plot devices and it is relevant to begin with a perusal of the ideologies and theologies of Israelite violence and war.

Violence and War as Ideological Influences

It is reasonable to suggest that the people writing *Judges* originally were writing about things that were theologically important to them: the ideals of war, invasions, the triumphs of Israel and denigration of the Other that would placate YHWH and fulfil their covenantal commitments.⁴⁵⁵

Violence and its organizational structure, war, are common within the Hebrew Bible in general and the book of *Judges* in particular. Gerhard von Rad argued that "War was at the heart of Israel's religion and thus of its identity"⁴⁵⁶ as did G.L. Mattingly: "War was so common in the biblical period that the Old Testament makes specific reference to times of peace."⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Some twentieth century proposals suggest that the text meant to support the concept of a Davidic hereditary monarchy, specifically from the tribe of Judah. [Burney, *Judges*, 64; R.O.H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (Leiden/New York, NY: Brill), 1996), 266-67, 304-305; Soggin, *Judges*, 281; A.D.H. Mayes, *Judges* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 12, 66.] Other scholars suggested the stories contain a covert message that NO king, other than YHWH, was appropriate. [P.D. Guest, "Dangerous Liaisons in the book of *Judges*," *SJOT* 11, no.2 (1997): 241-69; Boling, *Judges*, 294; Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 112]. A third theory proposes that the book of *Judges* is an allegorical polemic against Northern (*i.e.* Israelite) judges by Southern (*i.e.*, Judahite) writers. [M. Brettler, "The book of *Judges*: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108, no.3 (1989): 395-418].

⁴⁵⁶ Von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 3.

⁴⁵⁷ G.L. Mattingly, "War," in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier, General Editor (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996), 1198.

War was a physical reality and the validity of war as a theological and political tool influenced every aspect of Israelite life as it modified, altered and amplified the group's world view, beliefs, and philosophical, theological attitudes. Following Bobbitt, I use the term "war" to refer to any conflict that has organizational structure, from guerrilla and tribal raids to inter-nation conflicts.⁴⁵⁸

The endemic nature of violence and war within the Hebrew Bible and its influence on the evolution of its religion has been well explained and argued elsewhere.⁴⁵⁹ Positive attitudes towards power, force and the rule of law are constituent elements of the war process. Israelite identity was closely related to an ability to make war following *YHWH*'s directives.⁴⁶⁰ "War" became a theological necessity without which *YHWH* and the Israelites lacked validity.

The premise that many Biblical narratives have historical veracity has been increasingly questioned, disproved and discounted by archaeologists and historians.⁴⁶¹ With no archaeological evidence to support a large scale invasion and major armed conflicts in the Canaanite region that became "Israel,"⁴⁶² the "invasion," as described in the books of *Joshua* and *Judges*, becomes a literary

⁴⁵⁸ Bobbitt, *The Shield*, 835ff.

⁴⁵⁹ E.g., Nelson-Pallmeyer's *Is Religion Killing Us?*, Niditch, *War*, and von Rad, *Holy War*.

⁴⁶⁰ Von Rad, *Holy War*. See also Peter Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, IN: Eerdmans, 1978).

⁴⁶¹ See Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) or William Dever, *What did the Biblical Writers Know and When did they know it?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 2001).

⁴⁶² The "infiltration" model is proposed by Norman Gotwald [*The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology for the Religion of the Liberation of Israel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979)]. The "pioneer settlement" model is suggested by Robert Coote and Keith Whitelam [*The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* (Sheffield: Almond, Social World of Biblical Antiquity, 1987)]. Lawrence Stager modifies the pioneer theorem to suggest a "ruralization hypothesis" ["Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 123-175].

manifestation of an intellectual fantasy saga created by the leaders of the ethnic entity, "Israelites," to express fundamental theological imperatives and serve an ideological purpose. They needed the myth of an armed conquest to consolidate their relationship with their god because that god made it possible through warfare. It can be argued that they considered any strategies to gain, retain or maintain the land they regarded as their gift from *YHWH* ideologically acceptable. The record of military conflicts became therefore a religious and theological necessity to maintain Israelite connections with their god through their control of the land.

How did the Israelites win? Acceptable behaviours are addressed in only two places in the Hebrew Bible and these are no restrictions on battlefield behaviours, only on cultic conduct *before* and *after* battle.⁴⁶³ If there are no impediments within the Israelite writings that forbid tricksterism, deceit and dishonesty, if there are no guidelines for the individual elimination or assassination of enemy leaders, and there are none, there should be no prohibition in the use of these methods within any "battle" or "war" mandate. This permits the Interpreter to justify all strategies and behaviours in the pericopes as acceptable. Ideologically, each Protagonists is permitted to utilize any tactic that they see fit.

YHWH's varying support and the conflict and interplay of Israelite-versus-non-Israelite generate important considerations. Theologically and ideologically, all methods of war seem to be valid in the battlefield as long as *YHWH* approves

⁴⁶³ Instructions are centred on the behaviour of the warriors in the military camp and the necessary preparations (and exclusions) that should take place before the battle (*Deut.* 20 and 23:10-14; *Num.* 19:16, 31:9, 31:25-30 and 35:11). *Deut.* 20:19-20 discusses the protection of fruit-bearing trees during sieges as the only applicable stricture during conflicts.

of the conflict and cultic requirements have been met. There is the theological understanding that *YHWH* could be fickle, or at least capricious, when faced with Israelite apostasy.⁴⁶⁴ That *YHWH* supported the “Other” as a method of punishment for the Israelites permeates Israelite overview of their religious beliefs and of *YHWH* even as the Israelites denigrate all non-Israelite peoples.⁴⁶⁵ To guarantee *YHWH*’s support, Israelites, individually and as a unit, had to be faithful to the Covenant. This is a god who is prepared to be merciful and gracious to apostate Israelites. *YHWH*’s direct re-involvement with the Israelites begins the moment they ask for assistance⁴⁶⁶ or the deity judges intervention to be appropriate.⁴⁶⁷ Military defeats are deemed to be a consequence of Israelite failure to meet covenantal obligations or perform inappropriate cultic behaviours. *YHWH* is crucial to any Israelite success and therefore every Israelite narrative because of this theological relationship of Israel with *YHWH* but at the same time, *YHWH* is not part of the battle scenario as an active participant.

Each story of the 12 judges can be divided into two parts: the original tale, which shows characteristics of *märchen* and the identifiable redaction. The redaction, moulds the book into a *relatively* consistent whole. With its plot arrangement and an introductory and summative structure, the redactors shaped each pericope to reflect the theological ideals of their time, using each original tale, the

⁴⁶⁴ *E.g.*, 3:12: “the LORD strengthened King Eglon of Moab ...”

⁴⁶⁵ Many biblical narratives feature stories in which symbolic violence is inflicted upon non-Israelites. For example, Moabites are considered stupid (3:12ff), the Midianites and the Amalekites are considered nastily destructive (6:1ff).

⁴⁶⁶ They “cried out to the Lord,” 3:9; 3:15; 6:7.

⁴⁶⁷ 8:33 ff.

core story, as a basis. I will argue that there is a distinct difference between the original *märchen*-core and the redactions in structure as well as language and theological intention.

The Narrative Structure

Biblical scholars place the original creation of the written form of *Judges* within a range, 1200-1000 BCE with *at least* three layers of construction and editing, the last redaction during or immediately following the Babylonian Exile, 588± to 538± BCE.⁴⁶⁸ It is generally accepted that the stories of Chapters 3 to 16 are oral folk tales that were recorded and amended over at least a five hundred year period.⁴⁶⁹ Each pericope of the major judges has a distinct narrative structure composed of three parts: an introductory redaction, a core story, followed by a brief concluding redaction.

The following is a general indication of each pericope's structure.

Ehud's pericope is the most straightforward: the redaction introduction of 3.5 verses (3:12-15a) immediately followed by the 15 verse *märchen*-core (3:15b-29) and the redactive conclusion "the land had rest" (3:30).

Ja'el's pericope is a critical yet supplemental insert in the Deborah-Barak narrative. The introductory redaction for Deborah's tale is applicable (4:1-3) but

⁴⁶⁸ Boling, *Judges*, xxi, 30-31; Soggin, *Judges*, 7-8.

⁴⁶⁹ See commentaries on *Judges*. Besides differentiating between the "core" story and the redaction, they not only date the redactions but also analyze them in greater detail. Boling's hypotheses that there are at least three layers of construction to *Judges* has widespread support. Boling, *Judges*, 30. See also, Soggin, *Judges*, 5-6; Burney, *Judges*, xii-l; Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 6-7, 286-287; A.D.H. Mayes, "Deuteronomistic royal ideology in *Judges* 17-21," *BiblInt* IX, no.3 (2001): 246.

the rest of Ja'el's tale is in disjointed sections, the disingenuous 4:11, which mentions Heber, and then the six verse *märchen*-core (4:17-22). At this point the story gains cohesion with the adjacent redaction for the entire story in 4:23-24 that does not reflect Ehud's "the land had rest." That statement is found at the end of the poetic version in 5:3`.

A Certain Woman's pericope is the shortest, most unusual and unexpected. She is a true cameo or agency character, with her swift and sudden appearance.⁴⁷⁰ Gideon's story is primary, to which Abimelech's adventures is a supplement so that Abimelech's introduction/redaction alone is applicable (8:33-35). A Certain Woman's *märchen*-core may begin with Abimelech's power grab (9:1) but it is only when his army advances on Thebez that she appears (9:53-54).

The final redaction for the overall Abimelech saga is atypical, with neither "the land had rest" nor anything similar, only a re-affirmation of *YHWH*'s power and authority (9:56-57).

The Märchen as the centre of the narrative

These pericopes are likely modified *märchen*. They may well have some historical roots expressed here as a fictionalized and theologized clarification of an original event amplified to increase its impact. Modifying a pre-existing story to

⁴⁷⁰ "... whose sole purpose is to carry out a particular function, whether it be to do a particular action, say a particular thing or be in a particular place to impel the plot forward." Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative. The Bible and Literature, Vol. 9* (Sheffield: Almond, 1993), 23-24.

embellish a specific ideology does not necessarily create a canonical contradiction. In these cases, *YHWH*'s theological demands upon the Israelites are non-negotiable: they are to worship no other gods.

Recalling Thompson's definition, *märchen* is more encompassing than the contentious terms, "fairy tale" and "folk tale."⁴⁷¹ It is clear to me that each pericope meets the majority of the *märchen* requirements.⁴⁷²

Firstly, these are stories of varying lengths with rather complex motifs and episodes, with characters who can be seen to embody "marvellous" or perhaps "uncanny" abilities within Todorov's categorization. Ehud's plotting, actions and escape seem amazing as does the battle strategy and slaughter of all the Moabites. Sisera's army's similar defeat, his propitious arrival at Ja'el's tent and her subsequent actions appear beyond the ability of logic as does A Certain Woman's lucky toss. "Humble heroes," two women and a member of a secondary tribe triumph. Even though they may not "succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses," they ensure the survival of the national unit.⁴⁷³

The settings encourage an affirmation of non-historicity, as Thompson's "never-never land." While the original audience may have had an accurate understanding of all the settings, the present-day audience does not, and it is as a present-day reader that such an evaluation is being applied.

⁴⁷¹ Thompson, *The Folktale*, 8.

⁴⁷² See definition p. 10±.

⁴⁷³ Rather than "kingdom" for at this stage, there are no Kings *per se*.

All geographic sites are nebulous and indefinable, lacking verifiable data except for the Jordan River. Ehud's "city of palms" may or may not be the present-day Jericho⁴⁷⁴ and the ambiguity continues with the questionable whereabouts of the sculptured stones at Seirah.⁴⁷⁵

With Ja'el's tale, we have further disingenuous locations. Hazor could be in one of several places⁴⁷⁶ and Kedesh is also of uncertain position.⁴⁷⁷ Harosheth-ha-goiim and Elon-bezaananim are unique and therefore mythic.⁴⁷⁸ Even Mount Tabor, which is generally believed to be in the northeast Jezebel Valley, cannot be specifically located.⁴⁷⁹ All these components add to the unreal aura of the story and compound the *märchen* possibilities.

A Certain Woman's Thebez's location is similarly controversial and nebulous.⁴⁸⁰ What is mythical/*märchen* is the named success of one person, with one implement, dealing the crucial death blow.

⁴⁷⁴ *Deut.* 34:3 and *2Chron.* 28:15 connect the two entities "Jericho" and "the city of palm (trees)." Soggin questions whether Jericho and the city of palms are the same. Soggin, *Judges*, 49.

⁴⁷⁵ This is the only time that Seirah occurs in the Hebrew Bible. *The HarperCollins Dictionary* (1993). As for the sculptured stones, their exact location is also moot (1989).

⁴⁷⁶ Two suggested locations are as contradictory (the upper Galilee and the southern Negev). *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 407.

⁴⁷⁷ There are four possible locations: in southeastern Galilee, northwest of Lake Huleh, near Megiddo or in Judah on the southern border. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 563.

⁴⁷⁸ The Jewish Encyclopedia suggests that Harosheth-ha-goiim may be a region, not a specific location and that Elon-bezaananim might be likely near Hazor. http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0008_0_08439.html. *The HarperCollins Dictionary* suggests that Harosheth-ha-goiim might be southeast of Mt. Carmel and also wavers about exact location (405). It has no citation for Elon-bezaananim.

⁴⁷⁹ "Tabor" is found 10 times. *E.g.*, 1 Chr. 6:77 and Psalms 89:12.

⁴⁸⁰ It is considered to "somewhere" near Shechem [*ATS Bible Dictionary*]. OR north east of Shechem [*Easton's Bible Dictionary*] OR "in the district of Neapolis," in Mount Ephraim [*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*]. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* asserts that the location is ambiguous (1132). Sasson concurs when he suggests any definitive location is a "guess." Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1-12*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 399. He also questions why Abimelech even targeted Thebez.

The Redactions

Blocks of texts inserted into an original story by the redactors, as the introduction and the conclusions, are the present focus. This extensive process imposes a structure and consistency of language and usage binding *Judges* 3 to 16 into a solid narrative unity. Such textual conformity creates an overall sense of theological homogeneity, encouraging the reader to make character and plot comparison serving as a predictive literary device.⁴⁸¹ Textual exclusions and inclusions of the redactions hint at variances in the narratives' structure and encourage imaginative anticipatory reactions. With such expectation comes the possibilities of latent humour, based on a commonality of community understanding of the nuances, incongruities within the narratives, and the unexpected surprise of their revelation. This all suggests that the Redactor's role is one of a literary and theological, as well as historical, agency.⁴⁸² It begins with the ten point cycle that I discuss more fully in the next section.

The Narrative Cycle Structure and the Introductory Redactions

The introductory redactions set the stage for the story and have a consistency that imposes a theological bias to the *märchen*-core and clarifies

⁴⁸¹ Looking beyond each individual story, the book as an entity, shows an overall decline in Israelite life and this presages 1, 2 Samuel, indicating an intertextual theological cohesion and overview among the books.

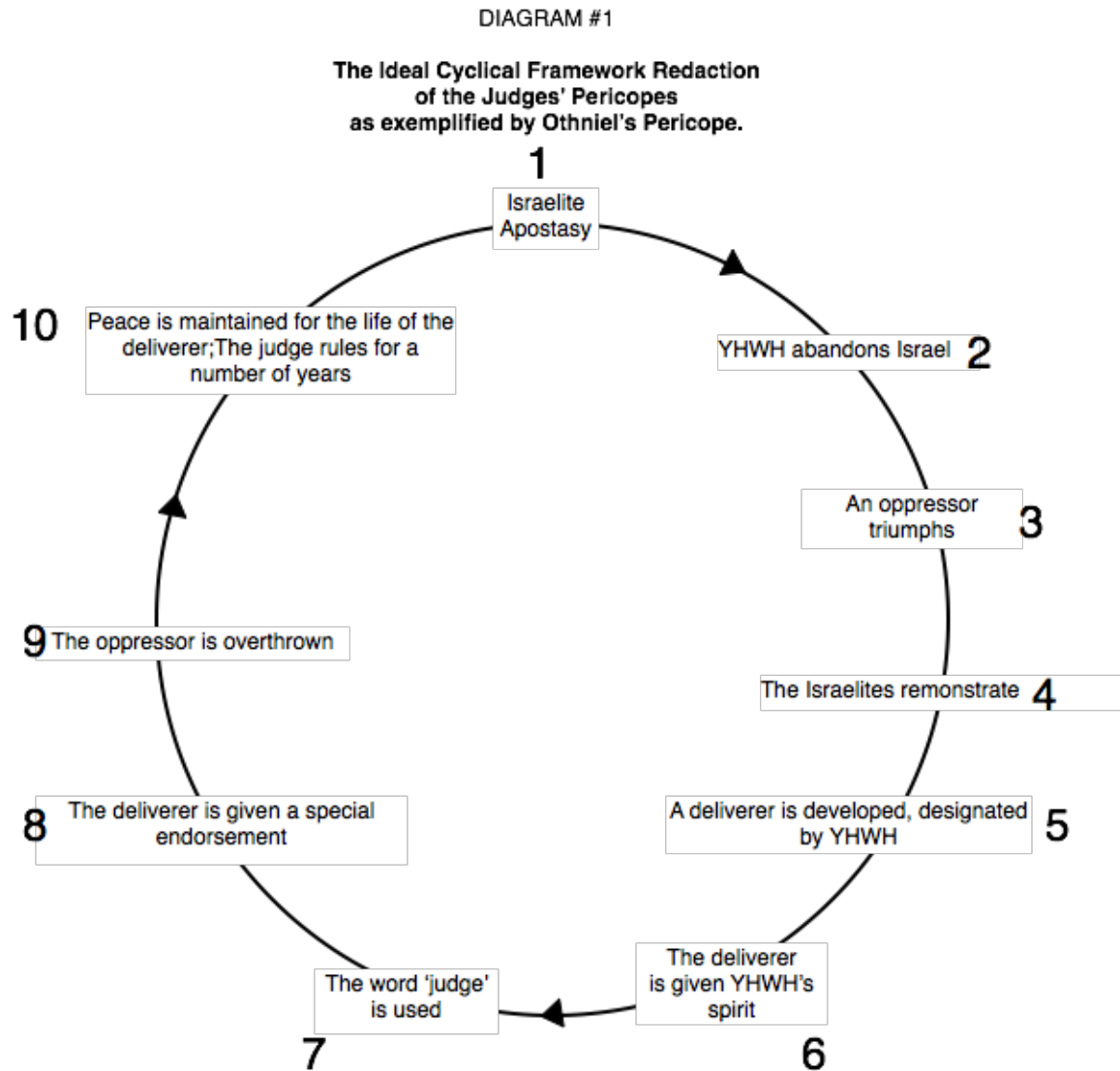
⁴⁸² This is a common perception. Boling, *Judges*, 30; Mayes, "Deuteronomistic royal ideology in *Judges* 17-21," 242-245. See also Burney, *Judges*, cxxviii-cxxxiii; Greenspahn, *The Theology of the Framework of Judges*, 385. O'Connell saw the role of the editor to be "establishing a standard of characterization whereby his [sic] readers could evaluate subsequent leaders." O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 266-67, 304-305.

YHWH's intentions. There are two interlocking parts to it: the introductory phrases and a textual configuration of a ten-point cycle.

This cyclical narrative frame is the most obvious amendment to the original *märchen*-core text, unifying the six stories of the major judges and presenting a regularity of intention.⁴⁸³ It also overlaps into the core-*märchen*, artificially integrating the two sections: redaction and core. The ideal manifestation of the cycle is exemplified by Othniel's tale in 3:1-11, which contains all ten elements. In this section, discussion will centre upon the presence or absence of the relevant features as shown in Diagram 1 (following).⁴⁸⁴ Exploration of the individual nuances and broader ramifications of each element and a detailed discussion of other elements of the obvious redaction, will be delayed until the consideration of the individual pericopes.

⁴⁸³ F.E. Greenspahn, "The Theology of the Framework of *Judges*," *VT* XXXVI, no.4 (1986): 386-89. The short minor judges' stories (1-4 verses) precludes this framework.

⁴⁸⁴ McCann suggests a four-step cycle. J. Clinton McCann, *Judges: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), 9-10. Matthews has a similar cycle with diagram. Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8-9. Martin also has a cyclical scheme. James D. Martin, *The Book of Judges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 3. Soggin emphasizes the "quasi-cyclical" nature of history repeating itself, as does Mayes. Soggin, *Judges*, 5; Mayes, *Judges*, 12.



Through this cyclical pattern the Redactor was able to adapt or moderate the overall impact of the individual tale *sub rosa*. The three pericopes contain such nuances and it is only in the *comparisons* that hidden subtleties become apparent. I argue that the presence or absence of any of these ten facets is symptomatic of theological and ideological precision as they link all the major judges' pericopes.

Each of the six major judges' tales displays six of the ten components: **1**, apostasy, **2**, *YHWH* abandonment, **3**, an oppressor, **4**, Israelites remonstrate, **9**,

the overthrow of evil and **10**, peace is established. The presence of the remaining four factors,⁴⁸⁵ especially the designations of "deliverer" and "judge" signals the redactor's theological understanding that *YHWH* has more confidence in the particular Protagonist.

Because this presence/absence depends on a comparative analysis, this knowledge is generally hidden from the casual Interpreter. I would argue that were one redactor to have a difference of opinion, the redactor would be able to present the six stories as requested/required, while simultaneously expressing his approval/disapproval of the individual pericope by the manipulation of those cyclical components.

We now move from the generalities of a textual overview to the specifics of the 10-point redactions for the three pericopes, and how they affect each story's theological rationale.

Ehud and the 10 Point Cycle

Ehud's story is self-contained and concise. The story appears relatively straight forward, and the redaction generally supports the idea that Ehud is *YHWH*'s divinely appointed agent. Ehud is the sole Protagonist, as the only clearly designated leader. All action revolves around his behaviour; there are no sub-narratives.

⁴⁸⁵ **5**, (a deliverer is designated), **6**, (*YHWH*'s spirit descends on the deliverer), **7**, (the word "judge" is used), and **8** (the deliverer receives *YHWH*'s special endorsement).

Ehud is a man of action, chosen by both *YHWH* and his fellow Israelites. Within the introductory redaction (3:12), the plot begins as anticipated through steps **1** to **3**. Eighteen years later, **4**, Israelites protest and **5**, a deliverer, Ehud, is appointed (3:15). Ehud's designation as a "deliverer" is unique.

Ehud is not identified as a "judge" (**7**) nor does he receive either of the two endorsements that might reinforce his mandate (**6**, **8**). As well, he does not receive textual credit for the Moabite defeat. The final victory is ascribed to Israel, shifting the responsibility for military success to *YHWH* and the idealized nation-state rather than Ehud and his army. *YHWH's* observable absence as a character, in the core further confuses any interpretation.

YHWH's absence in the core is consistent with the theology of *YHWH's* involvement in all aspects of Israelite life, including warfare. Within Deut. 20 and 23,⁴⁸⁶ it is clearly stated that *YHWH* is the guide and support of Israelite troops during battle, but nowhere does it indicate that *YHWH* might be *present* or *actively* involved. With such a commitment clearly stated, an additional indication or affirmation of *YHWH's* presence is redundant.

Further tacit divine approval of Ehud can be implied when the redaction indicates that Israel has 80 years of peace and safety after his death (3:30), twice the time Deborah's demise provided (5:31). For the Ehud pericope, there is the

⁴⁸⁶ *Deut.* 20:1-4 and 23:14, attest to *YHWH's* presence throughout war preparations.

question why he was not given the "judge" label or extra blessings, but otherwise, the cycle's redaction appears to approve of his actions and accomplishments.

Ja'el and A Certain Woman and the 10 Point Cycle

In contrast to Ehud, Ja'el and A Certain Woman are characters in subplots of a larger narrative. Neither is a designated leader, they have no titles, neither deliverer, nor judge, nor any endorsement directly from *YHWH*. They do not fit on the cyclical framework except at **9**, the oppressor is defeated. Yet they are essential to the plot's core purpose: the ultimate defeat of the anti-Israelite faction and the implied Israelite return to covenantal worship.⁴⁸⁷ Their textual validity depends on the acceptability of the Protagonist of the larger narrative.

Examining the Deborah/Ja'el story first, there is a direct cause-and-effect component in the narrative's literary structure beyond the redaction. Had Deborah not prophesized a woman's success, and Barak not engaged the armies in battle, there would have been no narrative connection to Ja'el.

How, therefore, does Deborah measure up within the redaction cycle? The plot begins well with **1 to 4**. Deborah is uniquely designated a prophetess *and*, **7**, a judge. The two special blessings (**6** and **8**) are textually missing but the double designation of "judge" *and* "prophetess" implies that Deborah has *YHWH's* full blessing and approval (4:4). This double-designation also strengthens Deborah's leadership status. While not receiving the "deliverer" honorific, (**5**), it and the

⁴⁸⁷ Although this is not specifically indicated. See 4:24 and 9:56-10:1.

presence of *YHWH*'s spirit are insinuated in her explicit directions from *YHWH* to Barak, indicating her control over his actions and the battle success, successes that are again credited to *YHWH* by divine instructions (4:6-7, 14) and complemented by *YHWH*'s involvement (4:4, 5, 15).

Ja'el has one degree of separation from Deborah; they do not interact directly yet Deborah's acceptability within the redaction leads one to infer that Ja'el's actions are similarly acceptable, for, as well as the redaction's favourable evaluation, there is no textual admonishment of Ja'el's words and actions. Her subplot is protected within the superstructure of the Deborah cycle. The redaction supports Deborah's leadership with *YHWH*'s presence on the battlefield an unexpected addendum. By supporting Deborah's status, the cyclical structure affirms Ja'el's role.

A Certain Woman's story is another nested subplot within Abimelech's story, itself an addendum to the judge Gideon's saga. Abimelech's entire tale should be viewed carefully because of the unusual structure of the redaction and cycle. The description of Israelite apostasy, (1) provides more specifics about the Israelite depravity than other texts, details that emphasize the depths of the Israelite rejection of *YHWH* (8:33-35). Adding to the narrative tension, there is no indication that *YHWH* abandons Israel, (2), the implication is that the previous apostasy, triggered by Gideon's behaviour and death, has continued. There is also no indication that the Israelites are unhappy in their apostasy or that they re-

monstrated to *YHWH* about Abimelech's expanding control (4). Abimelech himself is an interloper who does not have *YHWH*'s approval or support. The oppressor is not named the beginning of the story nor is the deliverer (3, 5). The term "judge" is not employed, (7), and neither divine endorsement takes place, (6, 8). Only component (9) occurs, the oppressor is overthrown. By the end of the pericope, as the enemy army disappears, there is no assurance that there is peace, a return to covenantal worship or a benevolent ruler/judge, (10). Disapproval of Abimelech is clear.

The Introductory Phrases

Beyond the premeditated construction of each pericope into a ten point cycle configuration there is a second observable redaction, which encloses and packages each pericope. The presence or absence of these components and the linguistic choices that the redactors made, contribute to a heightened narrative awareness and tension, promoting individual imagination, through hints of unusual events with the potential for surprise and incongruity, in all aspects of subsequent plot developments.

These standardized beginnings, which mimic the *märchen* structure of "once upon a time," lead one to again suggest that the redactors meant to encourage the Interpreters to consider these narratives as cautionary or folk tales

with moral and theological messages, rather than exclusive or exact recounting of historical events.⁴⁸⁸

The introduction to the six major judges' stories links and unites them, using one of two formulaic models:

A. "the sons of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (3:7; 6:1)

or

B. "the sons of Israel *again* did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord"

(3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1)

Following statements of malfeasance, *YHWH* implements a plan where an oppressor gains political and military control over Israel. *YHWH* "strengthens" the Moabites in Ehud's story (3:12), "sells" the Israelites to the Canaanites in Ja'el's tale (4:1) and "gives" them to the Midianites in Gideon's introduction (6:1).

Ehud and the Introductory Redaction

Ehud's story has a particular literary intensity. The tale begins with introduction B. There is some logic to this repetition "again" as Ehud's story sequentially introduces the second account of Israelite misbehaviour after Othniel. This

⁴⁸⁸ See T.A. Boogaart, "Stone for Stone: Retribution in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem," *JSOT* 10 no.32 (1985): 45-56; and James Black, "Ruth in the dark: folktale, law and creative ambiguity in the Old Testament," *CJLT* 5, no.1, (March 1991): 20-36.

is followed by “YHWH strengthened Eglon King of Moab over Israel because they had done [the] evil in the eyes of the Lord” (3:12b), which is repeated.

“[The] evil in the sight of the LORD” appears in the introductions for Ehud, Deborah/Ja’el and Gideon.⁴⁸⁹ The word, evil, **רָעָה**, is generally employed when a person or group breaks a religious law or God-given instruction in both Hebrew and English.⁴⁹⁰ Israelite evil is linguistically highlighted in a manner that is not obvious in the English. The definite article, **הַ**, is placed before “evil” and this is not reflected in the English translation. This Hebrew article shifts the emphasis from a general misdeed to a very specific, though textually undefined, misconduct that is worthy of particular attention.⁴⁹¹ The redactor has evaluated Israelite behaviour to be particularly heinous.

The entire phrase, “do evil in YHWH’s eyes,” is found frequently elsewhere, referring to an identifiable leader’s turpitude or the societal death of a community. The group, in each instance, is considered as culpable as the leader.⁴⁹² It is a narrative clue of an upcoming, pre-ordained divine judgment and

⁴⁸⁹ One must recall the additional nuances of “again” and the repetitions of 3:12-13; 4:1-3; 6:1-3; 8:33-35.

⁴⁹⁰ **רָעָה**, ‘*wr*, evil, occurs in 442 verses in the Hebrew Bible. *E.g.*, *Gen.* 2:9, 38:7; *Ex.* 32:22, *Num.* 32:13; *Deut.* 1:35, 17:1. It is not always preceded by “the.”

⁴⁹¹ I agree with Schneider on this point. Tammi Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 46.

⁴⁹² “Evil in the eyes of the Lord” is found 56 times in the Hebrew Bible. The sub-phrase “in the eyes of the Lord” is found 93 times. Thus, the majority of the time that the phrase “eyes of the Lord” is employed, it is connected with actions that YHWH deemed unacceptable.

likely death sentence: death of an individual ruler, accompanied by a dynastic replacement.⁴⁹³ That phrase, twice in one verse as it is with Ehud's story, is unique like so many aspects of his story. This repetition emphasizes the serious, recurrent nature of Israelite actions and behaviour, adding immediate exigency to Ehud's story. The extreme nature of Israelite evil and *YHWH's* behaviour emphasizes the power of the antagonist Eglon's link to the Divinity.

The observant Interpreter may assume that this Israelite apostasy is unacceptable with the certainty of *YHWH's* indignation, intervention and punishment but no specific expectations. The reader's anticipation hinges on suspenseful speculation and imaginative conjecture: who will be affected and how? The writer will use narrative devices and language that create unexpected contradictions, tension and surprises before these questions are answered.

"*YHWH* strengthened" (3:12) in this linguistic combination is found only six times in the Hebrew Bible. To strengthen Ehud's enemies (3:12) in the verb form,

חִזַּק, *chzq*, is used, a word generally employed to indicate *YHWH's* dominant

and authoritarian actions towards humanity.⁴⁹⁴ In this case, Moabites gain power

⁴⁹³ On two occasions, when "evil in the eyes of the Lord" is used, *YHWH* takes no action (*2Kgs* 8:18; *2Chron.* 21:6). Twice there is judgment, followed by royal repentance and forgiveness (*2Kgs* 13:11, 14:24; *2Chron.* 33: 2,6). Three times the phrase is used in a divine instruction, (*Gen.* 38:7; *1Kgs* 16:19; *2Kgs* 21:20). The societal death of the community is found in *2Kgs* 8:27, 15:28, 24:9. Finally, there is the scenario when there is a combination (*Judg.* 3:12; *1Kgs* 22:52; *1Chron.* 36:5,12; *Jer.* 52:2).

⁴⁹⁴ As in the Moses-Pharaoh interactions of *Ex.* 9:12, 35. חִזַּק is variously translated as "strengthen," "prevail," "harden" or other equally powerful verbs. "Strengthen" or "to be hardened" and its cognates are found in 45 verses, e.g., *Judg.* 3:12,13; 7:11; 9:24, 16:28 as well as *1Sam.* 23:16, 30:6; *2Sam* 16:21 and *1Kings* 20:22. *Deuteronomy* uses another word, אָמַץ, to be strong.

and authority at no cost to themselves. They and their allies give nothing back to *YHWH* for *YHWH*'s largesse. All labour, commitment and cost are on *YHWH*'s part.⁴⁹⁵

“To take possession,” *יָרַשׁ*, *yrsh*, as the Moabites do, indicates further control and power of ownership, compounding the “strengthening” aspect of the Moabite insurgency, where their battle prowess is emphasized (3:13). Eglon’s leadership is underdeveloped and understated: “The Israelites served King Eglon” (3:14), implying a benign occupation. At no time do the Moabites show any indication of exceptional cruelty or ferocity, the power given to them by *YHWH* is sufficient. It is a benevolent oppression if such is not a contradiction. Eglon is evaluated by his physical attributes, not his battle or administrative actions so that the emphasis remains on the *YHWH*ist involvement in the Israelite subjugation.

After 18 years (3:14), the Israelites “cry out to the LORD” and *YHWH* arranges their rescue, remaining a palpable, though silent, presence. One must conclude the Israelites’ behaviour is so grievous that their god inflicts severe time strictures, since the previous oppression involving Othniel lasted only eight years.

⁴⁹⁵ The other five instances of “*YHWH* strengthened” are in the Egyptian portion of Exodus. Its use in this context could remind the reader of the Exodus story and parallel elements in Ehud’s story to the Exodus to strengthen Ehud’s reputation extra-textually, so he will be remembered as an extraordinary deliverer in action and label. The narrative implication is that Ehud will be just as wily, just as strong and just as successful as Moses. This florid reiteration foreshadows the vivid, detailed story that follows and mirrors and presages the tautology of other plot elements. This juxtaposition similarly groups Eglon with Pharaonic power, authority and evil, insinuating that Eglon will be defeated as decisively and creatively as Pharaoh was. Ehud and the Israelites, with *YHWH*’s assistance, will triumph just as the first Moses did. With such a linguistic structure, no other ending is possible.

Sudden appearances and actions inject a surprise element to otherwise bloody tales of military dominance and perfidy. The unbelievable nature of each accomplishment generates joy, humour and relief, triggered by the reader's understanding of oppression and the delight at the personal and national liberation that results from the oppressor's defeat. This humourous interpretation celebrates the relief and hope that are inspired.

But the Redactor has not finished. To add further complexity to the story and narratively agitate the reader, hinting at plot twists to come, the Protagonist is revealed to be a Benjaminite, a member of one of the lowest ranking tribes of Israel *and* he is left-handed. These details hint of a conflict between unequal forces,⁴⁹⁶ but nowhere in the preamble is there an obvious hint of humour introduced unless the Interpreter anticipates humour based on those disparities. Devousness and creativity may come to the reader's mind, but no more. The stage is set for a confusing, invigorating story.

Ja'el and the Introductory Redaction

For Ja'el, the redaction is not as clearly applicable, because her story is distinct and separated from the Deborah-Barak Act One. The introductory phrases do, however, mimic Ehud's, noting again the importance of the article "the" with "evil" in the Hebrew but here, "the evil" is not repeated. This introduction has other interesting features.

⁴⁹⁶ I hesitate to employ the phrase, a "David versus Goliath" scenario.

“And *YHWH* sold them” is unique to the book of *Judges* (4:2).⁴⁹⁷ Its use has additional impact when the identical phrase comes from Deborah in 4:9, a repetition and linkage between the narrative and the redacted framework.⁴⁹⁸ The restatement is important to the humour and anticipation of the plot: *YHWH* sells Israelites to the Canaanites and then, in ironic reversal, sells the Canaanites to a woman. These phrases mirror the emphases and structural repetitions/interconnections found with Ehud to reinforce *YHWH*'s unspoken presence and power, and signal that the interconnections between two parts of the story, redaction and *märchen*-core, will be mirrored later in similar interactions between scenes in the story, Deborah versus Ja'el. There is, however, little hint to Ja'el's upcoming appearance and surprising behaviour, which will astound the reader with its sudden and lethal effect.

To sell, מָכַר , *mkhr*, is used most often in a context of serious interactions.⁴⁹⁹ In this text, it insinuates that an exchange of goods or services has taken place between the Canaanites and *YHWH* so that the Canaanites are indebted to *YHWH* or have somehow paid for the privilege of subjugating Israel. *YHWH* has expended less resources or energy, entering into a mutually beneficial alliance.

⁴⁹⁷ *YHWH* sells the Israelites into the power of their enemies five times in *Judges*: in 2:14 (synopsis of the entire book); 3:8 (Othniel); 4:2 (Deborah); 4:9 (Deborah's speech, rather than the narrator) and 10:7 (Jephthah). The sixth example is within a retelling of Israelite covenantal shortfalls, specifically naming Sisera in *1Sam.* 12:9, a *de facto* reference to *Judges*.

⁴⁹⁸ 4:2: ... the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan. 4:9: ... for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.

⁴⁹⁹ *E.g.*, when Esau sells his birthright to Jacob, *Gen.* 25:31. Often referring to the sale of human beings. *E.g.*, when a man sells his daughter. *Exod.* 21:16; *Deut.* 21:14; 24:7.

The Canaanites gain no additional powers from *YHWH* and textually there is no evidence of Canaanite payback as might be implied.

The introduction concludes with a detailed précis of the enemy's transgressions: a twenty-year long cruel and oppressive presence by a leader who continues to overwhelm the Israelites with a military force that includes 900 iron chariots (4:3). The emphasis on the lengthy oppression, the cruelty and the military might enhance the challenges that the Israelite characters will face and encourages the Interpreter's imagination.

Jabin reigns, מֶלֶךְ , *mlkh*. The potential for a benevolent autocracy similar to Eglon's, is immediately denied with the mention of iron chariots, and Sisera's excessive power (4:2-3). Canaanite oversight has less support from the Israelite God; the Canaanites must implement harsher measures to maintain their power; military might is the determining factor. This decline in the occupational force's benevolence is further emphasized by the manner by which the oppressors dominate the Israelites. The Canaanites "reign," the Israelites cannot placate the occupying forces with tribute.

The introductory redaction was designed to apply to Deborah's entire chronicle including Ja'el's subplot. Being necessary to a plot does not, however, guarantee the redactor's observable involvement so, in one sense, Ja'el has no redacted introduction, and therefore no hint of pre-existing *YHWH* approval or support, only the narrative overlay of the prophetic prediction of Sisera's defeat. In spite of this caveat, as a necessary element of Deborah's overall plot, Ja'el

should be covered by the redactive intentions. Ja'el's appearance twists whatever predictions the reader has previously made and compounds Deborah's prophesy. With the reiteration of Sisera's power, might and cruelty, narrative tension is created: does Ja'el have godly support? In addition, there is no indication that humour will become a narrative device. So much the better for the incongruity and surprise to develop within the core of the story.

A Certain Woman and the Introductory Redaction

With only five verses, A Certain Woman's story is too compact for redactive garnishes. Yet her pivotal presence and actions are strikingly similar to Ja'el's. Without the sudden appearance of these women, each plot and its theological underpinnings collapse. A consideration of Abimelech's introductory framework is valid but not Gideon's⁵⁰⁰ except for one element. *YHWH* gives the Israelites to the Midianites before Gideon's rise (6:1) using to give, נתן, ⁵⁰¹ *ntn*, a one-sided freewill donation with no intimation or indication of reciprocity. The seemingly free will offering, where the occupiers use devious and destructive actions to control the populace (6:1), leads to Abimelech's ascendancy. This decline is further emphasized by the manner by which the oppressors dominate the Israelites: the Midianites "prevail."

⁵⁰⁰ There is only one narrative connection between Gideon and Abimelech, that Abimelech was Gideon's son (8:31). Gideon's saga fits well into the major judges' cyclical motif (6:1-14) with *YHWH*'s full support. None of these positive attributes can be attributed to Abimelech.

⁵⁰¹ 6:1, נתן, *ntn*, give, put or set, is used in *Genesis* when God creates the world. It (and its cognates) are found over 400 times. It is used to discuss relationships with *YHWH* and other people.

Lacking any godly support, Abimelech's conquests and occupation of Israelite lands are examples of duplicitous negotiation and double-dealing coupled with unabashed military conquest that are not sanctioned by either the Israelite god nor non-aligned Israelites [those who do not agree with Abimelech] (8:30-9:57). Abimelech's introduction is completely different from Ehud's and Deborah's: longer, more complex, more detailed and harsher in its condemnation of Israelite apostasy.

The words, "evil" and "the evil" are not employed but disapproval is keen nonetheless. Unique details show the depths of the Israelite abandonment of *YHWH* and their original liberator's heritage.⁵⁰² The terms "prostituted themselves" [literally, "served as a harlot"] is seldom used in the Hebrew Bible, but here it appears twice within six verses.⁵⁰³ When Gideon appears to take no actions against such behaviour in 8:27 prior to Abimelech's ascendancy, all is prepared for Abimelech's apostasy. That the Israelites have forgotten their god, worship other gods and no longer support the dynasty that originally liberated them for *YHWH*, provides fertile ground for Abimelech's ambition. This triple vilification sets the tone for the entirely negative tale that follows: the Israelites are so corrupt that any leader who arises is likely to be similarly amoral.

⁵⁰² "The" evil is found in the introduction to Gideon's portion of the story.

⁵⁰³ The first time it appears is when Gideon produces an ephod and Israel "prostituted themselves to it" (8:27). The phrase is used in cases of major apostasy and rejection of *YHWH*. *Judg.* 8:27, 8:33. It is also found in *Ezek.* 23:43, *Hosea* 4:12, *Psa.* 106:39, and *1Chron.* 5:25.

Israelite rejection is linguistically tied to other Israelite repudiation of *YHWH*, with the verb, שׁוּב , *shwv*, to relapse.⁵⁰⁴ Although prostitution is a commonly held concept and considered a sin,⁵⁰⁵ and therefore, evil, the verb, “to be a harlot,” זָנָה , *znh*, is relatively rare⁵⁰⁶ so that the clear identification of Israelites *as prostituting themselves* signals a Israelite decadence more extreme than other pericopes, where sin is not so baldly described. It is another textual indication of the progressive overall decline of the Israelite nation throughout these specific pericopes and the book (Ch. 3-16).⁵⁰⁷

Abimelech’s redactive structure, casts aspersions on the validity of his entire life and ventures, even before his narrative begins. Were he a valid instrument of *YHWH*’s appointment, he would have had a redactive introduction similar to Ehud’s. The introductory sentences clearly indicate that Israelite intransigence goes beyond previous stories. Unlike other redactions, nothing indicates that the Israelites are unhappy or repentant. This absence of Israelite personal understanding of their situation signifies a negative and subversive introduction. Because the Israelites are not asking for help from *YHWH*, and he is not trying to

⁵⁰⁴ It is occasionally translated as “turn away,” “return” or “turn aside.” See *Gen.* 15:16, “come back [to the Covenant]”; *1Kings* 8:35, “turn from [sin].” In the Ja’el segment, the English translation of “Turn aside my lord” includes a verb not found in the Masoretic text. The Hebrew is, therefore: “away, lord, away.”

⁵⁰⁵ *Gen.* 38:21, *Ex.* 34:16, *Lev.* 17:7 for example. Sin is particularly highlighted in *Deuteronomy*, e.g. *Deut.* 23:17-18.

⁵⁰⁶ Six usages: *Judg.* 8:27, 33; *Ezek.* 23:43; *Hos.* 4:12; *Psa.* 106:39; *1Chr.* 5:25.

⁵⁰⁷ There is also the semantic difference between a prostitute, who accepts money/favour/other benefits in exchange for sex and the term “to be a harlot,” which while it implies sexual interactions, does not necessarily imply payment for services rendered.

bring the Israelites back to *YHWH*, he will eventually fail (8:33-35). Abimelech's destiny is preordained.

Abimelech has no *YHWH*-designated validity. His first adult appearance in 9:1, presents a leader who is trying to consolidate power, and there is the brief narrative potential that he might be a *YHWH*-directed saviour, or deliverer, to be identified later in the plot, for narrative variety. This hope is immediately dashed when he kills his 70 brothers four verses later. From that point, all his actions are suspect. This is further emphasized by his behaviours and actions that display an anti-*YHWH*, anti-Israelite and anti-family stance⁵⁰⁸ as he grabs political and economic power through ruthless military conquest. Since Abimelech has these deficiencies along with no mandate from *YHWH*, any person who is able to defeat him has religious and theological validity especially if the instigator somehow is able to encourage a return to *YHWH* worship.

The fact that *YHWH* takes no part in the redaction of Abimelech's *märchen*-core is further textual confirmation that Abimelech is neither Gideon's legitimate heir nor acceptable to *YHWH*.⁵⁰⁹ *YHWH*'s evil spirit (9:23) further reinforces that idea. That Abimelech will be unsuccessful in his quest for power and control is pre-ordained within the introduction. His immediate invincibility is held

⁵⁰⁸ This shows Abimelech's anti-paternal family bias. He is, in reality, rejecting his father and Gideon's legacy when he relies upon his maternal support system. This is contrary to other linear narratives where, in each case, the paternal line is emphasized. *E.g.*, Ruth rejecting her maternal line to follow her husband's family (*Ruth* 1); Rebecca joining her husband's clan (*Gen.* 24).

⁵⁰⁹ Even Jotham's soliloquy of 9:7 ff. makes minimal references to *YHWH*.

in contrast to *YHWH*'s textual rejection. This inconsistency sets the stage for the possibility of further textual uncertainties and surprises.

The Summative Redactions

The conclusion of each pericope is less clearly defined than its beginning, although one might propose that the introductory phrase of the next pericope is the culmination of the previous tale, based on each story's overall cyclical structure.⁵¹⁰

Ehud's summative sentence packages his story neatly: "So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest eighty years" (3:30). The passive verb tense de-emphasizes not only Ehud's role but also *YHWH*'s and places the focus on the nation Israel's achievement.

Deborah's final conclusion is not presented till the end of the poetic retelling of the story, (5:31),⁵¹¹ although there is a partial summative statement at immediately following the prose description of Sisera's death (4:23-24).⁵¹² The more conclusive and complete repetition of "And the land had rest forty years" after the poetic version (5:31) affirms the absolute destruction of the Canaanite

⁵¹⁰ 3:30; 5:31. Ehud provides 80 years peace; Deborah, 40.

⁵¹¹ Which leads one to suggest that the poem was manipulated and edited into that position during redaction.

⁵¹² 4:24: Then the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed King Jabin of Canaan.

forces. *YHWH* is given more credit this time and again, Israel, through its warriors, also take some credit. The repetition of Jabin's name and Kingship suggests that his eventual defeat was one of which the Israelites were particularly proud.

With Abimelech, the summation involves the departure of the troops but nothing further about Israelite peace or a land at rest. *YHWH*'s blanket rejection of Abimelech's rule and Israelite apostasy is clear (9:55-57)⁵¹³ This theological judgment is particularly heavy and unyielding. *YHWH* is back in overall command, but the Israelites may not be entirely aware of the situation. How do all these separate components fit together to make unified, theological treatises within blood-thirsty narratives?

Together: the Redactions and the Märchen-Core

The *märchen* that are each pericope's core show stories similar in structure to the Grimm tales, with underdog heroes triumphing over evil through their creativity, inventiveness and persistence. The redaction is integral, imposes the theological bias, changing the plots' motivation and focus from entertainment to theological treatise, with *YHWH* as the instigator and source of all plot machinations.

⁵¹³ 9:55 When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all went home. Thus God repaid Abimelech for the crime he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers; and God also made all the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall back on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham son of Jerubbaal.

8-Beyond the Obvious: Narrative Nuances

THE FRAMEWORKS AND THE PROTAGONISTS

The 10 point cycle and the redactions that have been identified, have set the stage for the textual indecision and uncertainty that continue in each plot within the *märchen*-core. Contradictions, specifically the presence and absence of parts of the cycle and *YHWH*'s questionable presence, leads one to expect further surprises and incongruity. Narrative fickleness continues with the introductory emphasis on the negative aspects of each Protagonist. The unlikely hero, war and suspense, are common and critical narrative strategies throughout the Hebrew Bible.⁵¹⁴ What is unexpected is the presence of humour, which materializes without a modicum of warning. To suddenly introduce such a major facet compounds the narrative uncertainties and presents the Interpreter with a conundrum and a new question: why is there humour and what is its purpose?

Inconsistent godly sanction counterbalanced by implied societal disapproval, launches each narrative with an effective dramatic tension. The three Protagonists are seemingly disadvantaged heroes in Israelite cultural and social terms: a disabled/left handed warrior from a minor tribe, and two women, both of whom appear to be non-Israelites and one is so marginalized that she lacks a name. The Protagonists are ambiguously theologically empowered by *YHWH*'s

⁵¹⁴ Jacob's and Job's adventures come to mind.

divine grace, yet presented in unfavourable narrative circumstances and conditions that could be implied would reduce their chances of success or effectiveness. These tensions continue prompted by the Interpreter's perceptions.

VIOLENCE AND HUMOUR

Violence is the key to each narrative, the core of each plot. These are violent stories by the nature in which the plot manifests the unexpected, brutal actions and deaths of three different tyrants and the absolute eradication of their armies. Engineering the Antagonist's death is the primary motivation for each Protagonist.

Violence may involve more than physical manifestations; there can be other indications within the text's vocabulary and intentionality, using Bourdieu's standards of symbolic violence. Language that refers to the non-Israelites as a large group, (nick)names given to individual characters, the manner in which the three Casualties are killed, the tone of each pericope with its distinctive anti-foreigner bias, all contribute to the subtle linguistic and symbolic violence, some of which has a humorous impact beyond their innate creativity.

That violence and the humour might be connected and complement each other is plausible. Identifying and qualifying humour is challenging because of the nebulousness of understanding and the extended role of imagination and cultural interpretation. Humour is less conspicuous, more difficult to identify and is not a predominant feature of the text so that the plot and intentionality proceed whether

or not the humour is identified. It is a byproduct of the individual reader's understanding of humour and the text taken together.

Each story retains its theological and plot-driven essence whether the humour is identified or not. When humour is discerned, it does not contradict, but rather enriches and refines the original interpretation and theology. Because humour is evaluated using cultural and contextual referents, it is relevant to remind the reader that this assessment is based on the considerations of a 21st century female biblical scholar, who considers humour a fundamental component of life.

In analysis of text, and especially of humour, meaning and nuance are lost or can become seriously speculative in another language, even with the most judicious of translations. This is particularly challenging in *Judges* because of the changing standards of humour and its interpretation as well as the large number of *hapax legomena*.⁵¹⁵

Some humour in these pericopes depends upon the contrast between the readers' understanding of the frame, their theological memory and narrative assumptions. Tensions build as reader expectations and suppositions are directly contradicted by the text. From the narratively constructed surprise and shock, come manifestations of humour. We begin the discussion of individual characters within these pericopes examining the largest group in each story, the Israelites to try to discern where and how the humour occurs.

⁵¹⁵ Halpern, *The First Historians*, 58. *Hapax* will be discussed later.

The Israelite People

The ethical, moral and theological implications of Israelite behaviour are the foci of each story. Israelite recalcitrance launches each plot and their theological weaknesses impel the Protagonist to violent behaviour. Concurrently, Israelite civilians are a passive presence within the story, for, beyond their original obstinance, their narrative personality is challenging to ascertain except for the ascribed military.

The Israelite narrative presence depends upon their original fickleness and the Protagonists' ability to expedite their return to *YHWH*, although this is not evident in the text. Only "rest" is articulated.⁵¹⁶ As a group without an identifiable leader, they stray from *YHWH*, suggesting a "ground swell" of disobedience rather than a concerted effort to follow a deviant leader. Abimelech might well be the exception except that the people had already lapsed prior to his ascendancy. The Israelites' universal and immediate acceptance of the *YHWH*-based leadership of Ehud and Deborah/Barak (and even the deviant Abimelech) implies a malleable group consciousness with little indication of indecision and self-reflection. The foot soldiers never hesitate; only the leader Barak does. Israelite cooperation implies a unity of purpose to impel the plot forward. Abimelech is the ex-

⁵¹⁶ There is no indication that they return to appropriate worship. Worship is never mentioned.

ception again when he employs suasion and family connections to rally his potential allies. The careful reader may discover how widespread tribal support is for the individual Protagonist by careful reading.⁵¹⁷

Onus for the fulfilment of *YHWH*'s laws and strictures fall upon the Israelites as a collective entity and their malfeasance is the cause of *YHWH*'s actions. This larger group is held accountable and individual exceptions are neither recorded nor rewarded. While the group is evaluated as religiously negligent, one leader is able to extricate Israel and re-establish the sanctity of the Israelite-*YHWH* bond, with the support and direct involvement of one God, not a pantheon. It would appear that emphasis on the "oneness" of the successful leader as an agent of covenantal orthodoxy, parallels the "oneness" of the Israelite God. When they lack a strong human guide, the Israelites' inability to achieve oneness with *YHWH* disrupts their covenantal relationship. At no time in any of the texts, does any sense of an "Israelite conception of humour" arise, either in their narrative behaviour, presence or their speech.

Ehud and Eglon

Ehud begins as an unambiguous champion, an "epic hero" in Jungian terms.⁵¹⁸ While he is also identified as possibly disadvantaged, a left-handed

⁵¹⁷ In Ehud's saga, the tribes that align themselves for battle are not identified. (3:27). In Barak's case, Zebulun and Naphtali respond to the call (4:10, 14). With Abimelech, warriors are identified not by tribe but by settlement [the men of Shechem etc.], an additional indication of the lack of Israel-wide support. His mercenaries are not identified.

⁵¹⁸ An "epic hero" is the protagonist who is favoured by the god(s) in Carl Jung's chronology. Wayne G. Rollins, "Biblical Archetypes and the Story of the Self" in *Psychological Insights into the Bible: Text and*

Benjaminite, a member of a minor Israelite tribe, Niditch calls him and all the judges, “swashbuckling charismatic military leaders.”⁵¹⁹ Clearly and decisively, the writer has created an atypical, confusing story: a singular, “handicapped” hero sent to battle a powerful villain.

The author launches a clever and creative name game. There is a great deal of wit in this text, some of which presents opportunities for anticipatory humour, beyond the overall triumphalism of the innate Israelite bias and its symbolic anti-Moab bias and violence. This is displayed firstly in the name sequencing.

G. B. Gray correctly noted the importance of names within Hebrew narratives as he supports the idea that Biblical narratives were somehow fictionalized. Although it is impossible to conclusively determine if the names are redactions, the amendment of personal names is another literary device that amplifies the impact and humorous presentation of each character, serving as additional behavioural markers.

Hebrew proper names ... were more than symbols; they were conferred not merely for purposes of distinction but *because of an idea they expressed ... To the value of these narratives as proof of custom, it is clearly immaterial whether they are strictly historical or not.*⁵²⁰

Readings, eds. Wayne G. Rollins, and D. Andrew Kille (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 107. Niditch uses the same term to refer to the judges. Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2008), 3.

⁵¹⁹ Niditch, *Judges*, 1.

⁵²⁰ George Buchanan Gray, *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names* (London: Black, 1986), 1. Emphasis added.

Gray argues that “Ehud” is in a group of names originally compounded from אב, “Father,” that reinforces Ehud’s divine mandate.⁵²¹ Other scholarly suggestions include “majesty,”⁵²² “splendour,”⁵²³ “God of Praise,”⁵²⁴ “Loner,”⁵²⁵ and “one who praises [YHWH].”⁵²⁶ Van de Toorn suggests the name is based on ‘Ehad/One’ as a theophatic.⁵²⁷ All these possibilities add a positive aura to the characterization, and before the plot begins, promote imaginative reflection. This creates textual wit, some of which presents opportunities for anticipatory humour, beyond the overall triumphalism of the innate Israelite bias. How will this Protagonist live up to his name?

Ehud is further identified as “Ehud son of Gera the Benjaminite” (3:15). This phrase presents another clue that this story will unfold in an unconventional manner. Mirroring the introductory repetitions is a subtle tautology.⁵²⁸ The “son of Gera” has only one connection in the Bible: to the Benjaminite tribe. “Son of

⁵²¹ Gray, *Studies*, 26, note 4.

⁵²² Soggin, *Judges*, 49. He bases his comments on Noth’s and Täubler’s work.

⁵²³ B. Lindars, *Judges 1—5: A New Translation and Commentary edited by A.D.H. Mayes* (London: T.&T. Clark, 1995), 140.

⁵²⁴ Joan Comay, Ronald Brownrigg, *Who’s Who in the Bible: two volumes in one* (New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1980), 106.

⁵²⁵ Boling is dismissive of his name but uses this translation to justify Ehud’s solitary status at the end of the pericope, *Judges*, 85.

⁵²⁶ The *Holman’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* considers it a “Personal name meaning ‘unity, powerful.’” Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, General Editors, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers), 2005.

⁵²⁷ K. Van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. W. van der Horst, eds., *The Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 1220-1223. They base their conclusion on the similar word used in *Deut.* 6:4, *Mal.* 2:10, *Job* 31:5, *Eccl.* 21:11 and *Ezek.* 14:9.

⁵²⁸ Recalling the redactions’ repetitions of “to do,” “to do again” and “the evil” that almost directly precede this.

Gera" means a Benjaminite.⁵²⁹ The linguistic repetition, "son of Benjamin the Benjaminite," is another flag to warn the reader of the narrative's unconventional nature and potential, a predictive signal that teases the reader, while reaffirming for the *cognoscenti* their superiority since they understand such subtleties, triumphant superiority as humour.

The humourous word play continues.

"The Benjaminite," in direct translation is "son of the right, son of the Ja-min," emphasizing the puns that will become an integral part of this narrative. "A man bound with respect to his right hand" is the precise translation of the NRSV's "a left-handed man" (3:15).⁵³⁰ The immediate reaction should be one of amusement. How could a "Son of the Right Hand" be "Bound of the Right Hand"? It is a play on words, a sardonic affirmation of the contradictory and incongruous. Hence, it is humourous, as attributes of the clown and the trickster. The phrase presents a puzzle that promotes a moment of thought- and imagination-provoking discomfort and questions.⁵³¹ How will the humour continue? How will this affect the narrative and complement this beginning?

⁵²⁹ Each of the nine times "Gera" occurs in the Bible, it is linked to "Benjamin." "Gera" is posited as a subgroup or clan of the tribe of Benjamin. See Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 141; Soggin, *Judges*, 50; Boling, *Judges*, 86; B. Halpern, "Ehud," ABD 2: 414; Burney, *Judges*, 69; J. Gray, ed., *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 263.

⁵³⁰ אִישׁ אֶמְרֵךְ יִבְמִינִי

⁵³¹ The English translation, "a left-handed man," in combination with "Benjamin," rather than "Son of the Right Hand," avoids and downplays such innuendos. NRSV, NEB, NKJ, NET.

Statistically and linguistically, ours is a right-handed world. Only 2-10% of any population is primarily left-handed.⁵³² Any identification of left handedness as a handicap is a 20th and 21st Century cultural imposition that has no basis in reality. As in many cultures, the right hand was dominant in Israelite society.⁵³³ At the same time, there appears to have been only limited negative connotation to the idea of left-handedness throughout biblical texts.⁵³⁴ Left-handedness is never mentioned as a dis-ability.⁵³⁵ In view of the generally positive, or at least, a neutral, attitude towards left-handedness, the identification of a character's left-handedness cannot be viewed as pejorative except in priestly connotations.⁵³⁶ That Ehud could be left-handed and not have it viewed as a disability by Israelites, is supported in the narrative.⁵³⁷ From a military perspective, left-handedness can be

⁵³² F. Bloom and A. Lazerson, *Brain, Mind and Behaviour* (New York, NY: W.H. Freeman, 2nd edn, 1985), 294. They conclude that this percentage is consistent in all cultures, based on their examination of ancient Egyptian statuary and images. Elsewhere they state: "Left-handedness, while relatively uncommon, is much more common in males" (72). L. J. Harris says 2-12%. (L.J. Harris, "Cultural Influences on Handedness: Historical and Contemporary Theory and Evidence" in *Left-Handedness: Behavioral Implications and Anomalies*. Advances, ed. S. Coren in Psychology 67 [Amsterdam: North-Holland/Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., 1990), 205]). Harris cites an 1885 work by D. Wilson called *Palaeolithic Dexterity*, (Royal Society of Canada Proceedings and Transactions 3, 119-33). Wilson took the tribal numbers of Benjamin as 26 000 and calculated that 700 (warriors) was 2.7%, of that total, a number that is consistent with the conclusions above.

⁵³³ Middle Eastern Arabs today use the right hand for meeting, greeting and eating. The left hand is used for ablutions and other non-sacred activities. See also Ezek. 39:3 and Harris, "Cultural Influences," 200.

⁵³⁴ The examples where "left hand" is found cannot be considered expressly negative for "ordinary" Israelites. See *Gen.* 48:13.

⁵³⁵ Lynn Holden, *Forms of Deformity*, JSOTSup. 131 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

⁵³⁶ Within the Temple rituals, there were more stringent standards about the use of specific hands. *Lev.* 14:15-2.

⁵³⁷ In the more recent past, right-handedness has been "encouraged" by limiting the use of the left hand. There would appear to be no reason why the same idea in reverse could not have been utilized to help create warriors with specific skills, particularly since warfare was such an important part of their lives. If this is a strategy that was used in the warrior communities of the Bible, then a left-handed warrior would be an important and respected member of an elite group with rare combat skills. As such, a physical binding process would be an acceptable action for young boys as would the commitment of older males to use only one hand. The linguistic use of "bound" encourages that train of thought.

an asset.⁵³⁸ Rare, divergent skills are always a surprise, especially in hostile situations, and with surprise, often comes humour of anticipation, not to mention a fighting advantage.

Ehud's place on the implied dis-ability spectrum is easy to identify. He could have been a) simply left-handed by genetics; b) ambidextrous, by nature, by training, or a combination thereof;⁵³⁹ c) slightly handicapped with a gradation of disability; or d) fully handicapped, unable to use his right hand at all. Immediately following the announcement of his "binding," we find him making a dagger to exact specifications. This contradiction is irreconcilable if he were permanently physically disabled. Thus the "binding" in no way implies an inability to use his right hand. The insinuation that as part of his training, Ehud was somehow constrained from using his right hand also increases the tension of the story during the construction of the dagger. Ehud has the benefit of both hands and can perform all functions appropriate for the plot and story line.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ Archaeological evidence of the Iron Age fortifications of Lachish Str. III and Beersheba Str. V strengthen Halpern's assertion that left-handed warriors and slingers were prized specialist warriors. In sieges, the left-handed warrior could approach the city gate more aggressively, if one makes the assumption that each would carry his shield on his non-dominant arm. The entrances to these cities include a ramp to the right of the city gate. In such cases, an attacking army with left-handed slingers could protect themselves from missiles sent over the wall, while slinging their own missiles over their shields into the city. Halpern, *The First Historians*, 41-44.

⁵³⁹ Soggin says the Septuagint labels Ehud ambidextrous. Soggin, *Judges*, 50.

⁵⁴⁰ It is clear that there must be a perceptible differentiation between "left hand(ed)" and "bound of the right hand" and this is shown in the language. "Bound of the right hand" is almost a *hapax*, found only twice, in *Judges*, 3:15, and 20:16. In the majority of the times that the term "left handed" is translated from the Hebrew, the word "handed" or "hand" is implied not included [similarly for "right hand/ed"]. For example the Hebrew of *Num.* 20:17, "not turning aside to the right hand or the left ..." does not contain the word "hand" יָדָא. Only texts where the word "hand" is necessary for comprehension does it appear *e.g.*, 3:21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand

As a left-handed warrior, from the tribe of Benjamin, Ehud comes from a tradition of accurate and deadly warriors. The question should not be “How can a man ‘bound of the right hand’ accomplish the job that YHWH has given him?” but rather, “Why would a slinger need a dagger?” for it is as accurate slingers that the Benjaminites are celebrated, not as hand-to-hand fighters.⁵⁴¹ This adds further tension and suspense to the story. With that deception and suspense comes the possibilities of humour. How will the Foreigners be foiled this time?

For Niditch, Ehud’s left-handedness is the most important element to “his trickster’s defeat of Eglon.” Ehud is “appropriately left-handed—left being the marginal, less favored, underhanded side of the body in an Israelite symbol system.”⁵⁴² This is a negation of the hero archetype and an elevation of the Trickster/Clown as a further exemplar of the creative humour of the story.⁵⁴³ Within one verse we have a character study: a marginalized, deviant Trickster who is also an esteemed ferocious warrior Hero, called into *YHWH*’s service.

Ehud is guaranteed success as YHWH’s designate and he was chosen by his peers. This creates additional tension and anticipation, another example of the doublets that litter this pericope and further reinforce his position. How will he accomplish his task? Will he further surprise us as a slinger or a stabber?

This contradiction of cultural expectations is used to narrative advantage. To the Israelites, Ehud is able-bodied and a plausible hero, blessed by YHWH.

⁵⁴¹ 20:16 clarifies: “Of all this force [of Benjaminites], there were seven hundred picked men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair, and not miss.”

⁵⁴² Niditch, *War*, 117ff.

⁵⁴³ As expressed by Carl Jung’s archetypes.

The Interpreters and the Moabites harbour a different opinion. The Interpreter may have no bias against left-handedness while the Moabites do. The Moabites did not adapt their defence strategies for exceptional circumstances. Their weapon search is as strategically amateurish as their assumptions of Ehud's ineffectiveness are incorrect. That Eglon's security force does not discover the dagger and allows itself to be so easily dismissed from its primary responsibility, the protection of its king, further underscores the narrative bias of the Israelite perceptions of Moabite ineptness (3:19). This conflict of expectations leads to tension and humourous imaginative anticipation, while at the same time it displays a narrative symbolic violence when the writers denigrate the Antagonists again when their ungainly behaviours are thus highlighted.

Any lingering idea that Ehud is disabled is dispelled by the activities that follow. This narrative is one smooth act of interconnected scenes with Ehud the unambiguous centre: Ehud's introduction, Ehud's presentation and confrontation, Ehud's flight and rallying the troops, the battle, the summation. Action takes precedence over speech.⁵⁴⁴ From vv. 15 to 28, not only is Ehud the subject of the majority of the transitive verbs, in clear-cut sentences few explanatory clauses distract from the whirlwind of activities.⁵⁴⁵ That overall cohesiveness creates a

⁵⁴⁴ There are only three verses in which dialogue occurs (3:19, 20, 28).

⁵⁴⁵ He makes (a sword); he fastens it; he presents tribute; he goes away; he returns; he speaks to Eglon; he approaches the Moabite; he kills; he leaves; he travels to Seirah; he blows the trumpet; he rallies the troops; the battle is fought; the Moabites are defeated; the land has rest. The summative change at the end of the story from individual to group emphasis is appropriate. Ehud cannot defeat the Moabites on his own; he needs the Israelite army to complete *YHWH's* design. He has done his solitary work; now it is up to the Israelites as a group to finish the job by eliminating the Moabites at which point, Ehud will retreat to his solitude. This would support Boling's judgment that Ehud is "a loner," when he translates Ehud's name as "One" or "Solitary." Boling, *Judges*, 85.

unity that reinforces the overall impact. The links between the verses hustle the reader backwards and forward through an ingenious series of interconnections, maintaining the overall thematic unity.

Eglon's name is linguistically derisive and open to wide, negative interpretations. It could easily be a nickname, following Othniel's tradition.⁵⁴⁶ The Hebrew has two meanings: "Young Calf" or "Fat Calf."⁵⁴⁷ Both terms could be considered derogatory and used in a disparaging sense, enriching the plot line by holding the character up to disrepute and humourous derision, a further clear bias against Eglon and the Moabites, which pervades the entire text. Throughout the core of the pericope, Eglon is treated as a buffoon, the butt of a gigantic, deadly joke, symbolic violence at its most clever.⁵⁴⁸

His name is added to the affirmation "Eglon was a very fat man" so that the exact translation becomes "Fat Calf was a very fat man," another amusing repetition with a unique linguistic structure.⁵⁴⁹ Over his 18 years reign, Eglon has evolved from "a young (bull) calf" with all the virility that entails to a "fat calf," ready for Israelite slaughter, another example of subversive, symbolic violence.

⁵⁴⁶ In the preceding story, the enemy king's name, Cushan-rishathaim, translates as "Cushan of the Double Wickedness."

⁵⁴⁷ Radday notes the humour of Eglon's name in "Humour in Names," in *On Humour*, Radday & Brenner, 63. Gray translates it as "calf." Gray, *Hebrew Proper Names*, 92. See also, Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981), 39; Boling, *Judges*, 85; Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 136; Soggin, *Judges*, 49. Lindars supports Boling and Soggin that it could be a "symbolic" name. Soggin uses the word "caricature."

⁵⁴⁸ Soggin sees Eglon as a caricature. Soggin, *Judges*, 49.

⁵⁴⁹ 3:17. The phrase "very fat" is another unique phrase.

Physical size is an important component of that kind of humour, and Eglon's perceived being gives further hints of humorous interconnections. His victim is so fat, Ehud needs two mouths to feed on/kill Eglon, ergo, the "two mouthed dagger," another clever aside and *double entendre*.⁵⁵⁰ Consistent with every *märchen*, the Antagonist has been portrayed in the strongest of negative terms.

Scatological and sexual humour pervades the entire segment of Eglon's death. A two-edged dagger is an effective short fighting/killing tool, easier for the left-handed person to use and simple to secret upon one's body. At the introduction of these details (3:16), the knowledgeable reader has information that is plot-predictive and encourages anticipatory humour of discomfort, admiration and triumphant superiority. There is the phallic, masculine-power, symbolism of the dagger, which Ehud straps to his right thigh, close to his physical phallic/power/fertility centre and this action emphasizes the sexual conflicts of the text—the feminine/devious (left-handedness)⁵⁵¹ being placed in proximity to Ehud's masculine/just centre.⁵⁵² This location, in keeping with the need for easy access for a left-handed warrior, is a metaphorical contradiction, and the detail is important to the tricksterism of the story and imperative for the readers to understand if they are to be party to the humour.

This anticipatory and community-based humour is rooted in the potential for violence. In the introductory redaction, all actions have been validated by

⁵⁵⁰ This is an exact translation of the Hebrew.

⁵⁵¹ See Niditch, *War*, 117ff.

⁵⁵² Geoffrey P. Miller, "Verbal Feud in the Hebrew Bible: *Judges* 3:12-30 and 19-21," *JNES* 55, no.2 (1996): 105-117.

Ehud's divine mandate and enriched by Israelite support (3:15). Therefore, the nation and *YHWH* explicitly and implicitly affirm whatever actions Ehud accomplishes as the Trickster motif gains prominence. Details are added bit by bit. The double-edged dagger has added impact. Why is it so important to have a two edged/two mouthed dagger? The "upcoming something" is connected to the thoughtlessness of the Moabites, subterfuge and deception, the hidden dagger, the location of the dagger, sexuality, and the innuendo of the private conversation between King and Israelite.⁵⁵³

A skilled, powerful military leader surrounded by bodyguards who provide no protection is farce. A man so fat that the dagger disappears into his belly up to its hilt staggers the imagination in its hyperbolic portrayal. Vocabulary links elements of this story to other

Judges' tales. The choice of תָּקַע , *tqa'*, "thrust," is the same expression used when Ehud blows the trumpet (3:27) and when Ja'el kills Sisera (4:21).⁵⁵⁴ These narrative actions reinforce the idea that this may not be a factual recounting, but rather a fantasizing embellishment, written specifically to connect the stories subconsciously and encourage the Interpreter's imaginative responses.

Brenner explores the combination of a feminist approach with the recognition of humour, presenting the possibility of another layer.⁵⁵⁵ Fat kings are always intrinsically funny, according to Leacock⁵⁵⁶ and, in Biblical texts, foreign rulers are consistently portrayed as ludicrous, contemptible, inadequate and inept. They are

⁵⁵³ The trickster is also often considered connected with the genitals, a concept that strengthens the story's underlining sexual innuendo.

⁵⁵⁴ Niditch, *Judges*, 58.

⁵⁵⁵ Athalya Brenner, "Who's Afraid of Feminist Criticism? Who's Afraid of Biblical Humour? The Case of the Obtuse Foreign Ruler in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 19, no.63 (1994): 38-55.

⁵⁵⁶ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 134.

always placed in comic juxtaposition with their polar opposites, Israelite heroes.⁵⁵⁷ As he is obese, in Israelite cultural terms, Eglon must also be stupid and vulnerable and grotesquely feminized. Brenner sees a “link between gendered, specifically male, sexuality and socio-political authority in the biblical configuration of the obtuse ruler.”⁵⁵⁸ In support, Robert Alter calls the dagger thrust “hideously sexual.”⁵⁵⁹

Irony and anticipatory humour abound. The presentation of tribute ironically involves the gift of the instrument of the king’s death, Ehud’s dagger. Further irony revolves around the idea that a leader who has controlled and decisively run a conquered nation for 18 years, is unable to protect himself from himself, whether it was curiosity or lust. There are guards unable to do their job, placed in juxtaposition with the triumphant killer, a “handicapped” loner with no obvious political affiliations.

Conversation is minimal yet there is humour in those speeches, with secret coding that reveal overtones to the observant and knowledgeable readers. Speech may be overwhelmed by action, but again there is repetition. In 3:19, Ehud tells Eglon “I have a secret message for you, O king,” which he modifies and amplifies slightly in the following verse “I have a message from God,” using *'elohim* rather than *YHWH*. This word, in its uses within the Hebrew Bible, has several meanings, including a general identification of any god, including, but not

⁵⁵⁷ Brenner, “Who’s Afraid?”, 43.

⁵⁵⁸ Brenner, “Who’s Afraid?”, 41.

⁵⁵⁹ Alter, *The Art*, 39.

restricted to *YHWH*. Beyond the original pronouncements of Ehud's deliverer status, *YHWH* has played a limited role in this pericope but is instantly brought to mind when Ehud uses the lesser of the two more common divine names. This shows Ehud's theological acknowledgement and understanding that *'elohim*, not *YHWH*, was more appropriate for addressing non-Israelites. Employing *'elohim*, Ehud is indicating to the reader, and Eglon as well, had he the knowledge to understand the distinctions, that Eglon is not part of the Israelite inner circle, and is therefore not covered by Israelite laws, mandates and protection.

Eglon understands God's message to contain religious information and enlightenment, or perhaps a segue to a sexual encounter. Ehud means it to be the message of the dagger and death. Eglon rises to the bait, both literally and figuratively, ironically prompted to speak one word "Silence!" before he dies, literally and figuratively. Beyond this point, neither his name nor title are ever mentioned again. Before "Silence" he had said nothing; after, he becomes mute forever, effectively skewered, the ultimate in silence.⁵⁶⁰

Further extensive details reinforce Ehud's physical abilities and further negate the perception of him as disabled. Eglon was truly a corpulent man, if his fat can entrap the dagger's hilt, not just its shaft, and Ehud is an exceedingly strong person to be able to accomplish that. Leaving the dagger in place is forensically appropriate, minimizing, but not eliminating, blood spatter (3:22). It is a direct taunt to the Moabites indicating clearly how absolutely obese the king was and

⁵⁶⁰ In the entire Hebrew Bible, the word "silence" and "silent" are used rarely, only 49 times.

who the killer is. It also encourages further use of the imagination as part of the humorous horror. Will the servants discover that the King has been killed, if the dagger is not readily apparent? We are given no clear-cut answer. With a veneer of sexuality, lust, and power, presented with hidden wit and innuendo, the entire ironic situation is steeped in bloody and grisly detail. At the same time, the details encourage the reader's imagination to create nuances the text omits.

The servants thought Eglon "was covering his feet," a common Biblical euphemism for sexual activity or defecation (3:24).⁵⁶¹ The Hebrew leaves room for (mis)interpretation while this detail humanizes the servants, embarrassed about their master, hesitating before unlocking the door (3:24-25). The solitary situation further supports the idea of some sort of sexual interaction between the two men, emphasizing once more the ambiguity of their encounter.

⁵⁶¹ See *Ruth* 3:4,7. The six-winged angels in *Is.* 6:2, use one pair of wings to cover "their feet." This adds credence to Tom A. Jull's analysis, Jull, "מקרה", 63-75.

Tom Jull⁵⁶² and Michael Barré⁵⁶³ support this ambiguity. Both suggest that “the **dirt** came out,” the hapax, **הַאֲרָקָה**, *parshedonah*, should be “the/his **excrement** came out.”⁵⁶⁴ From a forensic point of view there has definite validity, although intestines or other innards also come to mind.⁵⁶⁵

Jull further argues that the roof chamber where the meeting took place could be interpreted as having some toilet facilities and that the *hapax*, **מִסְדֵּרוֹן**, *misderonah*, (3:23), should be “toilet,” rather than “vestibule” or “porch,”⁵⁶⁶ hence the confusion and hesitance of the servants, and their initial understanding of the locked door. It creates an interesting scenario of Ehud sliding out of the palace through the toilet, after locking the outer doors behind him, as a clown-like Trickster persona.⁵⁶⁷ The incongruity of the divinely-appointed deliverer with such an unusual, though creative, exit strategy is startling, an absurd,

⁵⁶² Jull, “מִסְדֵּרוֹן,” 63-75.

⁵⁶³ Michael Barré, “The Meaning of *prsdn* in *Judges* III 22,” *VT* 41 no.1 (1991): 1-11. Barré’s conclusions are based on specific Assyrian, Akkadian and Sumerian texts.

⁵⁶⁴ Handy and Brettler support this perception. Lowell K. Handy, “Uneasy Laughter: Ehud and Eglon as Ethnic Humor,” *JSOT*, 6, no.2 (1992): 233-246; Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Book of *Judges*: Literature as Politics,” *JBL* 108, no.3 (1989): 395-418.

⁵⁶⁵ “Dirt” is the widely chosen word: NRSV, Websters, KJVS and Geneva translate it that way. Only the ESVS uses “dung.” One must consider that the choice of the word “dirt” is possibly a reflection of the societal expectations of the times of the specific translations, where the word “excrement” or “faeces” was considered widely inappropriate. According to Soggin, both the Vulgate and the Targum, use “excrement” in their translation. Soggin, *Judges*, 52.

⁵⁶⁶ NRSV. Webb says something similar. Webb, *Judges*, 174.

⁵⁶⁷ The location of toilets in the upper levels of 14th century castles comes to mind. In one castle I visited in southern Germany (name long forgotten), the toilets were part of the stateroom and overhung the battlements so that excrement fell directly to the ground below.

discomforting surprise. The dichotomy of Ehud escaping by toilet violates the sacred separation of the person (the right hand, the Hero) and faeces (the left hand, the Trickster) and emphasizes the infantile fascination with bodily functions (the Clown). These impressions are immediately counter-acted by Ehud's intrepid behaviours, rallying the troops and defeating the Moabites, actions and roles that are very clearly within the Hero domain. We have in this tale a multi-dimensional Protagonist who cannot be stereotyped.

Following Jull's interpretation, Ehud's actions and escape inadvertently befoul himself, making him less acceptable to the later redactors. While contact with faecal matter does not transmit ritual impurity according to the Talmud, anything that mandates "life force" on the life/death nexus does.⁵⁶⁸ This includes contact with blood, semen and corpses. Textually, Ehud is initially guilty of contact with blood, on the assumption that killing Eglon involved direct exposure or splatter. Leaving the dagger in place decreases, but does not eliminate, blood contamination. Similarly, Ehud's contact with semen is plausible, depending upon whether one accepts that the two men had a sexual tryst.⁵⁶⁹ Contact with Eglon's corpse is problematic, whether Eglon "became dead" as Ehud stabbed him so that Ehud was touching a corpse, or whether Eglon died after Ehud removed his

⁵⁶⁸ This idea of becoming besmirched by either blood or faeces is not indicated in the text, but is a distinct possibility, almost a certainty, considering the situation if one accepts *misderonah* as "toilet". *Deut.* 23:9-11 instructs about emptying one's bowels in battle camp situations but there are no other instructions. Ritual impurity, contact with life forces, is considered dangerous and requires purification. Thanks to Eric Mendelsohn, Professor Emeritus University of Toronto, for clarification.

⁵⁶⁹ Miller contends Ehud was offering a homosexual liaison to Eglon. Miller, "Verbal Feud," 114-115. See also, Alter, *The Art*, 39; Webb, *Judges*, 131-132; Guest, "Judges" in *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCR, 2006), eds. Deryn Guest *et al.*, 168-177; Brenner, "Who's Afraid?", 41.

hand from the dagger. Within these possibilities and the general ambiguity of the text, Ehud is likely in a state of impurity.

This suggestion of Ehud's impurity is further strengthened, if one considers the probability of Zoroastrian influences. The parallel development, and territorial proximity of this religious group to the Israelites during the time of the text's creation, has led scholars to propose that Zoroastrian thought influenced Israelite values and belief systems. There is the issue of the understanding that this incident (of ritual impurity) might easily be kept secret, or hidden, as within the plot, Ehud is alone, and would have no Israelite observing his actions and behaviour. If such is the case, the additional idea of faecal contamination strengthens the proposal that Ehud has rendered himself impure through his actions because Zoroastrians believed that contact with faecal matter rendered a person impure.⁵⁷⁰ Because there are no textual references to Ehud's ritual cleansing following his encounter with Eglon, it may be suggested that Ehud would be impure and therefore guilty of major religious infractions. His subsequent actions would thus be inappropriate.

When he invokes God's name, using the exclusively Israelite nomenclature, *YHWH*, rather than *'elohim* (3:28), Ehud hopes to rally the troops reaffirming divine assurance. This linguistic differentiation separates the believers from the

⁵⁷⁰ See Matthew Black and H.H. Rowley, eds., *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (New York, NY: Nelson, 1982), 607; Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, "Zoroastrianism" in *Encyclopedia Americana* 29 (Danbury, CT: Grolier, 1988), 813-815. Zoroastrianism seems to have begun in the late part of the 12th Century BCE [Richard Foltz, *Spirituality in the Land of the Noble: How Iran Shaped the World's Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications 2004)]. Biblical scholars place the creation of *Judges* within a similar range, 1200-1000 BCE. Boling, *Judges*, xxi; Soggin, *Judges*, 7-8.

non-believers and indicates that Ehud is aware of this polarization and is pressing a theological rationale on the warriors as he musters them against the Moabites. When summoning the Israelite fighters, he also handles a semi-sacred symbol, the trumpet, which is linked to both battle field and temple.⁵⁷¹ If he is in a state of impurity, these are major cultic infractions.

The final twinges of gory humour occur next (3:28-29). Ehud's army at the fords of the Jordan is parallel to Moses crossing the Red Sea,⁵⁷² accentuating the Moses-Ehud connection, two men with "handicaps" with strong affinity to water and the salvation of *YHWH*'s people who eradicate the enemy using water. In addition, שֶׁמֶן , *shmn*, is used to refer to the Moabite warriors at those fords.

Some translations translate this as "lusty and full of valour,"⁵⁷³ "strong, capable,"⁵⁷⁴ or "strong, able-bodied"⁵⁷⁵ but the Hebrew proposes "fat" and "rich" as well. Such a range of interpretation suggests that the Moabite warriors had lost their slim warrior-svelte-ness and had sunk to portliness like their king, and like their king, are being ridiculed by the text. This is subversive violence, where the negativity is linguistic and deliberate, but only apparent to those who understand the nuances of the language and have the imagination to compare the soldiers to

⁵⁷¹ שֹׁפָר , *shfr*, the trumpet, is used 44 times in the Hebrew Bible and every time, there is the implication of, or affirmation of, a religious or battle connotation where *YHWH* is supportive of the situation. *E.g.*, *Jer.* 4:19; *Joel* 2:1; *Psa.* 47:5.

⁵⁷² *Exod.* 14.

⁵⁷³ ASV, KJV.

⁵⁷⁴ NET.

⁵⁷⁵ NRSV.

their leader. Additionally, the humour and irony of their defeat, is readily apparent to anyone with elementary military knowledge. The Moabites were caught in a textbook example of a pincer trap, from which they appear to make no effort to escape. This is another example of a humour based on the Interpreter's personal knowledge of military strategies.

Ehud's story ends with a brevity that seems uncharacteristically sparse and sudden, considering the preceding lurid and descriptive details (3:30). Ehud had disappeared immediately after his rousing address to the troops even though the final indication of his name comes earlier in 3:26, with the final doublet repetition of "escaped." In the Hebrew there is an unusual placement. "Ehud" is in front of the verb, an inversion, a linguistic emphasis and disjunctive syntax that stresses the importance of the subject, Ehud. From this point, Ehud's name disappears. Ehud begins as an Israelite male isolated at a smithy and ends the story as a similarly isolated victorious leader, a judge by implication, and the deliverer who preserves his country's peace for twice as long as anyone, yet is not saluted.⁵⁷⁶

Ehud is clearly a multi-dimensional protagonist. As *YHWH's* declared deliverer, he shares that ranking with Othniel alone. He was clearly chosen by the Israelites to take a leadership role and fulfils all further mandated leadership

⁵⁷⁶ Eighty years (3:30). Othniel and Deborah each provide 40 years of peace (3:11, 5:31). There is no designated time of peace after Abimelech's reign (9:55-10:2).

roles.⁵⁷⁷ Religion and politics blend with his use of the holiest of *YHWH*'s names and the trumpet, literal and symbolic representations of, and connection to, both the temple/ark and the battlefield. These together enforce Ehud's priestly link that his brief remarks exhorting the troops before battle, confirm (3:28). The Israelites established him as the official who had the power to release them, but they chose to stay and fight. As they go into battle, it is implied Ehud assumes the role of commander,⁵⁷⁸ further exemplifying his political, military and religious leadership, continuing the pattern that began when he is first introduced as *YHWH*'s designate. As the story progresses, he adds deliverer, deceiver, killer, military recruiter, priest, official, commander, and implicit judge to his narrative characterization and job description.⁵⁷⁹

One can clearly identify at least three Jungian archetypes, the Hero, the Trickster and the Clown, encompassed within Ehud's behaviour and actions. The plot's success rests on the differences between the three archetypes and the interplay between them as embodied in one character. That Ehud is chosen by *YHWH* and is *YHWH*'s direct agent lends religious credibility to all three archetypes, particularly the Clown, who would not normally be considered part of such a theological venue.

⁵⁷⁷ *Deut.* 20:1-9 deals in part with distinct leadership groups with separate responsibilities in the pre-battle period. The priest begins with an admonition to the troops. Next, officials have instructions for the troops. It is only at this point that those who will lead the men into battle, the commanders, come forward to take control.

⁵⁷⁸ Again, this is ambiguous, not clearly stated and open for debate.

⁵⁷⁹ His "judge" label is not clarified and only implied by the summative phrases of 3:30.

If satire is a literary trope that involves the use of irony, sarcasm and ridicule to expose or denounce a truthful situation, this story could qualify as satire, assuming its origins to be historically based. Elements are apparent in the general mocking tone where fatness is equated with incompetence and the underdog triumphs against great and overwhelming adversity.⁵⁸⁰ But the Benjaminite is not an underdog and never was, so that with that realization, the irony flourishes.⁵⁸¹

Ironic humour embodied within the entire book is indirectly proposed by Adrian Jannis Bledstein in her proposition that *Judges* was written by women. Bledstein suggests that the women authors wanted to critique male arrogance and highlight the progressive disintegration of the civilization. To her, the humour found in each pericope serves as a form of satirical resistance against the arrogance of male rulers, which would be classified as triumphant superiority, amplified by a general ironic twist from a feminist perspective.⁵⁸²

The humour of Ehud's adventure is ironic gore, based on a communal understanding of evil and oppression, where word plays, puns, and ambiguous scenarios increase the tension of differentiation. The many textual doublets reinforce the narrative impact, reinforcing inference for the less attentive reader.⁵⁸³ This

⁵⁸⁰ This is consistent with Leacock. *H.*, 141; *H. and H.*, 134.

⁵⁸¹ As *YHWH's* designate, Ehud is immediately identified as heroic.

⁵⁸² Adrian Janis Bledstein, "Is *Judges* a Woman's Satire of Men Who Play God?" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 34-57.

⁵⁸³ The doublets are eleven in number, with repetitions of: "the evil"; "to do"; "eyes of the Lord"; Ehud the Benjaminite; a left handed man of the right handed tribe; the slinger versus the sword; Ehud as only *YHWH's* and Israelites' choice; Eglon's name with his description; the double edged/double mouthed sword; "I have a message" and the double "escaped."

story emphasizes that humour need not be light-hearted or sympathetic to all characters in order to be amusing. Laughter is not a necessity.

The humour is strictly related to the Interpreter's pre-existing bias and attitude. If the reader develops a positive feeling for all characters, the humour becomes less apparent. Its position and prominence may be deemed negative, casting aspersions upon a hero character who cannot defeat a fat man except by subterfuge. In further defence of Eglon, which might be construed as a criticism of Ehud, Eglon is not labelled as "cruel" or oppressive as Sisera is (4:3) nor is he brutal towards family and allies, as is Abimelech (9:5,21). As such the humour is less tenable.

There are many interpretations for the overall purpose/intention of this pericope. Some scholars call it "slapstick comedy"⁵⁸⁴ or an ethnic joke meant to perpetuate prejudice and stereotyping.⁵⁸⁵ Others see it as a scatological tale loaded with political irony,⁵⁸⁶ or a "verbal feud."⁵⁸⁷ Still others consider it is "an attempt at ethnic polemic and political satire, not a record of events as they actually happened,"⁵⁸⁸ so strongly anti-Moabite that every Moabite is delineated in absolute

⁵⁸⁴ McCann, *Judges*, 43.

⁵⁸⁵ Handy, "Uneasy Laughter," 233-246. In the rest of the Bible, Moabites are always shown in a negative light, except Ruth.

⁵⁸⁶ Brenner, "Who's Afraid?"; Robert Alter, *On Biblical Narrative* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Books, 2000); Jull, "מִקְרָה", 74.

⁵⁸⁷ G.P. Miller, "Verbal Feud," 105-117.

⁵⁸⁸ Jull, "מִקְרָה", 63-75.

stereotypically negative terms. Hardy further suggests that the prejudice and stereotyping of successive redactions perpetuate the joke.⁵⁸⁹ With these various interpretations, it is valid to consider it a fictionalized tale, a *märchen*.⁵⁹⁰

What happens when the humour is ignored, or not identified in the story? Stripping away the humour removes the nuances that enrich the tale creating a slightly different emphasis.

In this case, a man respected by both *YHWH* and his peers deceives his country's overweight foreign ruler in several ways, kills him and then rallies Israelite warriors to eradicate the large, foreign, occupying army in a bloodthirsty, culminating fight. Neither Ehud's creativity nor his status is emphasized,⁵⁹¹ nor is the contrast between the Oppressors' and the Israelites' body images.⁵⁹² These aspects encourage the Interpreters' triumphalist humour and incredulity, as well as narrative surprise and astonishment. Some political innuendos are minimized: the overweight (and therefore inept) foreign leader and his similarly endowed troops versus the adept, svelte, clever Israelites. Instead, the power imbalance becomes more stark, and the Israelite success more unusual as Ehud's behaviour becomes more daring and less likely to succeed. It becomes a true underdog tale. Another political innuendo, based on an ecological/sociological concern,

⁵⁸⁹ Handy, "Uneasy Laughter."

⁵⁹⁰ Brenner, "Who's Afraid?", 38-55.

⁵⁹¹ His word plays, his secret hiding place for the dagger, his escape from a locked room, his low ranking tribe.

⁵⁹² Ehud's left handedness, Eglon's and the Moabites' girth.

is raised, one that is ignored with the triumphalism of the “humourous” interpretation. With the location of the final battle, how do the remaining peoples react when it is fought *in* a major river whose water would therefore be polluted? What social, economic and political fallout occurs?

YHWH as a character appears more vicious, in the implied demand, or at least encouragement, for the elimination of all Moabites. At the same time, Eglon becomes a more nuanced sympathetic character, as he seeks further information with his request to hear another god’s message. Theologically, the emphasis shifts to the importance of cultural and physical genocide of groups that occupy Israelite territory. Israelite misbehaviour leads to the obliteration of other societies and *YHWH*’s forgiveness appears to be connected to these deeds.

The story of Deborah, Barak, Ja’el and Sisera continues this pattern of complicated texts with contradictory components.

Ja’el and Sisera

Once more people and things are not as they appear and a wealth of unorthodox possibilities becomes apparent. Rather than the “slapstick comedy”⁵⁹³ of Ehud’s adventure, this is a story of creativity, irony and self-determination, where one character’s rejection leads to another’s triumph and where the humour is not necessarily palpable. Characterizations are shown in conversation rather

⁵⁹³ McCann, *Judges*, 43.

than by physical description. Narrative links move the reader backwards and forward through ingenious interconnections between the main story of Deborah and Barak and Ja'el's peripheral, yet all-important, subplot.

This pericope also has a different construction with two acts. In the first Deborah and Barak plan for battle against Sisera, followed by the battle itself (4:1-15a). Act Two involves Sisera's flight and a newly introduced character, Ja'el (4:15b-24). The protagonist of the second act is not whom we have been narratively led to expect. Deborah is nowhere to be found and Barak appears only as a coda. In spite of their absences, they have set the stage for the challenges Ja'el will face and have established the scenario for the surprise and incongruity that is part and parcel of effective humour. Ja'el's actions break ethnic boundaries and establish interconnections, commonality and community.

Linguistic and theological tricksterism permeates the entire story. The redaction may lack the repetitive intensity of Ehud's introduction but other conditions compound the tyranny (4:1-3).

The Lord has *sold* Israelites to the Canaanites.⁵⁹⁴ For twenty years, they have been under the tyrannical rule of a governor, not the king himself. This presents an additional layer of administration, and likely corruption, which the governor, Sisera, provides with cruelty and a heavy hand (4:3).

Humour begins with the names. The four honourifics for the major characters so clearly reflect the character's actions that it is fitting to again suggest that

⁵⁹⁴ See the discussion of the redactions for the implications of this word.

they may all be sobriquets. Deborah is an extremely powerful, unique character. Her name is usually translated as “Bee.”⁵⁹⁵ She buzzes from triumph as a charismatic judge (4:5) to success as a war leader and stings Barak with her rebuke (4:9). Like the bee, she works both independently and with others to ensure cooperation and affirmation so she may achieve her final sweet victory.⁵⁹⁶ Her judicial seat, being not at the gates of a town, but rather under a tree, distinct from a settlement, reinforces her allure. People, from commoner to powerful Israelite military leaders like Barak are willing to travel to her for judgment (4:7). From her first words, Deborah defines herself and the tale to be under *YHWH*’s instruction, mandate and auspices (4:6-7). “Wife of Lappidoth” could be translated as “wife of lightning,” rather than indicating a man’s name, reinforcing Deborah’s singleness of status and purpose, her power, brightness and impact.⁵⁹⁷

With such directives, theologically there can be no doubt about the end result. The text immediately amplifies this impression with the exclusively Israelite-centred *YHWH*, יהוה *the Lord*, amplified by *'elohim*, אֱלֹהִים *God*, to create “*The LORD, the*

⁵⁹⁵ Burney, *Judges*, 85.

⁵⁹⁶ Bernard A. Asen, “Deborah, Barak and Bees: Apismellifera, Apiculture and *Judges* 4 and 5,” *ZAW*, 109, 1989: 514-533.

⁵⁹⁷ לַפִּידוֹת . Or “wife of flames.” Mark A. Leuchter, “The Priesthood in Ancient Israel,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture*, 40, 2, (May 2010), 100-110 suggests “wife of flames.” “Wife of torches” is proposed by N.C. Crow and A.E. Connor, “Mantic Mary? The Virgin Mother as Prophet in Luke 1:26-56 and the Early Church,” *JSNT* 34, 3, (March 2014), 254-276, quoting C. Meyers ‘Deborah’, in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. D.N. Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 331-32. Also, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, ‘Deborah 2’, in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 66-67. Sasson suggest “a wielder of flames.” Sasson, *Judges*, 250.

God of Israel, "אלהי ישראל" ⁵⁹⁸ (4:9) the most powerful combination of

terms to refer to the Israelite deity, stressing the major theological importance and *gravitas* of Deborah's words as a statement of *YHWH's* authority, power and over-riding connection to the process that commands Barak's active participation. Deborah is auguring the successful overthrow of an oppressive dictatorship. Throughout Act One, each time God's power and involvement is mentioned, it is *YHWH*, not *'elohim*.⁵⁹⁹

Additional intentions are shown with the verb, *give*, expressing a definable, directed action from the Divine to a human and, in each case, that promise is fulfilled (4:7).⁶⁰⁰ The presence of "give" (4:7), followed almost immediately with "sell" (4:9),⁶⁰¹ once Barak shows hesitation, followed by another "give" (4:14)⁶⁰² has supplementary confirmations of *YHWH's* direct involvement and examples of linguistic emphasis similar to Ehud's.

Barak's name can be translated as "Lightning"⁶⁰³ and taken into context with "wife of Lappidoth" suggests another layer of meaning. If Barak and, Lappidoth are synonyms, the possibility of Deborah and Barak as husband/wife or some other kind of familial connection adds richness to the narrative and suggests other ideas: *i.e.*, Does this explain Barak's almost instant response to Deborah's call? Is Barak just putting up a husbandly protest, rather than showing

⁵⁹⁸ All other times "*YHWH*" alone is used. 4:1, 2, 3, 9, 14, 15.

⁵⁹⁹ *'Elohim* is used only in the summative 4:23.

⁶⁰⁰ Other examples of "give": 1:34; 3:28; 4:14; 7:14,15; 8:3.

⁶⁰¹ "... for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."

⁶⁰² "Up! For this is the day on which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand."

⁶⁰³ Burney, *Judges*, 87, ברק , brq.

cowardice when he questions Deborah's instructions? With *YHWH*'s help, Barak flashes through Sisera's troops destroying them. Like lightning, he disappears and reappears, being both destructive and irregular. The anticipatory expectation of Deborah's direct involvement in Sisera's defeat becomes ironically and humourously amended.

Barak wavers. Through Deborah, *YHWH* changes the message: "the LORD will *sell* Sisera into the hand of a woman" (4:9). Barak is no longer to be the *YHWH*-guided instrument of Sisera's downfall. This is the only example in the Bible where *YHWH* "sells" a non-Israelite; this is a linguistic trick and reversal compounded by the ambiguity of the reference to a woman.⁶⁰⁴ The pivotal nature of Deborah's two prophesies poses further conundrums. The contrast is particularly striking, ironic and triumphalist. Sisera, the highest-ranking enemy, is about to be conveyed to a lower ranking person, a woman, and, as it turns out, an even lower ranking person than originally imagined because Ja'el's tribal heritage may not be Israelite, although her husband shares a tenuous connection with the Chosen People. Even as the plot makes Deborah *YHWH*'s victorious agent, it rebukes Barak.⁶⁰⁵ The surprise and shock of Ja'el's arrival *en scène* help create a humourous possibility beyond the narrative confusion and surprise.

⁶⁰⁴ The normative translation of מִכַּר , *mkhr*, sell, involves *YHWH* giving the Israelites to a non-Israelite power. See 2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7 for such examples of its usual use.

⁶⁰⁵ Burney suggests that "it is difficult to escape the common impression that the unpalatable information is produced by the prophetess at this juncture in consequence of Barak's want of alacrity in accepting the divine mandate. As La paraphrases, 'You wish for a woman's help and it is a woman (though a different one) who shall have the honour.'" Burney, *Judges*, 89. ["La" is Burney's abbreviation for M.J. Lagrange, *Le Livre des Juges* (1903)].

For Deborah, this is a divinely inspired prophesy, for the readers, an ultimate ironic, contradictory *and* incorrect anticipatory experience because they assume it will be Deborah who will defeat Sisera. Narratively they have no reason to think otherwise. Imaginatively, they are stymied by the lack of alternative women to consider, but gender humour remains, with the already-clear reversal of expectations: a woman will defeat a warrior chief.

The Narrator and *YHWH* are using chicanery on everyone within and without the text. *YHWH* continues to sanction Deborah's prophesy, in spite of the ironic amendment precipitated by Barak's ambivalence. The imbalance is striking, the irony and the tricksterism sharply evident. *YHWH* calls into question not only the might and power of an armed force but also the role, responsibility and effectiveness of gender identities and societal expectations. Operational success is guaranteed, the Israelites will defeat Sisera's army, but complications will arise as men and women do not fit expected patterns of behaviour. Who, where and how is left to the imagination. The structural climax will be surprising because of the actions of an as-yet unidentified character.

Like Ehud, Deborah is an Epic Hero, a female prophet, appointed by *YHWH*, a judge, appointed by her peers. Her behaviours and accomplishments amplify these categorizations, giving her an institutional *gravitas* that Ehud lacks. She is not a Trickster, except by default, for there is question whether she understands the nuance of her prophesy. Nor is she a Clown for she does not make us

laugh nor make us feel merry.⁶⁰⁶ Barak is not a Trickster either, his attitudes are too straightforward, but, on the other hand, he is a Hero/Clown, a hero through his battle prowess and a Clown, or fool, when he rejects Deborah's command.

The narrative's tricks and humour include a surprise, a new, incongruously introduced character. As the pivotal tag end of Deborah's adventures, Ja'el's discordant story begins with the subplot's introduction interjected into Act One, almost as a sidebar amongst the gathering of Israelite warriors. It is a harbinger of interesting things to come (4:11).

The interjection of Heber into the narrative is another signal of its overall unpredictability, a shift in focus. The reader is led to infer that he will be of narrative consequence. His presence or absence is never clarified or acknowledged, used only to identify Ja'el's lineage. Ja'el is not mentioned at that time, rendering the possibility of diversionary imaginative reflection coupled with this explicit endorsement of separation and uniqueness, while making these almost immediately irrelevant. It is a classic narrative red herring.

The mystery of the Kenite clan remains but its textual mention marks the beginning of the end of Canaanite domination. This anticipatory plot development, in the midst of a battle plan description, gives the reader cause to expect

⁶⁰⁶ Ann and Barry Ulanov, "The Clown Archetype" in *Quadrant: The Journal of the C.G. Jung Foundation*, 13, no.1 (Spring 1980).

further confusion.⁶⁰⁷ The words “separated from” and “as far away at” emphasizes the uniqueness of Heber’s actions and his deliberate physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual isolation and detachment from his tribe.⁶⁰⁸ Is this simply a physical separation of someone who fears Sisera or has he deserted Sisera’s cause to become a neutral observer or an active Israelite supporter? The latter thought is encouraged by the addendum that he is a descendent of Moses’ family. While the reader mulls over possibilities, the narrative eradicates Sisera’s army and sends him fleeing to Ja’el’s tent.

After being earlier condemned as an “oppressive” overlord with advanced weaponry, Sisera’s personality is now given prominence. Beyond his articulated anti-Israelite behaviour, Sisera’s name labels him an outsider. The origins of his name are contentious although one dictionary suggests that it means “a servant of Ra,” which marks him clearly as a non-Israelite.⁶⁰⁹ Further, while under normal military circumstances, it is strategically important to eliminate the leader of a military force, in this scenario, dead or alive, Sisera is no longer of consequence. He had already lost the battle and deserted his army, the source of his power, au-

⁶⁰⁷ And no clear answers. Was there really any definable Kenite alliance with the Canaanites or was it a relationship based on economic expediency? Were they allied with any other specific group or was their motivation survival, playing all ends against the middle? See Soggin, *Judges*, 77-78.

⁶⁰⁸ Clarification arises with the concept of “separation.” The Hebrew פָּרַד, *prd*, *separate*, is seldom used, 38 times in the Hebrew Bible. See *Prov.* 18:1; *Gen.* 2:10 etc.

⁶⁰⁹ Sisera is distinctly non-Israelite. Burney says he was Hittite (*Judges*, 113). Boling sees him as one of the Sea People or Philistines (*Judges*, 94). Soggin has several suggestions from Luvian to northern Anatolian (*Judges*, 63).

thority and control (4:15-17). His death is critical only to validate Deborah's prophetic reputation and is, therefore, narratively, prophetically, and theologically consequential.

Sisera is Barak's mirror image, as much an antipathetic warrior as Barak. Barak shows initial reluctance followed by battle enthusiasm. Sisera enters the battle field enthusiastically, but once his forces appear thwarted, he loses his ardour, and deserts (4:14-15).⁶¹⁰ Irony abounds, the master charioteer, with 900 now-useless chariots flees the battle field, *on foot*. Repetitive details abound. "Fled away on foot" is repeated twice in two separate verses for emphasis (4:15, 17). To be alone and on foot are major fiascos for any leader, let alone one whose military power was so impressive that the chariots had been repeated three times. (4:3, 4:13, 4:15.) These restatements highlight the inconsistencies of Sisera's life and with these oddities come the reader's amusement of personal superiority and triumphalism that makes it possible to more easily accept the exaggeration and hyperbole of the army's eradication along with the conspicuous, and unexpected cowardice of its leader. *Märchen* generally characterize the villain in the darkest of colours.

⁶¹⁰ English translations are consistent: "Sisera ... fled away on foot while Barak pursued the chariots," NRSV. An interesting side bar is that Barak, for narrative purposes, does not observe the flight of the general and he follows the chariots.

Ja'el is the "Young Mountain Goat."⁶¹¹ This metaphor is vivid. As the resilient, active, clever, independent and agile wild goat living on her own,⁶¹² Ja'el overcomes adversity, and maintains the high ground, overpowering and outrunning her adversary intellectually, creatively and physically. Though traditionally translated as "mountain goat," יַעֲלִי, implies within the structure of her name, a

divine connection through the god *El*, יְיָ, even though *YHWH/El* is not men-

tioned. Here is another subtle, subversive manner in which the writers reinforce the redaction-imposed theological significance, while setting up an anticipatory clue. The proposal that her name includes one of the names of the Hebrew deity, *El*, strengthens her status as an instrument of *YHWH*, again deviously.

Ja'el's adventures lack many of the intentionally amusing vignettes triggered by the *hapax* of Ehud's saga but her story is as complex, uncertain and interconnected, beginning well before she herself enters the plot, at Deborah's admonition to Barak (4:9). As mentioned above, this is an almost identical duplication of the introductory redaction except that emphasis shifts from *YHWH* selling

⁶¹¹ Boling in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Achtemeier, 476. Thomas F. McDaniel uniquely suggests that "Ja'el is the Hiphil form of the verb 'to attack, to kill covertly' with defective spelling." Thomas F. McDaniel, *Deborah never sang: a philological study of the Song of Deborah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978/1983), 148. If this has any credibility, and I have not seen McDaniel's suggestion elsewhere, this is creatively amusing with definitive anticipatory irony and narrative presages.

⁶¹² Martin suggests that Ja'el is an entirely independent person. Martin, *Judges*, 61-63.

all Israelites to the Canaanites to *YHWH* selling one Canaanite to an unidentified woman. This about-face creates additional uncertainty. Here is a predictive plot element at its most clever, where the reader makes a valid assumption that will later be demolished. Ja'el will become another Hero/Trickster, crucial to the validation of Deborah's prophetic abilities and, by extension, her judgeship, her leadership, her textual validity and her future reputation.

Ja'el's actions are mandated by *YHWH* by extension, and unassailable. Sisera approaches Ja'el's tent from a position of weakness and powerlessness without the strategic power, authority and influence connected to military leadership. He has been deprived of physical power by the battle and his subsequent flight. It is not untoward to suggest and imagine that, he is physically, emotionally and intellectually bereft and vulnerable, such fatigue affecting his decision-making abilities as becomes evident in the unfolding narrative. Markers, not specified in the text, are evident to Sisera as he identifies Ja'el's tent as a potential sanctuary.⁶¹³ He never questions that supposition.⁶¹⁴ He also appears to have presumed that word of his defeat has not reached Ja'el so that he would be able to

⁶¹³ Soggin, *Judges*, 75. Boling acknowledges the challenge when he comments "it would be recognized as providential that a Galilean Qenite Chieftain had a loyal Yahwist wife" (Boling, *Judges*, 97).

⁶¹⁴ Soggin puts forward a "plausible hypothesis" instigated by F.C. Fensham that the Kenites had a kinship with Israel and an alliance with the Canaanites, and up to this point there had been no conflict. F.C. Fensham, "Did a Treaty between the Israelites and the Kenites exist?" *BASOR* 175, 1964, 51-54, quoted in Soggin, *Judges*, 77-78.

maintain the facade of authority and strength that he lacks in reality. This assumption of continuing command is indicated in his presumptive orders to Ja'el (4:18-19).⁶¹⁵

When Ja'el uses hospitality to her advantage, she has implicit divine authority, though she may have no idea of the Divine. Again, language provides the ambiguous details that are seminal. The Hebrew reader's general understanding would be that women, especially unaccompanied women such as Ja'el, did not leave their tents to greet men.⁶¹⁶ As such, Ja'el's behaviour casts narrative aspersions on her entire demeanour and the plot. While there may have been "peace between King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite" (4:17), the reader has also been reminded of the Kenites' historical link to Moses and the wider Israelite umbrella of kinship and loyalty (4:11). These contradictions add further tension as they prompt the imagination to propose further textual possibilities.

Sisera is invited into "the tent of Ja'el," not "the tent of Heber," an ambiguity which empowers the reader to supplementary questions. Is Ja'el a divorced woman, in spite of her title, "wife of Heber," or a discarded older wife, whose alle-

⁶¹⁵ נָא, n', has often been translated as "please", (NKJV; NASB; NIV). It has an alternative connotation, "now", which, with the appropriate tone of voice, becomes a command as "NOW give me a little water to drink." (4:19) BDB considers it a particle of entreaty or exhortation. (BDB, 609).

⁶¹⁶ See *Gen.* 18, Abraham's interactions with the three strangers. See also Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 68-73.

giance to Heber is limited? Is she an independent wife with her own realm of influence and charisma? Is her tent a cultic shrine and she a cultic priestess?⁶¹⁷ Or, like Sarah in Gen. 24:67, is Ja'el's tent, just *status quo*, an acceptable and commonly understood aspect of family life?⁶¹⁸ Is Heber loyal to Sisera while Ja'el is not?⁶¹⁹ Is Ja'el the mother/lover?⁶²⁰ Is he seeking cultic sanctuary?⁶²¹ Is the tent the womb?⁶²² Has Sisera violated the culture's hospitality code by entering Ja'el's tent OR is Sisera merely one completely exhausted soldier looking for a refuge in the shade?⁶²³ Some dimension of the "tent of Ja'el" reassures Sisera. Again, the language tells only part of the tale and there are many valid imaginative interpretations, which we must consider Invisible Text.

⁶¹⁷ Martin, *Judges*, 57.

⁶¹⁸ Scholars assume that the Bible is a) the result of several particular historical eras; b) was produced within a number of distinct ideological frameworks and c) reconstructs those ideologies in part. Because it is valid to infer that the gender roles of women and men were not static during the 700± years in which the text was created and revised, there is the possibility that the gender roles thus portrayed were valid reflections of appropriate acceptable behaviour within the general gender societal expectations of those times. See Alter, *The Art*, 39; Webb, *Judges*, 131-132; Guest, "Judges" in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, eds. Guest *et al.*, 168-177.

⁶¹⁹ Martin proposes that Ja'el is completely independent of Heber (*Judges*, 57, 60) as does Boling (*Judges*, 95-97).

⁶²⁰ Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Uncovering Jael and Sisera: A New Reading," *SJOT* 19, no.1 (2005): 24-47. Tamarkin Reis maintains that every time unmarried men and women are together alone in the Hebrew Bible, sexual intercourse takes place (27).

⁶²¹ Benjamin Mazar suggests that Ja'el and family are part of an aristocratic priestly Kenite family and the tent is a holy sanctuary. Benjamin Mazar, "The Sanctuary of Arad and the Family of Hobab the Kenite," *JNES* 24, no.3 (1965): 297-303.

⁶²² Mike Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre and Scholarship on Sisera's Death*. Translated by Matthew Gumpert. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 213. Alter supports the maternal implications. Alter, *The Art*, 48.

⁶²³ That is Fewell's and Gunn's contention. Dana N. Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men and the Authority of Violence in *Judges* 4 and 5," *JAAR* 58, n.10 (1990), 393. See also, Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 68-70.

Unlike Ehud's action-packed saga, Ja'el's verbs are benign yet transitive. Her initial actions and words fit into the range of appropriate behaviour within the expectations of Israelite/Hebrew desert hospitality with the textual addendum that she has implicit divine authority within the aegis of the present narrative (4:18-20).⁶²⁴

Sisera is lulled by a woman's words and actions, a clear negative marker within a patriarchal society, linguistic tricksterism at its best, evident to the believing audience and imprecise to the non-believer. Ja'el compounds this ambiguity when she addresses Sisera in the most respectful term, stroking his ego.⁶²⁵ "Turn aside, my lord" (4:18) with the choice of *Adoni*, a term used to emphasize the inequality of rank between the speaker and the listener, which the speaker is acknowledging.⁶²⁶ Ja'el clearly entices Sisera with that repetition, which is used the third time as he enters her tent (4:18). "Turn aside" itself is a phrase employed elsewhere to imply a distinct theological movement, found most commonly in connection to divine instructions.⁶²⁷ Is this "Turn *aside* to me" for theological

⁶²⁴ Using *Deut.* 10:19 "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt," presents a problem. If Sisera is an unwelcome guest, who has violated the hospitality code and is a threat to her personal safety, then Ja'el's actions could well be within her rights.

⁶²⁵ Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 265-66.

⁶²⁶ אֲדֹנִי , *adn* , Also found in 3:25, 19:11, 19:12 and 19:27, it is used to indicate a master-servant relationship. It is also found when Jacob is trying to placate Esau (*Gen.* 3:24-25); also referring to the Pharaoh in *Gen.* 40. On other occasions, it is used to name the Israelite god.

⁶²⁷ סוּר , *swr* . In *Deut.* 31:29, when the speaker cautions about turning from good to evil. In *Ex.* 3:3, Moses turns aside from the sight of *YHWH*. Other examples involve choices of behaviour, action or the commandment(s). *Deut* 28:14; *1Sam* 22:23; *Gen.* 35:2; *Josh.* 23:6.

safety, shelter, rest, psychological tranquility putting aside all troubles that ail him, the negativities of his life? Or is it “Turn aside *to me*” as a sexual invitation?

There is her blatant lie “Have no fear,” using the word employed in other texts where the Lord is placating Israelites with the same positive terms.⁶²⁸ Ja’el is using ambiguous coded theological terms to entice a non-believer. Language has become the purveyor of theological values. Whether or not Sisera understood the theological innuendo, the Israelite reader certainly would. From an Israelite perspective, Sisera violates sexual and hospitality strictures entering a woman’s tent.⁶²⁹ Ja’el’s overly generous hospitality⁶³⁰ assuages his hesitance and provides contextual anticipation: what is coming next? The reader is left in suspense again when Ja’el covers Sisera with a “rug.”⁶³¹

When he asks for water, she gives him milk, a more elaborate gift and a soporific.⁶³² The next “higher quality offer” could be sexual if one suggests that Ja’el’s tent and its isolation indicate cultic prostitution.⁶³³ The Hebrew reader

⁶²⁸ The same verb, to fear, is found *Gen.* 15:1; *Num.* 14:9; *Deut.* 1:21; *Josh* 8:1; *Judg.* 6:23.

⁶²⁹ Examining the mandate of public versus private spaces, see the example of Sarah, *Gen.* 18:10, and the differentiation of men’s tents versus women’s tents in *Gen.* 31:33. The vast majority of time that the word “tent” occurs in the Hebrew Bible (366 in total), it is “the tent of meeting,” the original home of the tabernacle and later “the tent of the Lord,” which is likely why some scholars have suggested that Ja’el might have been a cultic priestess.

⁶³⁰ Matthews claims the entire incident is about hospitality. Victor Matthews, “Hospitality and Hostility in *Judges* 4,” *BTB* 21, no.1 (1991): 13-21.

⁶³¹ The word is found elsewhere in *Isa.* 21:5 where it is translated as “rug.” Translation for the other word for “rug” is traditionally “overlay.” See *Ex.* 26:37, 27:2, 6. Sasson declares there is no question that it is some kind of cloth, perhaps a mantle. Sasson, *Judges* 1-12, 266.

⁶³² See *Gen.* 18 when Abraham offers his guests milk.

⁶³³ Niditch suggests a sexual component. Niditch, *Judges*, 63. Brenner agrees. Athalya Brenner, “A Triangle and a Rhombus in Narrative Structure: A Proposed Integrative Reading of *Judges* 4 and 5,” in *A Feminist Commentary of the Book of Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 103. Reis proposes that the pericope has sexual power at its root: a woman’s sexual power over a

knows instantly that Sisera is in trouble. Anticipatory humour, superiority over the character and his nation make the irony almost palpable.

While body image seems to play a limited role, many recent scholars contend that Ja'el's success is based on her sexual allure and her physical seduction of Sisera. This is first implied in her name "*young* mountain goat." The idea of a sexual tryst between Sisera and Ja'el is not a recent development.⁶³⁴ Since the 1600s, artists have tended to depict Ja'el as young and sexually attractive, portrayals that encourage the idea of some sexual contact between the two.⁶³⁵ As this interpretation depends on alternative exegesis of textual clues, the entire idea is open to as much speculation as Eglon's sexuality. One may, however, conclude that having ruled for 20 years (4:3), Sisera is a mature, sexually active warrior.⁶³⁶ Ja'el is ageless, somewhere between puberty and old age, clever enough to deceive and entice an experienced, exhausted, warrior yet strong enough to hammer a tent peg through human bone. While lacking further physical descriptions of each character, we do have the sexual imagery of Ja'el's words, her repetitions and her enticements as well as the tent peg's phallic

man. Reis, "Uncovering Jael and Sisera," 28. Bal claims it's all about maternal emotions. Bal, *Murder and Difference*, 24-47; 135-138.

⁶³⁴ Sasson states "Rabbinical lore [bMegillah15a] contends Ja'el had grace and beauty with men's desire surging at the mere sound of her voice." Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 494, note 37.

⁶³⁵ See Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1656), "Jael and Sisera"; Felice Ficherelli (1605-1660), "Jael and Sisera"; Salomon de Bray (1597-1664), "Jael, Deborah and Barak"; Carlo Maratta (1625-1713) "Study of Jael in Red Chalk"; James Tissot (1836-1902), "Jael smote Sisera and Slew him." Colleen M. Conway illustrated her book with 13 portrayals of Ja'el and Sisera, all of which show an attractive woman, although one by Dirck Volckertz Coornhert, shows a musclebound female titan (60). Colleen M. Conway. *Sex and Slaughter in the Tent of Jael: A Cultural History of a Biblical Story*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁶³⁶ Taking the statement that he had ruled for 20 years, Sisera would be 35± years of age.

shape. Niditch notes the ambiguity of the tent peg when she observes that the word could also be translated as “male member,” *i.e.*, penis.⁶³⁷ The irony increases with this possibility: if Sisera rapes Ja’el’s body with his penis, she “rapes” his mind/soul/existence with a phallic-shaped tent peg. The ironic symbolism of the tent peg carries further with the idea of a “tool in hand” normally used to construct shelter and safety that provides neither for the victim. It is furthermore, a tool that is specifically *not* forbidden to women.⁶³⁸ The location of the death blow, the *temple* in most translations, is debatable if only because the word is almost a *hapax*, unique to *Judges*.⁶³⁹

There has been much academic ink spilled over discussions of the sexual nature of this story. In one sense, it is a reversal of the “rape and death” scenario, so common to military incursions, because it is the male, not the female, who is violated. The humour here comes within the questionable, “all’s fair in love and war” category, a reversal of expectations, surprise and incongruity, while retaining triumphant superiority. The irony and preposterousness of a battle-weary

⁶³⁷ Niditch, *Judges*, 63, footnote O. As found in the *Codex Vaticanus*, according to Niditch. Also in *Ex.* 39:40, *Judg.* 4:21, 22; 5:26. In the majority of the 19 uses of this word, it is translated as “peg,” and the adjective “tent” is often not articulated, but understood in context.

⁶³⁸ Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 269

⁶³⁹ פֶּגַע, *rqqh*, translated as “temple” [part of the human head] in *Judg.* 4:21, 22, 5:26 or “cheek” [part of the human face] in *Song* 6:3, 7. The physical building, “temple” has another word. Josephus Flavius said the peg went through his mouth and cheek, a view that garners support from recent medical researchers. Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities*, Undated Edition, quoted in M. Feinsod, “Three Head Injuries: The Biblical Account of the Deaths of Sisera, Abimelech and Goliath,” *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, 6 no.3 (1997): 320-324.

warrior, who is seduced by, or rapes, the wife of an ally, may seem inconsistent but is not.⁶⁴⁰

Sisera assumes his orders will be obeyed. He lacks the self-awareness that he is now powerless. The Interpreter also could be similarly deceived, which adds to the suspense and upcoming surprise. Sisera commands Ja'el to stand watch to protect him (4:20). She can honestly say "No" when anyone comes and asks "Is anyone here?" for Sisera will be dead.⁶⁴¹ This is the truest of indications of Ja'el's tricksterism and the text's ironic subterfuge. She saves him from harm by anyone else, trapping him with her words and actions. In that ambiguity is wit and ironic humour, linked to sexual uncertainty. Triumphalist innuendo is further amplified: an oppressive overlord has been defeated. An isolated, vulnerable, low status woman succeeds using an instrument close at hand, retaining religious mandates.⁶⁴² It is an ignominious death, laughable for the Israelite, and ultimately any tyrannized female.

Like Eglon, Sisera's narrative mistakes are rooted in his unrealistic expectations and overriding ego. A once-powerful leader is deceived and becomes vulnerable because he does not understand that his authority was completely gone.

⁶⁴⁰ The rape of Berlin by Russian troops in 1945 is well documented, a historical confirmation of rape as a military strategy that continues today. See the conflicts in Kosovo, Libya, Nigeria and Bosnia. The rape of civilians is often a tool of intimidation by terrorist groups.

⁶⁴¹ In a further ironic manifestation, having been given the option to say, "No one is here," Ja'el never exercises it. She "jumps the gun" when she sees Barak (4:22). It may have been a deliberate act to indicate she would not obey Sisera's instructions.

⁶⁴² Hammer and tent pegs were not men's weapons or implements of war so their use by women was acceptable. See Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, 72, referring to J. Pitt-Rivers. "The Stranger, the Guest, and the Hostile Host," in *Contributions to Mediterranean Sociology: Mediterranean rural communities and social change*, ed. J. G. Peristiany (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 27.

He could not perceive that he misjudged a situation and a person. He accepted a woman, a non-Canaanite, at face value, expecting absolute truth that met his understandings and he misinterpreted what he heard. He did not seek clarification of ambiguous speech, because he did not recognize its ambiguity. His Canaanite context did not allow him to interpret correctly. The fall of the obnoxious, the cruel, the mighty and the oppressive is almost always amusing and emotionally satisfying for the general public, especially when the victim underestimates a marginal member of society. Even his instructions to Ja'el are imbued with irony. She *will* be able to do as he says "... if anybody comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No'" (4:20) because he will be dead. Again, it is humour of a triumphant superiority.

Ja'el does not necessarily understand *YHWH* or how she is to fulfil *YHWH's* commands, and these factors emphasize the importance and relevance of every person in a well-constructed narrative and in theological considerations. The plot also highlights the importance of flexibility and creativity. That a simple implement can make the difference between life and death, is a common-sense but not necessarily widely understood, concept.⁶⁴³ Further, the idea that every human being is capable of murder, under the correct, or appropriate, circumstances is another sound notion that is seldom acknowledged or explored.

Sisera's death accentuates other contradictions: the disparity of a warrior's "honourable" death on the battlefield versus an ignoble, deceptive death, at a

⁶⁴³ This is not meant to support the idea that this is a factual recounting of an event, rather that by employing tools close at hand, the heroine alone is able to rescue herself from adversity.

woman's, not a warrior's, hand. The discernible overlay of sexual innuendo and tricksterism compound that scenario. There are also the redactive hints that Deborah's effectiveness, and Ja'el's accomplishments by extension, is less valued than Ehud's, when Israel is at peace for 40 years in contrast to the 80 year tenure following Ehud's death.⁶⁴⁴

Further gender assumptions are challenged. That men alone are all powerful and *YHWH's* sole funnel to the people does not stand scrutiny. Deborah and Ja'el are the heroes; Barak is hesitant, unsure and perhaps cowardly, prior to battle. Eternal glory through Sisera's death escapes him. Sisera's cowardice, fleeing the battlefield, is compounded when he is duped and killed by a woman. Two separate women are acclaimed, one for the prophesy and the second for its accomplishment. In another contradiction of the seeming *status quo*, it is the more powerful, higher profile Deborah's validity and status which rests on the action of Ja'el. Ja'el has no such vulnerability. Ja'el does NOT need Deborah. She does not share her glory with anyone, nor does she require anyone to validate herself. In any respect, her endeavour is independent. It is a surprise, a shock and an unexpected narrative tweak. All honour is Ja'el's.

This story contains distinctly intentional humour with its factors of surprise, incongruity, commonality and community. At no time is the humour conciliatory, self-effacing or accidental. Israelite triumphant superiority undermines the effects

⁶⁴⁴ Only at the end of the poem in Chapter 5 do we have affirmation of the 40 years of peace after Deborah's death (5:31).

of Foreigners, while providing alternative behaviour patterns and role models to those same Israelites.

The key plot trigger is the deception that triggers the wonder and strangeness of the male/female dynamic and contradictory behaviours. This is a story of gender and status role reversals using duplicity, surprise and confusion perpetrated by each character. Deborah confounds Barak with her prophecy; Barak confounds Deborah with his initial refusal to go to battle; Sisera confounds Barak and the two armies by fleeing the battle; Ja'el confounds Sisera with her hospitality and subsequent actions; Ja'el confounds Barak with Sisera's dead body and Ja'el also confounds Deborah by affirming her prophecy. Ja'el's behaviour also astonishes the reader with that same prophecy, the lowest ranking female defeating the highest ranking male.

Mistakes the characters make provide critical plot convolutions that enrich and enhance the tale. Barak's hesitance, doubt and inconsistency is the first unexpected and inexplicable plot twist, where military bravery without temporization and uncertainty was anticipated.⁶⁴⁵ Because he knows he is *YHWH*'s designated military leader, Barak's behaviour is bewildering. That his indecision is an effective plot twist is without question; it can also be a sign of Barak's limited theological understanding of Deborah and *YHWH*. In comparison, Sisera's lack of understanding of his new environment, ultimately causes his absolute defeat, after his

⁶⁴⁵ Niditch considers Barak's actions not cowardice but "rather within the context of the worldview of the literature, he is wise to know that victory comes with the presence of God's favorite." Niditch, *Judges*, 65.

battlefield cowardice, both aspects that are unanticipated from someone who is described as “cruel” and “oppressive” (4:2-3).

The unexpected insertion of a female character after the battle, which could have been the climactic point of the story, seems initially out of place. If this were a war narrative, the battle would have been prominently featured with a concluding triumphal summary. Instead the tensions of the battle are downplayed, firstly with the Heber insertion and secondly with Ja’el’s appearance. Thus this is not a war story, it must have theological meaning.

For the story to be most effective, the reader must accept a sense of Israelite commonality, community and societal expectations, while understanding gender-specific suppositions and Israelite/Foreigner dichotomies. This story can be an entertaining study of human relationships and an example of the contrast of expectations versus narrative reality. The upset of the societal power dynamics enhances the reversal of gender roles. This story’s humour depends on an adversarial scenario, a contextual perception of strong females versus indecisive male(s) with the added dimension of the *seemingly* weak women versus the *seemingly* strong men.

Accepting the plot at face value -- a defenceless woman defeats a mighty warrior by subterfuge and tricksterism -- does not necessarily lead to an interpretation of humour, except perhaps as a reflection of an ironic power imbalance. It is the contradictions and surprises of the text, Ja’el’s linguistic *double entendres* and Sisera’s defeat by stealth that create the surprise and strangeness that lead

to the humour. The textual repetitions surrounded by the innuendo-loaded vocabulary emphasize the text's ambiguity and its certainty at one and the same time in a manner similar to Ehud's story.⁶⁴⁶ The notion of a sexual tryst brings out the discomfort many feel about sexuality, with an ensuing laughter of unease. As rape, it was a power ploy by Sisera, trying to re-assert his dominance and control in the only manner which he has left.⁶⁴⁷

The theological directions of the text are clarified with the triumphalist Israelite theological intentionality within the intertextual connections. *YHWH* sponsored and supported both women but only Deborah is narratively aware of that involvement. The humour's secret messages are more explicable when the entire chronicle is seen in relationships of the two parts. Deborah's and Barak's blunt discussion is in stark contrast to Ja'el's entirely devious verbal interactions with Sisera. Deborah has the highest of status yet has difficulty convincing Barak. Ja'el is the absolute opposite in both status and persuasive powers who has no difficulty deluding Sisera. *YHWH* is highlighted with Deborah/Barak and has no place in Ja'el's segment. In deed and behaviour, the two women are polar opposites yet they both accomplish *YHWH*'s goals.

Reader expectations are constantly reversed. *YHWH* appears to be supporting trickery, intrigue and cunning to defeat Israel's enemies with unusual and

⁶⁴⁶ *I.e.*, The various repetitions reinforce the story subliminally: the chariots (4:2, 7, 13, 15 twice, 16), the numbers of chariots (4:2, 13), "fled on foot," (4:15, 17), "turn aside," (4:18 thrice), tent peg (4:21 twice, 22).

⁶⁴⁷ Rape is not an act of love, affection or sex. Its motivation is to assert power, fear, authority and control over the victim. See Nigel Barber, "Is rape about control or sex? What is rape really about," *Psychology Today*, April 05, 2011. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-human-beast/201104/is-rape-about-control-or-sex> accessed 09.06.2017.

non-traditional characters to accomplish these goals. Whether Ja'el understands or knows that she is an instrument of *YHWH's* machinations is never textually acknowledged or explained. This deepens the reaction to the text when a non-Israelite, non-believer female is crucial to *YHWH's* success.

While there is a general tone of male dominance over society and women throughout the Hebrew Bible, recalling that preeminence need not be physical, this story presents alternate patterns of acceptable behaviour within *YHWH's* spectrum of approval. Females may find this text amusing and/or affirming because of the defeat of a cruel, threatening male by the most undervalued member of society. I am not suggesting that women should peg their male oppressors or opponents at the first opportunity, rather that the story presents a woman who successfully competes with a man, linguistically and physically. The humour itself also depends upon the reader's assumed prejudicial, misogynist interpretation that Sisera, as a man, should be superior to Ja'el in all respects including creative deception. The contradictions of this assumption can create a humorous response.

There are also exemplars for the male reader. A Foreigner bully, Sisera, is defeated by deception, trickery and his own innate human weaknesses and the skeptical Israelite warrior, Barak, is reprimanded for his hesitance so he does not receive the glory he might have otherwise earned. In *YHWH's* world, the tyrant will not triumph, and one must trust *YHWH* and *YHWH's* messenger or there will be consequences. Gender is irrelevant.

Sisera's final humiliation is separated from the main action by geography and his previous conduct. His reputation as cruel and oppressive is contradicted by his cowardly behaviour. He deliberately separated himself physically from his support system, his army and the battle scene. He trusted an untrustworthy person. Humour also moderates the negative effects of this violence. It is the Trickster Ja'el's language, characterization, creativity and plotting, before and after Sisera's death, that are the elements that amuse. Seemingly the consummate hostess, Ja'el enticed Sisera with linguistic platitudes and falsehoods, with upgraded foods, and creature comforts (4:18-20) just as Ehud behaved as Eglon's perfect guest, with tribute, respectful requests and special divine messages (3:17-20). Ironically, through their impeccable manners, Ja'el and Ehud are the perfect killers.

Sisera's death could be defined in terms of the phallic nature of Ja'el's speech in combination with the tool that kills him, which itself emphasizes the woman's physical power and commitment. His death is further minimized when Ja'el tells Barak, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking" (4:22), truthful, ambiguous and curt, with no self-aggrandizement. Instead of fulfilling Sisera's final command, she remains true to herself. Disadvantaged, marginalized people, liminal people on the edges of society, in this case, women, triumph, using tools traditionally ascribed as instruments of protection, along with deceit, subterfuge and violent actions. By enveloping Sisera's gruesome death

within understated language, ironic humour and behaviour, the author and redactor have managed to lessen the emotional and theological impact of what is, in reality, a cold-blooded murder of a stupidly defenceless coward.

The *märchen* traits begin with undefined locations, Ramah, Bethel and the palm of Deborah. While the former two have textual references that present the possibility specific physical sites,⁶⁴⁸ the palm of Deborah has no other identifiable attributes. Even the suggestion that the tree and setting originated with Rebekah's nurse, Deborah (Gen. 35:8), does not bear close scrutiny.⁶⁴⁹ Deborah of *Genesis* is buried under an oak or terebinth; Deborah of *Judges* adjudicates under a palm. Any connection between the two Deborahs is imprecise at best.⁶⁵⁰

A stereotypical villain, once all-powerful and ruthless, is defeated by stealth and a touch of divine interference. The Protagonists are flawed creatures (Barak's indecision and a marginalized, isolated woman) who triumph in the end by thinking outside the box. The battle sequences are minimalized while maintaining the ferocity of war as all enemies are eradicated. The deity is firmly on the side of "right and justice" within the story, but not as an overwhelming presence.

⁶⁴⁸ See Gen. 12:8, 13:3, 35:6 for Bethel; Josh. 19:8, 19:29 for Ramah.

⁶⁴⁹ Niditch claims that the Old Latin reads "under a palm." This definition distances the two Deborahs, as well as "reducing the more cultic image of Deborah as an oracle associated with a sacred tree or space."

Niditch, *Judges*, 62. Use of אֵלֹן terebinth or oak, 'allon, is generally associated with some level of cultic or officially sanctioned authority. See *BDB*, 436, 438.

⁶⁵⁰ Soggins suggests the oak of Deborah of *Genesis* is in the same general area as Deborah's palm tree, but denies a commonality as the two trees are different species and serve different functions. Soggins,

Judges, 64. Sasson affirms the two Deborahs are not connected. Because palms (נֹרָת) do not thrive in the Judean hills, Deborah of *Judges* has a special cachet of her own. Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 256.

Good triumphs and the state (again not the kingdom as imagined by Thompson) is re-established. Like the Ehud saga, the “happily ever after” aspect is minimized with a terse “The land had rest” with no mention of the characters’ post-story lives (5:31).

The critical feature once more is violence and humour’s interactions. Deborah’s benign and thoughtful presence is immediately counterbalanced by her demands on Barak’s military expertise and the expectation of violence. His immediate response is jarring and seems inappropriate, prompting the Interpreter’s disbelief and suspicion. If a warrior shows hesitance, what other narrative surprises are yet to come? Sisera, the oppressive forceful overlord, is immediately compared to the reticent Israelite. The irony is overwhelming while the possibilities of Israelite superiority are seemingly squashed.

This incongruity continues with Deborah’s forecast of a female as the instrument of *YHWH*’s command, defying misogynist expectations. The careful Interpreter will recognize the same discordant factors throughout, factors that signal unease, discomfort and potential surprise, for the entire story is based on the contradictions of expectation versus behaviour. Everything about Ja’el’s behaviour supports this: her last-minute appearance in the narrative, the invitation into her tent, her hospitality therein. All are a contradiction of societal expectations, followed by actions that are a further contradiction: her coldblooded killing of a sleeping man.

This can only be considered humorous if one allies oneself with the Israelites and makes the decision that triumphant superiority is the ruling mechanism for humour. It is amusing if one considers feminism as an equalizing agency and the scenario as the triumph for Israel of a non-Israelite, downtrodden, perhaps victim, female over a hostile, ferocious male ruler, who has been outsmarted at every junction. It is a literary refutation of gender role stereotypes. It moves the interpretation of violence from the military overview to a civilian outlook. It stresses the interactions that military conflicts have upon adjacent civilian groups. The author is internationalizing the effects of war: everyone has to be able to deal with the fallout from war. In this case, to the surprise of the reader, a woman succeeds.

This theme of triumphant women and devious accomplishments continues in Abimelech's pericope.

A Certain Woman and Abimelech

The standard understanding of Abimelech's tale is that it was yet another fictionalized account constructed by storytellers and subsequently restructured several times by redactions to meet changing theological imperatives.⁶⁵¹

There are, however, distinct differences within the Abimelech subplot of Gideon's mega-narrative. In its preamble (8:30-35), not only are Israelites *not* crying to *YHWH* for salvation, the introduction highlights the enormity of their

⁶⁵¹ Boogaart, "Stone for Stone," 45-56.

double rejection of *YHWH* and Gideon's family (8:33-35). *YHWH* has no presence in Abimelech's story, either as an inspiration or a character.

The Israelite/Hebrew reader knows that without divine approval, whatever successes Abimelech might appear to have over the course of his story will be invalidated. Although Abimelech's ruin is thus subversively predicted, there is no way for the reader to envisage the method(s) by which it will be accomplished, nor any other plot mechanisms. Therein creates the tension, the anticipation and the potential for imaginative conjecture and some possibility of humour, particularly of knowledgeable superiority. All textual markers *before* A Certain Woman's appearance hint to his continuing military and political success if one fails to decipher the word plays and character's names.⁶⁵² Thus, the absolute incongruity of Abimelech's death is unexpected and unanticipated, were the reader to be unaware of the literary inventiveness and *YHWH*'s overall power.

There is supplementary evidence that support the notion of Abimelech's immanent downfall. The textual information about the personality and behaviour of this man and his family is in direct contrast to the usual Biblical reticence to give personal and physical details. Abimelech's stature is questionable from the beginning. Not only is his mother a concubine, not a wife (8:31), identified as a

⁶⁵² J. Gerald Janzen discusses in detail the story's humour before A Certain Woman's entrance, with specific concentration on the names and word plays. J. Gerald Janzen, "A certain woman in the rhetoric of *Judges* 9," *JSOT* 12, no.38 (1988): 33-37.

slave (9:18), she lives in Shechem, not in Ophrah, Gideon's home town (8:27).⁶⁵³

Abimelech did spend some time away from Shechem for he returns to his birthplace before beginning his military takeover, implying the possibility that he had some direct interactions with his father, Gideon (9:1). Abimelech's irregular lifestyle is presaged by Gideon's ambiguous and contradictory behaviour.⁶⁵⁴ This sets the stage for the son's absolute rejection of his paternal heritage, *YHWH* and *YHWH's* narrative absence. Clearly identified women serve as bookends for Abimelech's story: his mother at the start and A Certain Woman, at his end. Between these, Abimelech dominates women by killing them all as he proceeds upon his militaristic, chauvinist way.

Abimelech himself, is one of the Bible's less charming, more fascinating narrative creations, a fully developed presence. He is a creative, devious, charismatic, manipulative warrior who, in a narratively short period of time, convinces his maternal relatives to back his power grab, cold-bloodedly kills 70 brothers, and charms the lords of Shechem to crown him king (9:2-6). The majority of his

⁶⁵³ Irwin has some interesting comments about the name, where he conjectures that it "may be the author's way of drawing attention to this figure as another in history's long line of usurpers and would-be rulers who resorted to manufactured claims of legitimacy." Brian P. Irwin, "Not Just Any King: Abimelech, the Northern Monarchy, and the Final Form of *Judges*," *JBL* 131, no.3 (2012): 443 - 454. Katie M. Heffelfinger claims that Gideon was king in reality. "'My Father is King': Chiefly Politics and the rise and fall of Abimelech," *JSOT* 33, no.3 (2009): 277-292.

⁶⁵⁴ Gideon textually ricochets between two names, emphasizing the ambiguity of his relationship with *YHWH*, his own theological uncertainties and implied his ongoing battle with apostasy. As a *YHWH*-appointed leader, Gideon, directly encountered angels and with *YHWH's* personal and direct support, delivered the Israelites to political independence (8:1-12). He rejects his own kingship for himself yet permits his lowest ranking child to be named "My father is King." This expression of an incompatible or divergent thought process continues with his creation of the ephod, which the Israelites revere, in contradiction to the Covenantal requirements (8:27).

story recounts his various battles and conquests, where his ferocious battle techniques are emphasized (8:30-9:57).⁶⁵⁵ When Abimelech is eventually betrayed by the original Shechem support group, in response, he eradicates its citizens and town (9:23-50). He shows no mercy or forgiveness: everyone dies when Abimelech captures a settlement (9:45; 9:49). That these actions are contrary to *YHWH*'s battle directives is not in dispute.⁶⁵⁶

Rejection and betrayal of *YHWH* will lead to ultimate defeat even when *YHWH* is obscured. This is a consistent Biblical message and Abimelech's story fits that mould. Beyond the opening phrases, the predictive nature of the overall chronicle reinforces his coming downfall. Jotham, the sole survivor of the sibling slaughter, denounces Abimelech during an eloquent, and lengthy allegorical condemnation early in the narrative yet nowhere in his speech is *YHWH* or *'elohim* evoked (9:7-20). The deity only enters the tale as a character after several of Abimelech's military successes, instigating the rebellious actions of the lords of Shechem. In further textual repudiation of Abimelech's validity as an Israelite, *'elohim*, not *YHWH*, is used. The text clearly states that *'elohim*'s involvement was motivated by the duplicitous deaths of the 70 brothers and Shechem's betrayal. *'elohim* turns the Shechemites against Abimelech and they ironically become the instigators of their own destruction (9:23-24). The deity is using non-

⁶⁵⁵ The extent of Abimelech's narrative, from conception to death, is 63 verses. Of these, 3 introduce Abimelech and Gideon's death, 15 are Jotham's soliloquy, 5 are redaction-like, the introduction and conclusion, two of the remaining verses concern A Certain Woman and 35 (55%) involve Abimelech's battles.

⁶⁵⁶ Women are specifically mentioned as casualties in 9:49. *Deut.* 20 articulates appropriate battle behaviours, none of which involve civilian deaths.

Israelites to not only defeat the Israelite heretic (Abimelech) but also to betray themselves. Abimelech becomes the author of his own destruction.

Abimelech's attack on Thebez is considered unusual by some scholars.⁶⁵⁷ His successful military techniques had continued and Thebez is almost completely within his power. Because the town's presence is minimally recorded in Biblical texts, this abrupt change in focus should serve as a warning that something momentous is approaching.⁶⁵⁸ This ambiguous geographic location adds a level of fantasy to the story, encouraging the idea of *märchen* qualities.

A contradictory statement sets up Abimelech's ultimate downfall. "Then Abimelech went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and took it" (9:50).⁶⁵⁹ In spite of this affirmation, the town has not fallen. The tower is unconquered. Retreating to a strong tower is both a defensive *and* an offensive manoeuvre. Under attack, a tower offers a strategic advantage of height and a temporary structural invulnerability, a strong offensive stance.⁶⁶⁰ The tower is also a textual hint of

⁶⁵⁷ See for example, Heffelfinger, "My father is King."

⁶⁵⁸ The town's name appears only twice in the entire Bible: in this text, 9:50ff, and *2Sam.* 11:21, when Abimelech's death (with amendments) is cited as an object lesson for David's troops. There is no geographical placement indicated.

⁶⁵⁹ A similar situation is described at the end of the book of Joshua when the Israelites had supposedly conquered "all Canaan."

⁶⁶⁰ On the other hand, in long sieges when it is cut off from outside assistance, a tower is vulnerable, with the depletion of food, water and weaponry.

YHWH's authority, reinforced by intertextual connections in Psalms and Proverbs, texts that use the metaphor of “strong tower” as theological affirmation of *YHWH's* power, sovereignty and support.⁶⁶¹

YHWH's surreptitious involvement is also shown textually in the report of the initial attack. There seem to have been no casualties, “all” Thebez’s men, women and leaders have fled to the tower.⁶⁶² It is bizarre that everyone survived, just as “all” the people of Shechem in 9:49 did not.⁶⁶³ Militarily, this is, of course, impossible, and is meant to encourage an imaginative explanation as it theologically indicates *YHWH's* power and might that is about to thwart Abimelech. Thebez is worthy while Shechem was not. Not only is this a sign of godly intervention, it is another manifestation of the storyteller’s art and the unrealistic exaggerated nature of the *märchen*.

The story to this point would seem to be a continuation of the saga of a rapacious, successful warlord. Abimelech is undeterred: he will destroy the entrance to the tower before his troops’ assault in a strategy similar to the attack on Shechem (9:46-49) but things don’t quite work out the way he anticipates (9:52-55).

⁶⁶¹ מִגְדָּל , “tower” is the normative translation and עֹז is used in a variety of meanings including “strong,” in this text, “mighty,” in 2Sam 6:12 also “fierce” in Is.12:2. The exact duplication of the Hebrew, מִגְדָּל עֹז , *strong tower*, is found only here, in *Psa*.61:3 and *Prov*.18:10.

⁶⁶² כָּל is extremely common and each time it is translated as “every” or “all.” See *Gen*.5:11, 6:20, *Ex*.1:22 etc.

⁶⁶³ The same word is used for “all” in both texts.

Who is A Certain Woman? There are no clues. She is definitely an “agent” character.⁶⁶⁴ The Hebrew employs the word, “one,” as “But *one* woman threw...” (9:53), which specifies particularity and emphasis, in a similar manner to “the” evil of Judg. 3. “A certain” or “one” woman, implies her identity was once known, as common knowledge or specified in some extraordinary way, which we are unable to interpret today.⁶⁶⁵ We do not know whether she is nobility, for only “lords” are specifically mentioned (9:51). We can speculate that she is of lower status, with her name not worthy of being recorded, but as with many conjectures, this may be inaccurate. She could have been of such high status, her identity was understood and there was no need to record it. Perhaps she needed to be protected by anonymity. The incongruity is interesting. We have specifics, and no way in which to validate any interpretative conclusions we might draw.

Like Ja’el, she takes initiative. She could easily have remained passive because she is surrounded by others who might have taken a leadership role and did not, unlike Ja’el, who had no such choice. A Certain Woman is assertive, courageous and imaginative. Her choice of a millstone shows innovation and creativity and implies that she has come to the tower prepared to actively engage in battle.⁶⁶⁶ The millstone also represents a concession to the cultic restriction that women were not to handle weapons. Her actions are clear and direct; there is no

⁶⁶⁴ “... whose sole purpose is to carry out a particular function, whether it be to do a particular action, say a particular thing or be in a particular place to impel the plot forward.” Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 23-24.

⁶⁶⁵ Several translations leave out the “certain” (NET, NLT-SE), while MESSAGE uses the word “some.”

⁶⁶⁶ During sieges, many things are hurled off city walls.

deception, subterfuge or trickery but instead, cunning and bravery, inventiveness and enterprise.

Millstones, mills and milling have a significant Israelite narrative presence. Although there are few specific references to them within the Hebrew Bible, their importance to an individual family's survival is accented.⁶⁶⁷ Such was their worth that the sound of the millstone is equated to familial congeniality and the contented godly life.⁶⁶⁸ To imply that a woman could not handle an *upper* millstone has no credence. Archaeological evidence from Middle Eastern sites indicates upper stones vary in size up to 30 lbs. (14 kg), which could be lifted and carried without difficulty.⁶⁶⁹

Its use here, as an implement of death, clashes with the general understanding of its role as an instrument of life and continued survival, just like Ja'el's tent peg. While it contributes to Abimelech's death, at the same time it affirms its life purpose allowing Thebez to survive. This incongruity is compounded by the

⁶⁶⁷ *Deut.* 24:6: "No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for that would be taking a life in pledge." Each family ground their own flour on a daily basis because there were no community mills.

⁶⁶⁸ *Jer.* 25:10: "... the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness ... the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp." There are rhetorical repetitions of "stone" throughout Abimelech's complete story and its overall ironic impact are quantified and explained elsewhere. Janzen, "A certain woman," 33-35.

⁶⁶⁹ The structure, shape and composition of each stone is not relevant, only its size and portability. There were two parts to the hand mill, the lower, heavy, usually more permanent stone, called the mortar or saddleback, and the lighter, moveable upper stone, the rider or pestle. In the 21st Century, the use of the additional adjective "upper" is appropriate for clarification and is commonly inserted, *i.e.*, NRSV, NKJV. As such, a 30 lb. weight is manageable for a solitary woman. "Bliss and Macalister in their excavations at Gezer and other places have found specimens of what is called the saddle-quern or mill, which consists of two stones... and the 'upper stone' or 'rider' was much smaller, 4 inches to 8 in. long and 2 3/4 inches to 6 inches wide, and of varying shapes. This could be seized with the two hands ..." James A. Patch, "Mills, millstones" in *The International Standard Bible encyclopaedia*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979/1988). According to Moore and Burney, an upper millstone was typically about two inches thick and a foot or so in diameter, probably weighed 25–30 pounds. G. F. Moore, *Judges* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1989), 268; C. F. Burney, *Judges*, 288.

gender of its handler, whose Biblical role would normatively be one of passivity, isolation and separation. Woman was often seen as “creator” not “destroyer” and it is with these conflicts of perception that the story takes an ironic, humourous tinge, especially if one considers its usual purpose, grinding grain, and its purpose here, grinding a head to the ground. An unnamed woman, seemingly of no historical, social or political consequence, kills a killer with a household utensil and creates re-newed life for Thebez. Metaphorically, in retributive justice, the “one stone” that Abimelech used to slaughter his siblings becomes his death stone.⁶⁷⁰ The ferocious leader of armies is felled by a kitchen tool; having killed many women, he is killed by one. All these contrasts are ironic and incongruous.

A Certain Woman is not only physically capable of carrying a millstone, she is also creative and innovative enough to bring it with her as she fled to the tower; she understood the necessity of non-traditional weapons. While she may not have had a physics-based understanding of falling objects, she correlated the need for a weapon with the restrictions of *YHWH*ist beliefs.⁶⁷¹ Forbidden the use of sword, javelin and lance, she chose the best thing at her disposal. It was a

⁶⁷⁰ See Boogaart, “Stone for Stone,” 1985, and Janzen’s response, “A Certain Woman,” 1987.

⁶⁷¹ *Deut.* 22:5: “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment ...” The word most commonly translated as “apparel”, כְּלִי, *khlh*, has several meanings including utensils and weapons, which, using that meaning, suggests that men’s utensils, including weapons would be forbidden. *BDB*, 3596.

shrewd and clever decision, whose effectiveness has been scientifically demonstrated.⁶⁷² The unnamed woman is definitely a Hero and, with the unusual use of a kitchen tool, a Trickster.

Various translations indicate that A Certain Woman “cast,” “dropped” or “threw” the millstone.⁶⁷³ In the majority of its usages,⁶⁷⁴ the Hebrew verb, שָׁלַךְ, *shlkh*, has a linguistic and translational emphasis on violence, anguish and hopelessness.⁶⁷⁵ While not necessarily amusing, the choice of this word underlines the ferocity of the deed along with a desperation and hope for divine intervention.⁶⁷⁶ When the word is employed elsewhere, *YHWH* often becomes an active agent in the Hebrew redemption.

That the millstone found its target could be considered providential. Since “all” Thebez citizenry is in place on the tower roof, the question of its originator and her accuracy leads the careful reader to conclude that it is fictitious to identify this particular woman doing this particular deed. Her identity and status represent all that is good against He-Who-Is-Evil. It is not explained how A Certain Woman was able to specifically target Abimelech, but one may imaginatively suggest that his armour, demeanour, the presence of an armour-bearer and his

⁶⁷² Twenty-first century experimentation has concluded that her actions would have been lethal. Denise Dick Herr and Mary Petrina Boyd, “A watermelon named Abimelech,” *BAR* 28, no.1 (Jan/Feb. 2002): 34-37.

⁶⁷³ “Cast”: KJV, KJVS, WEB, RV; “dropped”: NLT-SE, NKJVS, MESSAGE; “threw”: NRSV, NETS.

⁶⁷⁴ Accordance records it is found in 123 verses.

⁶⁷⁵ Gen. 21:15, when Hagar desperately casts Ishmael under a bush; *Psa.* 50:17, where the psalmist describes a hopeless rejection and *Dan.* 8:12, another hopeless rejection of the Divine message and this example, *Judg.* 9:53. In *2Kings* 17:20, it is translated as “banished.”

⁶⁷⁶ As in Hagar’s narrative.

position within the body of the army were markers that A Certain Woman was able to properly interpret. It may well be, and again is not indicated in the text, that a great number of stones, implements etc. were being pitched off the wall of the tower during that time. It is possible that A Certain Woman was just plain lucky or that she was identified as a *märchen* strategy. The power of *YHWH* is demonstrated by a textually secondary character who effectively destroys the head of the attacking army, a further witty yet ironic indicator of the implied and hidden humour of the text and the ironies of life.⁶⁷⁷ In that action, the leader shows the first signs of self-awareness in his final words, reflecting his innate bias within the prejudicial and stereotypical standards he has upheld. To avoid a culturally ignoble demise, he orders his own death by sword (9:54).

If, indeed there was a barrage going over the walls, how did Abimelech know that a woman had cast the stone that hit him? Could he see only women on the battlements? Was there a differentiation between what men and women threw over the edges? We have no textual answers but are led to infer that Abimelech could identify a millstone.⁶⁷⁸ It is another indication of this story's imaginative *märchen* fictionalization. Having spent his military life killing women, Abimelech's ego, training and his overall concept of women's inferior status culminate in his last action, and his life (9:49). He could not cope with the potential

⁶⁷⁷ Pun intended.

⁶⁷⁸ How would the warrior know this? Did he watch his mother mill their grain? Why did he conclude that a woman had pitched it?

social humiliation that he had been dealt a death blow by a woman, so he instructs his armour bearer to finish him off.⁶⁷⁹ Indeed, Sasson affirms that Abimelech “actually died a suicide (albeit by a third hand).”⁶⁸⁰ By such an instruction, he betrayed his innate gender intolerance as he guaranteed the textual preservation of his absolute humiliation: death at a woman’s hand.⁶⁸¹ He denigrates himself to the reader, confirming his misogyny, allowing the reader to laugh at the surprise and incongruity of the entire narrative, Abimelech’s character weaknesses and ultimate personal mortification effectively come to the forefront and its poetic justice.

Abimelech’s overall behaviour is not pleasing to *YHWH* whose minimalist role is nonetheless pivotal.⁶⁸² The theological inference is that A Certain Woman is acting as *YHWH*’s agent, and while her actions may appear to be self-motivated and not under *YHWH*’s influence, the actions are a reflection of, and an indication of, *YHWH*’s approval. The disappearance of Abimelech’s troops after his death further amplifies inferential support for *YHWH*. The army has lost any philosophical, theological and religious commitment to Abimelech’s cause and has no reason to remain. This is confirmed in the summative verses (9:56-57).

⁶⁷⁹ There is no religious consequence for the armour bearer’s behaviour because Abimelech was not an anointed king.

⁶⁸⁰ “... because his ego would not allow him to credit his seat to a woman, a dreaded disgrace.” Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 400.

⁶⁸¹ Soggin concurs with Moore that death at a woman’s hand was a disgrace. Soggin, *Judges*, 193-94, quoting Moore, *Judges*.

⁶⁸² 8:30-9:57. *’Elohim* appears only in 9:23, “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the lords of Shechem.”

The *märchen* elements of this story vary from the previous two pericopes. While the geographic markers are as obscure as Ehud's and Ja'el's, it is the Antagonist, Abimelech, around whom the entire plot revolves rather than the Protagonist, A Certain Woman, with no counter-balancing characters for narrative contrast, as with Barak and Deborah. All supporting characters, the lords of Shechem and Abimelech's maternal family are neither identified by name, personality nor impact on the plot development. They are cardboard representations of acquiescence. Jotham's monologue alone serves as a harbinger of Abimelech's impending doom. While Abimelech is declared "king" (9:6), the title is never used in connection with his name. He is always "Abimelech" not "King Abimelech," which subverts the entire effect of his kingship and supports Jotham's forecast.

A Certain Woman is almost a stereotypical *märchen* Protagonist, a down-trodden hero, a person under personal threat, in an adverse situation with an unlikely outcome, based on previous clues about Abimelech's military successes. She is, however, a monochromatic Protagonist, identified by her actions alone, unlike Ehud and Ja'el. The surprise with which she appears and ends Abimelech's life and the story is a shock. In previous biblical narratives, there have been tales of conquest and inappropriate behaviour, but they are followed by conversion and redemption.⁶⁸³ There is no conversion, let alone redemption.

This story is an exception, with the plot twists and its *märchen* components. The conclusion lacks any sense of fulfilment and leaves the situation in

⁶⁸³ Think of Jacob's double dealings, Joseph's arrogant behaviour, his brothers' rejection. These are all followed by forgiveness, repentance and return to *YHWH*.

flux. There is no consolidation of support for *YHWH*, nor indication of Israelite return to *YHWH*. Neither *YHWH* nor “Israel” has presence at all. The Thebezites are not identified. The attacking forces “disappear” and there is no reconciliation with *YHWH* or each other nor “better life in the future” implied. The “happily ever after” does not happen. No one is elevated to a governing power/kingship.

The humour is based on one action: the incongruity, surprise and suddenness of the millstone that accomplishes communal liberty after seasoned warriors have failed. A woman creatively challenges gender stereotypes and misogynist attitudes while maintaining Deuteronomic strictures about weaponry. For female readers, it presents an “AH HA!” moment of gender triumph and superiority; for some men, also a moment of astonishment and triumph with the laughter, “What a move!”; for (misogynist) men, a negative, scornful laugh of derision and astonishment: “She did WHAT?” The surprise and suddenness amaze and confirm the relevance and importance of every human.

Within the political ideological manifestations of this story, the importance of all humans in an interaction, regardless of status and gender is confirmed. Any evil person’s successes will be short lived, and punishment will be severe and appropriate. Nowhere is it given that *YHWH* is present as a force to inspire A Certain Woman, but the deity’s influence is understood.

While the Deity gave the impression of being a minor presence, such is not the case, and it is germane to examine *YHWH*'s narrative place overall because *YHWH* plays a critical role in the successful fulfilment of each Protagonist's quest.

YHWH as a character

Within each pericope, the divine presence is confined to the redaction where *YHWH* is the overwhelming character and presence, the primary motivation and influencing factor through extended divine authority. Thought-provoking aspects of *YHWH*'s presence are expressed in the linguistic differentiation of the words for GOD, the contrasts between the redaction's *YHWH* and the *märchen*-core's *'elohim* and *Adoni*, where the writers' theology is shown through their selection of a word to represent the nuances of the Israelite god.

The god's name and connection to the nation is key: "*Israel*", **יִשְׂרָאֵל**, means "El does battle" and *YHWH* was the master warrior *El*, after whom the nation named and fashioned itself.⁶⁸⁴ Territorial "imperialism" based on *YHWH*'s presence and participation is of tantamount importance yet the master warrior, *El*, is nowhere within these pericopes.⁶⁸⁵ There are three other vocabulary possibilities to consider: *Adoni*, *lord*, *Lord*; **אֲדֹנָי**, *'elohim*, *God*, **אֱלֹהִים**; or

⁶⁸⁴ See Von Rad's *Holy War*; also "God the Warrior," 33-44, in Craigie, *The Problem*.

⁶⁸⁵ The prophets chide warriors and the populace when they do not obey God's instructions. See *Jer.* 2:20-27. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (1885; repr. Cleveland, OH:

YHWH, the LORD, יהוה , used individually and in combination.⁶⁸⁶ Each word implies and clarifies the status of the situation with its use and applicability, subconsciously subverting the reader's mind to undertones of meaning.

Adoni is a less commonly used divine title throughout the Hebrew Bible and has two meanings.⁶⁸⁷ When the word is not capitalized in English, "lord," refers to a man, a supervisor of a household or a person with superior status to the speaker while "Lord" refers to the deity. *Adoni* is used only once when Ja'el first addresses Sisera as "lord" (4:18).⁶⁸⁸ Ja'el is clarifying her status as a social inferior, assuaging Sisera's ego, reassuring him of her respect, subservience and harmlessness. It further emphasizes Sisera's past god-like status in direct contradiction to his over-all behaviours. The cruel, defeated warrior is being held up to satirical disrepute. This linguistic inconsistency alerts the reader to upcoming interactions: further capricious endeavours are coming, an ironic prediction of his future. *YHWH* will be somehow involved, with the hint of the alternative divine label.

'Elohim, "God," is found widely in Judges.⁶⁸⁹ Again, the English word is not capitalized when referring to a non-Israelite deity and capitalized when describing

World, 1957): 433, from Wellhausen's article, "*Israel*," quoted in Ben C. Ollenburger's Introduction, in von Rad's *Holy War*, 3.

⁶⁸⁶ An additional word for "god" is *Ba'al*, בעל , which is exclusive used to refer to non-Israelite gods. It is found within our narratives but is clearly identified as the non-Israelite god. See 8:33.

⁶⁸⁷ Five times in *Judges*. In 4:18; 6:13, 15, the term refers to non-divinities. In 6:22 and 16:28, *Adon* is combined with *YHWH*, as "Lord God."

⁶⁸⁸ In 6:13-15, Gideon addresses the angel and the translation becomes "sir."

⁶⁸⁹ Twelve times within the three pericopes. *E.g.*, 2:3, 12, 17; 3:20; 5:8; 8:33.

the Israelite God (4:23). It is thus a clever word to use to stretch the incredulity of a plot and present inconsistencies to the meaning. While it may refer to the Israelite god, it need not, and such nuances further demarcate the division of Us/Them. When Ehud addresses Eglon using “God [*'elohim*]” (3:22), he is identifying Eglon as a non-believer. This hierarchical designation is supported in 3:28, when Ehud rallies Israelite warriors/believers with “the LORD [*YHWH*].” Similarly, when evil spirits work with the Shechemites against Abimelech it is *'elohim* who is involved (9:23), a sign that *YHWH* is not keen to be associated with non-believers like Abimelech or the violence in the action to follow but wishes the divine presence to be noted.

The third word, *YHWH*, is the substitute for the sacredness of God's name, identifying the God of the Israelites. It is traditionally translated as “the LORD.”⁶⁹⁰ Its presence indicates a text meant for the Chosen People, another emphasis on the exclusivity of the message and the Us/Them dynamic. The combination, “the LORD, the God,” using *YHWH 'elohim* or *YHWH Adon*, is the strongest indication of the Israelite God.⁶⁹¹ It is found in each redaction, emphasizing each pericope's importance as a Covenantal imperative.

YHWH's theological presence and influence are all-invasive, implied and abetted by the redaction. *YHWH* is therefore the plot's primary motivation and instigator, the force that directs the Protagonists whether or not they know it. The overlying textual assumption is that the Israelites know which behaviours and

⁶⁹⁰ *E.g.*, 7:4.

⁶⁹¹ As in 4:6.

practices are appropriate to maintain their covenantal relation, and they understand that *YHWH* is free to influence their lives and interactions.⁶⁹² Each Protagonist becomes the power-in-place, imbued with *YHWH*'s power and authority. As *YHWH*'s agents, all their behaviours are a reflection of *YHWH*'s design, and that includes any sense of humour within the narrative situations. The question for the reader is where and which actions will exhibit that judgment and power. The ambiguity that pervades each pericope involves the "how" and "what" of *YHWH*'s involvement, never the "why." All rejections of *YHWH* will have major consequences.

YHWH's name is used when the god bewails Israelite intransigence (3:12; 4:1; 8:34), instigates discipline on the people (3:12; 4:2), and when Israelites ask for help (3:15; 4:3). Ehud and Deborah employ it to inspire the troops (3:28) and to prompt and chastise Barak (4:6, 9, 14). *YHWH* is not present in any form with Abimelech, which signals a story of evil and harm rather than of forgiveness and recovery. The Protagonists' expectation is of divine involvement, not a guarantee.

YHWH presents definite theological biases, and *YHWH*'s behaviour affects Israel obviously and covertly, in spite of a seemingly cameo or agency role. *YHWH* is the instigator, "the enforcer" who reacts to unacceptable Israelite actions. Only in the redaction is *YHWH* a presence and a working member of the plot. At one and the same time,

⁶⁹² See S. Lasine, "Divine Narcissism and Yahweh's Parenting Style," *BiblInt* X, no.1 (2002): 36-56. See also P. L. Redditt, "The God Who Loves and Hates" in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What is Right?* eds. D. Penchansky and P. L. Redditt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 175-190.

YHWH is capricious and supportive of the Chosen People, using all people as pawns of divine will.⁶⁹³ *YHWH* makes value judgements, takes action against the Chosen People without consultation, flexibility or warning, designating non-Israelites to conquer, occupy and oppress (3:12; 4:2; 6:1). *YHWH*'s absence in the *märchen*-core leaves each Protagonist free to defeat the enemy and establish an appropriate religious and political structure without the deity's active participation.⁶⁹⁴ Abimelech's story only mentions *YHWH* as an arbiter of appropriate Hebrew behaviour (8:33-35).

The summative elements of Ehud's story ascribe victory not to *YHWH*, but to Israel (3:30). Both Ja'el's and A Certain Woman's conclusions specifically mention '*elohim*' as the power who maneuvered Israelite military success (4:23; 9:56-57). It would be remiss to ignore several possibilities for these affirmations. The violence may have been an approved tactic of *YHWH*'s reaction to Israelite heresy but in the summation, *YHWH* is dissociated from that violence when the Tetragrammaton is absent. '*Elohim*', confirms that distance. There is the possibility that this difference might be a reflection of a counter-feminist bias: that Ehud and his troops can reflect Israel's mandate while the women need '*elohim*'s active participation to successfully accomplish a tyrant's overthrow. There is always the question whether Ja'el and A Certain Woman are aware of *YHWH*, in which case, this would be an affirmation of the limitations of their authority, power and social status. Here is another indication that these two women are not within the Israelite community, even when their actions save the day.

⁶⁹³ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 23-24. This is not unique to *Judges*. The common thread throughout the Bible is the interactions between *YHWH* and the Hebrew/Israelites.

⁶⁹⁴ While *YHWH* does appear in Barak's battle, I consider it a redactive insertion.

Who then is *YHWH*? The deity as Mastermind has been imposed by the redactors. *YHWH* is the Puppet Master, hidden but ever present, the initiator of and motivator for all plot outcomes, advocating violence as the sole method of reproach, at the same time disengaging from the violence with the name '*elohim*'. *YHWH* promotes the disorder and violence of the foreign agents who take control of Israel. The deity then steps back. Overt, covert and symbolic violence, and its manifestation, oppression, become the method of discipline against the Israelites' misbehaviour, and a theological lesson that life for their god requires Israelites to behave appropriately or suffer somehow, while the deity remains apart from the violence.

YHWH promotes violence but does not seem to be directly involved. '*Elohim*' encompasses both Israelites and non-Israelites, and its use encourages ambiguity. This stance implies that *YHWH* becomes the creator of the humour, as an unexpected by-product of the violence. The Protagonists' *YHWH*-directed activities encourage them to behave in that specific manner. Humour, then becomes another of *YHWH*'s ways in which the understanding of the text is enhanced as it distances the reader from the actual visceral and emotional impact of each death. The humour continues that involvement, reinforcing the futility of rejection, bending the reader to a psychological enjoyment of the blood and gore as the message is pounded home. These word plays continue the edgy nature of the stories, enforcing the Us/Them dynamic, while augmenting the jocular, supe-

rior tone of each story by forcing the reader to discriminate against the non-Israelite, further perpetrating and perpetuating the triumphant superiority and ironic interpretation of the texts.

This is a deity whose roots are in conflict and war. The expectation of the resolution of such strife is an Israelite return to *YHWH* worship, the achievement of *shalom*, which cannot be achieved without *YHWH*. As a proponent of war, the deity does not *promote* the humour within the stories because it is not the primary intention of the text, but rather enables it through the plot and characterization which *YHWH* supports.

An evaluation of the pericopes is further enhanced and impeded by the original vocabulary of the Hebrew, particularly the various *hapax legomena*.

The Hapax Legomena ⁶⁹⁵

Hapax legomena, words that are unique or found rarely with no absolute signification,⁶⁹⁶ are a present-day scholar's acknowledgement that specific words cannot be absolutely identified or explained so readers must conceptualize

⁶⁹⁵ A *hapax* is "a word or form of which only one instance is recorded in a literature or an author." Frederick E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew: a Study of the Phenomenon and its Treatment since antiquity with special reference to verbal forms* (Chico, CA: ScholarsPress, SBL Dissertation Series, 1984), quoting the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I use Greenspahn as general arbitrator. Greenspahn lists his *hapax* from 201-208. He notes that no two lists are the same as Hebrew scholars employ different criteria (17).

⁶⁹⁶ "Absolute" *hapax* are those that have no detectable cognate connections whereas "non-absolute" *hapax* may have linguistic connections to non-biblical languages. Words sometimes cannot be identified or explained by context because they are functionally idiosyncratic. There is a general consensus that there are approximately 1 500 *hapax* in the Hebrew Bible but the majority, 1 100±, have meanings that can be discerned using other attested word forms. Article on *Hapax Legomena* in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>, the unedited full-text of the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

meanings that conform to the structure, language and understanding of the surrounding text. Different evaluations generate different possibilities for all narrative features. *Hapax* are another way in which the original writers/redactors accentuated the language's exclusivity and supported the Chosen People's unique theological outlook.⁶⁹⁷

There are four *hapax* in Ehud's, one in Ja'el's, none in Abimelech's pericope.⁶⁹⁸

In Ehud's anecdote, the four *hapax* are found in 3:16, 22 and 23.⁶⁹⁹ The meanings of two, גַּמְד , *ggmd*, cubit⁷⁰⁰ (3:16) and נֵב , *ntstsb*, hilt (3:22a), are not contentious.⁷⁰¹ Nor is Ja'el's *hapax*: 4:18, שְׁמִיכָה , *smkhn*.⁷⁰²

The other two *hapax* in Ehud's pericope lead directly to the story's enrichment and are crucial to the interpretation of the humour and violence of the story.

⁶⁹⁷ Today's Interpreter must also understand that there might have been no ambiguity in the writers' original intention or language, that the word we call *hapax* were abbreviations, nicknames, acronyms, contractions or elisions for which we lack the key. Abbreviations like KFC, Tim's, LOL and AOL, will likely pose similar challenges in 200 years.

⁶⁹⁸ Greenspahn claims six absolute *hapax* and 34 non-absolute examples in *Judges* (183-199).

⁶⁹⁹ For גַּמְד , (3:16), the *BDB* cites Aramaic for support with the meaning, rendering it a non-absolute

hapax [1574]. In 3:22, נֵב , *ntstsb*, is an absolute *hapax*, seemingly related to the common verb, נָצַב , *ntsb*, to stand. [*BDB*, 5324] In this context, a "standing piece at the end of a blade" could be nothing other than a hilt, haft or handle.

⁷⁰⁰ *BDB*, 1574.

⁷⁰¹ Purists might disagree about the length of a cubit, but the narrative demands that the weapon be shorter than other fighting blades to fit Ehud's thigh. "Dagger" is found only in *Baruch* 6:15.

⁷⁰² *BDB*, 8063. "Palestinian tradition, ..., from the context, might mean either "cloth" or "vessel," to mean "cloth" ("sudra")." *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.

In 3:22b, “dirt” has been the traditional translation of, **פרשדן** , *parshedonah* , an absolute *hapax* with no linguistic antecedents.⁷⁰³ Jull⁷⁰⁴ and Barré⁷⁰⁵ offer an alternative translation to “dirt” or “dung”⁷⁰⁶ when they suggest the more direct, “excrement.” This choice strengthens Jull’s contention that the final *hapax*, **מִסְדֵּרוֹן** , *misderonah*,⁷⁰⁷ in 3:23 [Then Ehud went into the **vestibule** and closed the doors], could be “toilet” rather than “vestibule.” This has possibilities, especially in view of the servants’ reaction (3:24-25) if one considers sexual activities and defecation private, rather than public activities. The idea of a sexual assignation in a toilet adds uncomfortable humour to the story but the majority of translators consider **מִסְדֵּרוֹן** , *parshedon*, to be “vestibule,” in which case the humour and sexual innuendo are weakened.⁷⁰⁸ It does, however, create a plot conundrum to explain how Ehud escaped from the locked room. An argument in favour of Jull’s interpretation, which I prefer, is the manner in which he

⁷⁰³ BDB, 6574.

⁷⁰⁴ Jull, “**מִסְדֵּרוֹן**,” 63-75. Interestingly, the NAS Hebrew Lexicon considers **פרשדן** to be “crotch.” This interpretation emphasizes the sexual innuendo of the entire scene “the hilt went in and the crotch came out” as an addendum to the humour. It also supports the medical observation that some men, at death, develop an erection as a natural progression in the movement of blood within the body. Thanks to Mari-dene Johnston, M.D., for clarification on this point. As a caution, the NAS Lexicon is the only lexicon that proposes this interpretation.

⁷⁰⁵ Barré, “The Meaning of *prsdn*,” 1-11.

⁷⁰⁶ Only the ESVS uses “dung.”

⁷⁰⁷ When the word “vestibule” is translated elsewhere, the Hebrew, **אוֹלָם** , ‘*ulam*, is employed. *E.g.*, 1Kings 6:3; 1Chr. 28:11.

⁷⁰⁸ In other examples where “dirt” occurs in the Hebrew Bible, alternative words are employed. “Dirt” is the translation in 2Sam. 1:2, (**הַמָּדָה** , *ardamah*) and Job 7:5, (**רֶטֶם** , *retsem*).

draws narrative elements into the overall whole to create and strengthen the sexual and physical innuendo, which propel the plot and the humorous overtones. The dagger, Ehud's left-handedness, the oral innuendos, utilizing risqué attributes to enhance Ehud's heroic behaviour, his spontaneous creativity and Eglon's gullibility, as well as the location of the killing, strengthen those aspects of the story, furthering the triumphalist humour of Israelite superiority. Toilet humour has a long history and such a location for a death, creates an ironic and laughable way in which to minimize the blood and gore of the narrative reality, while compounding the irony of Eglon's misinterpretations of Ehud's speech. The joy of deceit and ironic death of a powerful enemy is affirmed by the killing's location.

Beyond the *hapax*'s special qualities, there are two further challenges that impact upon the humour and the violence of the pericopes: the linguistic choices that the Hebrew writers/redactors made and the English-language preferences that scholars utilize in translation. Some choices affect the theological intention of the texts. Working sequentially through the three pericopes, we will examine these issues.

The Deliverer

One particularly provocative word in these three pericopes is the English use of the verb "to deliver" and its cognates. Hebrew offers at least ten verbs that have been traditionally translated "to deliver." Only two are found in *Judges* and each has significantly different meanings. **יָשַׁע**, *ysh'*, to deliver, to save, alone

adds to the theological intent of the text as it renders the theological design ambiguous by its presence or absence, implying godliness and righteousness throughout.⁷⁰⁹

“Deliverer” is the ascribed attribute of each judge, in spite of the word’s infrequent use within the book. **יָשַׁע**, *ysh’*, and its derivative, the noun, **יִשְׁע**,

msh, deliverer, imply godly involvement.

Deliverers serve as human exemplars of godly ideals, as YHWH-directed agents but are rarely identified. Only two men, Othniel and Ehud, are named as deliverers using this word. There is a tacit linguistic and narrative understanding, inferred by the “deliverer” title that a leader’s future mastery of any adversity is assured because of *YHWH*’s explicit blessing, involvement and assistance. The deliverer’s particular skills or prowess are not decisive factors.⁷¹⁰ *YHWH* should therefore be the hero, the conqueror of each foreign group, the focus of attention and the one who (re)establishes the *YHWH*-Israelite covenantal bond because of the authority that the deity delegates. In the reality of the narrative, this idea is so subtly presented that it is often overlooked.

Such is the prehistory of Ehud, who bears the deliverer label (3:15) and Barak, who does not (4:22-24). That Ehud and Barak do not get credit for their

⁷⁰⁹ Three times in *Judges*: Gideon’s introduction, 6:9; in 18:28, where the idea of physical movement is also emphasized and 10:15. Its synonym, **וְצָאֵל**, *ntzl*, involves only the movement of people or goods from one location to another.

⁷¹⁰ That prehistory includes such notables as Moses, Joshua and Othniel, all identified as deliverers. See *Ex.* 3:4-10; *Deut.* 31:23, 34:9; *Judg.* 3:9.

battle triumphs (3:30; 4:23), Ja'el verbally minimizes her actions (4:22) and A Certain Woman disappears immediately after her deed (9:55), all make theological sense. It is *YHWH* who has triumphed, not the individual human, through whom *YHWH* worked. It is not human actions or presence that are pivotal, it is *YHWH's* original designation, impetus, and subliminal collaboration that are consequential. It is *YHWH*-inspired violence that pervades the narrative and *YHWH*-inspired humour that is imbedded in the text. *YHWH* does nothing *directly* to instigate either. It is always through human agency or situational particulars. But this is not self-evident in the individual story and depends on an inter-textual examination. The directive introduction-redaction is the spark.

At the same time in these three pericopes, when only Ehud is clearly given the deliverer label, there is a quandary for the reader: how exactly has *YHWH* influenced each story where divine actuality is apparent neither as a presence or as represented by a clearly designated "deliverer"? It is only in the introductory redaction that *YHWH's* influence and involvement are directly identified.

Caution is important when examining English translations. In the majority of the Hebrew Bible, **יָשָׁא**, *ysh* and its cognates are translated as "deliverer/to deliver." In each of the 23 cases that it *is* translated as "saviour," it is evident through the surrounding text that the word refers to *YHWH*, the Israelite divinity.⁷¹¹ One may deduce this is a reflection of the English Christian translators'

⁷¹¹ E.g., 2Sam. 22:3; 2Kings 13:5; Nehemiah 9:27; Psa. 17:7.

reverence and theological assumption that only God and Jesus, the Christ, can be a “saviour.”⁷¹²

YHWH is the arbiter of divine mercy *and* divine justice, portrayed as an anthropomorphic presence who challenges the Israelite society’s preconceptions of status and honour, choosing the lowest members of the hierarchical Israelite social scale. *YHWH* has met the criteria for the identification of textual humour: community and commonality, surprise and incongruity. These attributes are further recognized in the Protagonists’ qualities and accomplishments within each narrative’s diverse plot twists. While these human choices challenge preconceptions of status and honour that the Israelite society might have had, they are consistent with the overall theme of the Hebrew Bible: unlikely and the unappreciated people will be esteemed, elevated in status and honoured. Within this concept is encompassed a sense of the unusual, of upheaval, a sense of humour. The deviousness, creativity and verve of each deliverer’s actions and the subsequent linguistic representation of those actions ensure a clever and creative portrayal of both deity and deliverer.

This is a god whose refining characteristics are consistency/inconsistency and punishment/forgiveness as the arbiter of divine mercy *AND* divine justice. This is a constant with the book’s plots, where Israelite religious inconsistency is consistent, and heroes are similarly inconsistent in their social status and understanding. It is a harbinger of future narrative and historical deviations. *YHWH*

⁷¹² NEB, NRSV, KJVS, NIV.

shows emotions, is fickle, makes value judgments, chooses when to listen and when to ignore, and indicates a wry sense of humour. *YHWH* is the deliverer. The Protagonists are merely *YHWH*'s mannequins. It is *YHWH* who creates the opportunities for both physical violence and the covert violence and humour, which are more subtly camouflaged.

The term “deliverer” is not the only misleading word. Further linguistic confusion and misunderstanding continues with the word “judge.”

The Judges

Not only is the word “judge” seldom used the book of the same name,⁷¹³ it has meanings inconsistent with modern North American usage. There are seven words that are variously translated “to judge” in the Bible. Within *Judges*, only one is found, שֹׁפֵט , *shft*, itself, the most common word with that meaning.⁷¹⁴

Hebrew verb forms are used at all times and in the three pericopes, *shft* is used only once, to identify Deborah in 4:4. The linguistic machinations continue when one considers that Deborah is a judge, but not a deliverer while Ehud is a deliverer, not a judge and Abimelech is neither.

To further confound the English-language reader, based on their behaviours within the book, the Hebrew “judge” is a military commander, and a civic

⁷¹³ Twenty times, always in the verb qal form.

⁷¹⁴ Judge and its cognates are found 190 times in the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha and the overwhelming majority of the time (over 80%) *shft* is used.

leader, rather than as an interpreter of the law, as is customary in North American society.⁷¹⁵ The Hebrew judges' major narrative responsibility appears to be the military conquest of insurgent Foreigners or other non-believers. Only Deborah is shown to be evaluating and arbitrating, in the 21st Century expectation (4:4 ff). The suspicion here is that her opinions are solicited because of her role as a prophetess and thus a link to *YHWH*.⁷¹⁶

Theological Implications

The overall narrative intention of *Judges* is to record the story of *YHWH*'s people, their individual narratives, their Covenant with *YHWH* and their theological understandings of *YHWH* as their god. The people deviate from *YHWH*'s expectations, fall into iniquity and are punished. Eventually some times, they ask *YHWH* for assistance, and with the Deity's support, they overthrow their oppressors. Then, there is the next deviation and the pattern continues. The entire process is not only cyclical, it is degenerative. Each story is progressively more violent than the one before, culminating in an inter-Hebrew conflict that pits eleven tribes against the twelfth in *Judges* 20.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁵ McCann, *Judges*, 3.

⁷¹⁶ Soggin, *Judges*, 1, 196-97.

⁷¹⁷ The book's overall theological intention is in much debate. Some scholars suggest it is meant to espouse a David monarchy. (Burney, *Judges*, 64; R.O.H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 266-67, 304-305; Soggin, *Judges*, 281; Mayes, *Judges*, 12, 66). Others have suggested an anti-monarchical stance (other than *YHWH*). [Guest, 'Dangerous Liaisons in the book of *Judges*', 241-69; Boling, *Judges*, 294; Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes*, 112]. A third theory against Northern (*i.e.*, Israelite) judges by Southern (*i.e.*, Judahite) writers is suggested by. Brettler, "The book of *Judges*," 395-418.

In a book so clearly named “*Judges*,” the term is seldom used. Similarly, within the many contradictions of the book in its entirety, while they appear to return to *YHWH*’s fold, nowhere, do the Israelites repent, and the word is not found,⁷¹⁸ nor is the phrase “The Israelites *returned* to *YHWH*,” its lexical equivalent.⁷¹⁹ Only in 10:10 and 10:15, outside our study mandate, do the Israelites indicate any type of self-reflection that touches upon the idea of their potential repentance.

The lack of any affirmations of personal or group reflection and repentance in the entire book has ramifications. This is compounded by the textual absence of any Israelite indication of worship in each pericopes. What does it mean theologically if *YHWH* continues involvement with people who do not repent, or who do not generally understand that they have sinned, yet they ask for assistance? If a person works from the perspective that it is an *YHWH*-inspired manifestation of *YHWH*’s intentions, what influence does this have on any interpretation of the three pericopes under study?

How others see these pericopes: Selected Commentaries

That these stories evolved during a historical time of intense competition and conflict for the Hebrew people is without question. The stories may lack strict

⁷¹⁸ שׁוּב , *shv*, repent.

⁷¹⁹ It is not a common phrase (14 times in the Hebrew Bible) and always implies penitence. See *Ex.* 32:31; *Deut.* 4:30, 30:2.

historiographical evidence as defined by 21st century historians but they are reflections of the communities that created them.⁷²⁰ They are stories that divulge and likely embellish historical incidents, as fictionalized, imaginative accounts of actions that may or may not have occurred.⁷²¹ “Historical saga,” “historicized narrative” or “narrative history” are more accurate designations than “historical record,” even if they have experiential roots.

Several theological commentaries examine the impact of *Judges* with an overview of its major theological components and are relevant. McCann’s and Martin’s suggestions mirror the general theological consensus that the book is prophetic, warning of the costs of unfaithfulness to *YHWH*.⁷²² Webb asserts *YHWH* alone is sovereign and *YHWH*’s laws constitute Israelite fundamental principles.⁷²³ Both Webb and McCann contend that Israelites appear to be unable to consistently honour, trust and obey *YHWH* and this failure is the core tenet on which the entire book’s story rests.⁷²⁴

McCann also suggests that *YHWH* suffers when Israelites misbehave, yet the deity’s support of Israel never wavers. For him, *YHWH* has an ambiguous at-

⁷²⁰ Kearney, *On Stories*, 80: “history is mediated through narrative.”

⁷²¹ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1905), 56, “the historian records whereas the novelist creates.”

⁷²² McCann, *Judges*, 24-25; Martin, *Judges*, 1-4, 14-15.

⁷²³ Webb, *Judges*, 13.

⁷²⁴ McCann, *Judges*, 24; Webb, *Judges*, 13.

titude to divine authority and power because the deity becomes involved in various situations with grace rather than “sheer force/enforcement.”⁷²⁵ Israelite failure and faithlessness is always met with *YHWH*’s intervention, which *YHWH* shows with “steadfast love, grace and mercy.”⁷²⁶

Martin strongly suggests that the crux of the book’s theological message is clearly stated in the text itself, and that the stories reflect *YHWH*’s reactions to Israelite stubbornness.⁷²⁷

Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: “... I am the LORD your God; you shall not pay reverence to the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live. But you have not given heed to my voice.” (6:8-10)

I will argue later that these are, in part, unsatisfactory explanations for the micro-narratives that I am studying.

While we will examine all these issues in detail in the summative chapter, we will now move to an investigation of the three stories using the lens of Girard’s Scapegoat methodology as discussed earlier in order to evaluate the ramifications of the textual violence within each pericope.

⁷²⁵ McCann, *Judges*, 25.

⁷²⁶ McCann, *Judges*, 24.

⁷²⁷ Martin, *Judges*, 15.

9-Girard and the Pericopes

We begin with cautions.

[The mimetic cycle] is found only partially in the Old Testament accounts. The mimetic crisis and collective violence are there, but the third phase of the mimetic cycle is absent: the sacred revelation, the resurrection that reveals the divinity of the victim⁷²⁸

Later, Girard adds:

In the Bible ... the confusion of the victimization process and the divine is dissolved and gives way to an absolute separation of the two ... the Jewish religion no longer turns victims into divinities or divinity into a victim.⁷²⁹

For Girard then, not every violent Biblical narrative will be an example of the scapegoating process and those stories that do have violence will contain at the most only the first two parts of this cycle, mimetic crisis and collective violence. For clarification and convenience, we will refer to this as the *Girardian Biblical ideal*.

The Girardian Biblical ideal of the Scapegoat Scenario has the three components as are found in the non-Biblical scenarios: the (human) *Model*, the (human) *Subject* and the *Object*. Subject and Model clash over the custody and control of that Object.⁷³⁰ Upon the arrival of a third person, the potential Scapegoat,

⁷²⁸ Girard, *I see Satan*, 106-107.

⁷²⁹ Girard, *I see Satan*, 121.

⁷³⁰ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 9. The Subject's core desire is to imitate the Model and gain possession of the Object.

both Model and Subject forget their conflict with each other and focus on the Scapegoat, who is subsequently blamed for events and actions in which he has no involvement. The Model and Subject, working together, attack the Scapegoat literally and/or figuratively to denigrate and defeat him.

To begin any affirmation of a potential Biblical Scapegoat Mechanism, one must be able to identify the Object, Subject and Model and eventually the Scapegoat.

The Object

If we identify the Object within these three stories as the manifestation of self-determination and separation from the rival group, an intellectual, spiritual, theological and political *freedom* from foreign oppression or opposition, we approach the possibility of a constant Object for all three stories. One group possesses that freedom and the second group aspires to obtain it. The challenge is that the Object *cannot* be shared in these scenarios. Its possession necessitates one group's political and military domination over the other. Here we have the beginnings of a deviation from the Girardian ideal.

Which is which: Subject or Model?

During the introductory scenes in each pericope, the various Aliens⁷³¹ have taken possession of the Israelite physical and political landscape, by military conquest, thus depriving them of self-determination and the freedom of

⁷³¹ Here I am using "alien" in the meaning of "belonging to a foreign nation," which is easily applicable to Eglon and Sisera rather than using the individual ethnicities: Eglon's Moabites, Sisera's Canaanites and

choice without interference. If the Subject's core desire is to imitate the Model and gain possession of the Object, within the Girardian mandate, then the Israelites can be identified as Subject and the Aliens as Model. The Subject-Israelites aspire to only one feature that the Model Aliens possess, "freedom".⁷³² This is a variation from the Girardian norm, where the Subject aspires *all* aspects of the Model.

Scapegoats in *Judges*?⁷³³

The traditional Girardian purview suggests that the choice of Scapegoat is fuelled by the Subject's and Model's intolerance towards the person identified, whether it is some disability/non-compliance, distinctive differentiation or polarization from the *status quo*. The Model and Subject together manipulate information ("truth") to facilitate the larger community's ultimate acceptance of the importance of the Scapegoat's punishment. This public opinion stimulates violence against, and persecution of, the Scapegoat. In these stories, this does not occur. For both Model and Subject, the situation is entirely rational from the beginning.⁷³⁴

Abimelech's "Israelite" group. In Abimelech's case, I deem his behaviour to be contrary to Israel's Covenant so that he is no longer part of the Israelite nation.

⁷³² Girard, *Thing Hidden*, 9.

⁷³³ This section is largely based on Chapter 2, "Stereotypes of Persecution," in Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 12-24, as is the following section *Commonalities among the Judges Pericopes*.

⁷³⁴ "[W]e must begin by recognizing a true belief in what I have called the stereotype of accusation, the guilt and the apparent responsibility of the victims ... The persecutors are caught up in the logic of the representation of persecution from a persecutor's standpoint and they cannot break away." Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 39.

To have a Girardian Scapegoat, the story must be told from the Victim's or Scapegoat's perspective. There is a textual conflict of plot versus tone. The plot favours the Subject and Model's condemnation of the Scapegoat, while the text's tone supports the Scapegoat's innocence.⁷³⁵ The ideal Girardian situation has the two factions, Subject and Model, at the same level, in close contact with each other as *internal mediation*, which triggers the violence. This does occur in each pericope but the collective violence against the Scapegoat that is meant to unite Model and Subject temporarily and establish a new social and religious order does not occur. Nor does the violence transcend previous boundaries and inaugurates temporary unanimity between the two previously distinct groups.

Looking in detail at each narrative, one must ask: can Eglon, Sisera and Abimelech be Girardian Biblical Scapegoats?

Commonalities in the Stories: Scapegoats versus Casualties

If we are to successfully fit the three pericopes to Girard's scapegoat theory, some preamble and linguistic clarification is necessary. There is a clear delineation between the Israelites as Subjects and the Aliens as Models at the start of each narrative. Until it can be established that they are Girardian Scapegoats, the three Alien military leaders will be called Casualties, a neutral term that does not imply Girard's Scapegoat mechanism. Nor does it suggest the sense of punishment, discrimination and intolerance that the expression "victim" carries.

⁷³⁵ Girard, *I see Satan*, 106-107.

The *initial crisis*, the first social predicament in the Scapegoat Cycle, the invasion of Israel by foreign powers, occurs in the introductory redaction. Conflict and rivalry between the two groups increase as internal mediation progresses to *mimetic rivalry*, when the Subject-Israelites begin to actively acknowledge their desire for the *possession* of the Object-freedom, to the point of conflict with the Model-Aliens. This desire begins with a distress call to *YHWH* in two of the three pericopes. *YHWH* is all-important as the motivational force. There is acknowledgement that no liberation is possible without *YHWH*'s "third party" involvement. This theological imperative is pivotal and clearly understood by the Israelites.

Restorative action begins with *YHWH*'s involvement.⁷³⁶ During the *acquisitive mimesis* stage, with its progression of intensity, Ehud presents tribute, Deborah and Barak plan a battle, and Abimelech attacks and conquers other cities on his way to Thebez. Again, Abimelech is the exception. Not only do the Israelites not request divine intervention to deal with Abimelech, as an oppressive force, he is the focus of his enfolding story. Nowhere else is the Antagonist the cornerstone and at the forefront of *all* the action.

Scandal, or *mimetic crisis* evolves when both groups are diverted from appropriate behaviour, in these cases to armed violence. This clearly reflects one Girardian expectation, of violence as: "when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the Object they all desire through physical or

⁷³⁶ *YHWH*'s response differs. Ehud is officially designated a deliverer. Deborah funnels *YHWH*'s instructions as prophet and judge, but not as a named deliverer. *YHWH* is noticeably absent with Abimelech.

other means,”⁷³⁷ remembering that Israelite actions begin only with Ehud and Deborah after they have confirmed *YHWH*’s assistance while again Abimelech’s pericope shows another pattern.

The buildup to the *scandal* takes an extended period of time in each story; the violent aspects are triggered by *YHWH*’s intervention, not by the individual Subject. The *scandal* occurs in two distinct parts: individual physical interactions between specified people, Ehud and Eglon, Ja’el and Sisera, A Certain Woman and Abimelech, *as well as* collective battles involving groups of warriors. Unlike the Girardian expectation, the mimetic rivalry and scandal are never distracted by a third person or party who could be a potential Scapegoat. At no time does either group identify an independently situated Scapegoat, *i.e.*, a person separate from either group. This is inconsistent with Girardian suggestions.

Further deviance is found in each narrative when the Subject-Israelites and Model-Aliens never waver from their rivalry, remaining separate and distinct throughout, in contrast to Girard’s proposition of group cooperation and consolidation when they target the Scapegoat together. There is no shift in loyalties to an amalgamated horde. Cultural and psychological boundaries remain discrete and unchanged. This continuation of the two groups’ absolute differentiation and separation is critical to the Interpreter’s perception of the Biblical killer, who is

⁷³⁷ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 9.

working exclusively for the Subject-Israelites, in contradiction to the Girardian expectation where the killer is the agent of *both* groups.⁷³⁸

The Subject-Israelites group never aspires to “become” the Model or duplicate Model behaviours or life styles. The Subject’s sole focus remains the very specifically defined Object, the attainment of self-determination and separation from the Model’s control. They do not aspire to the Aliens’ theological beliefs, life styles, behaviours or attitudes. In these pericopes, the Subject can obtain the Object only with the Model’s complete physical defeat, not with the Model’s cooperation. Cooperation and negotiation are never any part of the process.⁷³⁹

The Casualty is the highest-ranking member of the Model group. At the commencement of each story, he is neither weak nor vulnerable. He begins as the most powerful character in the plot. In the text’s core, he is derided, never portrayed in a positive light. He is not a random choice and his separation from the wider group occurs late in the story, just prior to his death. The Casualty is chosen because he is the Model group’s leader, responsible for the Subject’s oppression, in his personal, governing and leadership behaviour and his position at the apex of the Model’s hierarchy. The Subject deliberately targets him; he is not chosen by Girard’s “naïve group of Persecutors.”⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸ This implies singularity, which is not clarified by Girard. He contends that it is the mob reaction that dispatches the Scapegoat, rather than a specifically named individual.

⁷³⁹ In other Biblical texts, indications of negotiation and cooperation *within* Israelite society are indicated in the gatherings of the elders at the town gates. See *Ruth* 4:1-12.

⁷⁴⁰ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 8ff.

Eglon, Sisera and Abimelech are active participants in the entire pericope; they are neither late arrivals nor innocent third parties. Accusations against them are neither absurd nor incredible but are clearly delineated and judicious. In each case, the Casualty is a valid and lawful target, a legitimate focus for elimination within war conditions, as the leader of the opposing group. Instead of being an objective for joint antagonism, the Casualties are vilified by the Subject-Israelites, while at the same time, they are revered by the Model-Aliens. Contrary to the Girardian proposition that the Scapegoat has a weakened position, it is the Subject-Israelites who begin with unfavourable status.⁷⁴¹

During a “proper” Biblical Girardian Scapegoat framework, human relations have broken down in a crisis during the quest for the Object.⁷⁴² Evidence of this is perceptible from the first verse of each pericope (3:12; 4:1; 8:33). Israelite misbehaviour begins as an internal frailty, a quarrel between the Israelites and their god, expressed in their disregard for their covenantal obligations, not as a conflict with other humans. The Aliens enter the narrative *after* the Israelites have had their religious meltdown. Alien political dominance is a direct result of the Israelite disobedience, *enabled by* the Israelite God. *YHWH*, not the Israelites or the Foreigners, instigate the invasion that begins each story.

⁷⁴¹ Ehud as a left-handed warrior from a minor Israelite tribe, both Ja’el and A Certain Woman considered marginalized of minor importance, as women and potential non-Israelites.

⁷⁴² Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 43.

The *second* crisis and active conflict happens when the Israelites unite to re-claim their personal and religious freedom, which they cannot do alone. Israelite consolidation, like the original Alien invasion and oppression, has been stage-managed by *YHWH*.⁷⁴³ With the intervention and support of their God, the Israelites overthrow the Aliens, a xenophobic violence, in accordance with the general anti-Alien mandate that *YHWH* promotes.⁷⁴⁴

The “spontaneous” collaborative violence expected in a Girardian scenario does not happen. Instead there is a highly organized assault upon the Model figurehead and his army. At this point, each group becomes more distinct and separate in intentionality and purpose. Instead of unanimity and amalgamation, the Subject-Israelites revolt against the Model-Aliens. Models and Subjects remain enemies, never allies as envisaged by Girard. The Casualties’ deaths are directly connected to the Model-Alien society’s utter defeat. Instead of a temporarily forged unity and reconciliation with the Subjects, the Model is eradicated. It is only through the Model’s complete military defeat and expulsion that the Subjects return to *YHWH*. The “experience of relief” as identified by Girard, in these biblical examples is a result of the development of indigenous government and the re-establishment of the cultic behaviour, based on a cathartic set of battles and killings, not on a temporary allegiance of two rival groups. Social order and peace

⁷⁴³ Only Ehud receives the title “deliverer” (3:15). Deborah is a prophet and a judge (4:4), which may well be equal in status. Gideon is commissioned by *YHWH* (6: 12, 22, 36-40), but is never accorded the “deliverer” label. Gideon’s son, Abimelech, has no *YHWH*-given validation.

⁷⁴⁴ The Israelites may be the Chosen People, and there may be instructions about proper treatment of strangers, orphans, widows, and foreigners, but generally the texts in their completeness are meant for one people, the believers.

evolve, which could possibly be considered the “cleansing” of society as suggested by Girard, but there is no return to “equilibrium.” In one sense, the elimination of the Model group could be considered genocide because it is clearly stated that they are targeted and completely eliminated.

These texts never waver from a pro-Israelite bias as they represent Israelite perspectives exclusively. At no point is the text sympathetic to the Casualty or other Aliens. Any plot refinement, like partisan support for the non-Israelite Casualty, would contradict the preexisting, innate prejudice of the texts and is not evident.⁷⁴⁵ This is another marker of the inappropriateness of the Scapegoat scenario within these specific texts, recalling that Girard does affirm that not every violent Biblical narrative is an example of the Scapegoating theory.⁷⁴⁶ In spite of the presence of some Girardian elements, there should be no Scapegoats. Closer examination of individual pericopes will further substantiate this contention.

Ehud and Eglon

The validation of Ehud’s mandate from *YHWH* and the Israelites, permits him to implement the necessary war status. Eglon is a casualty of a guerrilla attack within a war footing, not mob violence supported by the combined power of the Subject and the Model’s cooperative venture.⁷⁴⁷ Contrary to Girard’s theory,

⁷⁴⁵ Unless such a foreigner is working for the Israelites as Rehab and Ruth were (*Josh.* 2:1ff and *Ruth*).

⁷⁴⁶ Girard, *I see Satan*, 106, 117-121.

⁷⁴⁷ Mob violence implies a lack of *initial* organizational structure and self discipline and an intention of lawlessness. In Ehud’s case, the violence is a) organized by Ehud; b) carried out by disciplined warriors with appropriate training; and c) purposeful, reconciliation with *YHWH* and reestablishment of their covenantal relationship.

this is not collective violence. Eglon is not innocent, he is an integral member of the Model group, responsible for the crimes of which he is accused. He is not sacred in action or language. Nowhere does the text show empathy or sympathy for either Eglon or the Moabites. While Girard suggests the Scapegoat's death would end any conflict, in contrast, Eglon's death precipitates the battle that defeats the larger group of Moabites. He is not resurrected, he is not revered, he receives no accolades. The actions of his death are not repeated as a ritualistic custom, nor recorded as a paragon. Eglon cannot, therefore, be a narrative or plot-directed Scapegoat.

Ja'el and A Certain Woman

As minor characters within the broader narratives, these women have no stated or obvious divine or textual approval. They are not involved in the collective violence of the battles that prompted their actions. They are isolated: neither has a direct narrative link to a major Protagonist. In Ja'el sub-narrative, Deborah never appears and Barak is an addendum, arriving after Sisera's death to give Ja'el validity as an implement of Deborah's prophesy. Gideon, the major protagonist of *Judges* 6-9, is long dead before A Certain Woman dispatches Abimelech, at the end of Chapter 9.

The two women themselves are involved in only the "violence" of the *skandal* of the Girardian cycle. They remain solitary instigators and do not gather allies, as one would expect during the Scapegoating process. Their rivalry with the Casualties is viable only in terms of an individual life-and-death struggle, not

as a group or “collective” action. This action cannot be identified as *Mimesis* against a designated Scapegoat but can be couched in terms of internal mediation: direct conflict in a struggle for the Object, defined as personal freedom, self-determination and territorial, religious power and authority.

Sisera and Abimelech are guilty of the crimes that are ascribed to them, they are always an integral part of the Model group. While their deaths might be considered a sacrifice to the winning Israelites, they are not Scapegoats, they are casualties of war, wars which they began.

Further: Ja’el and Sisera

Ja’el has a backstory; she is identified by marital connections and location. There is direct physical contact between the characters as Ja’el takes advantage of Sisera intellectually, emotionally and physically, with word plays, subterfuge, cunning, trickery and creativity, somniferous drinks and the ultimate tent peg.⁷⁴⁸ For the warrior, Sisera, this is a belittling and intimate death with Ja’el’s up-close-and-personal actions.

What happens when we endeavour to apply Girard’s Scapegoat theory? The initial conflict is pre-history. There is no amalgamation of the two groups, no consolidation of intention, no group targeting of a victim, no collective violence against Sisera. The text is consistently anti-Alien and anti-Sisera. Ja’el is working in isolation, with no official agency or sanction. Sisera’s death does not end the

⁷⁴⁸ Recent biblical interpreters have proposed various interesting possibilities about exactly how much and what kind of physical contact might have occurred between Ja’el and Sisera. See Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “Uncovering Jael and Sisera: A New Reading,” *SJOT* 19, no.1 (2005), 24-47, for one.

fighting as Girard proposes. It had already ended. In one sense, Sisera's death was irrelevant to the Israelite cause, although it neatly completes the narrative storyline and prophetic pronouncement. Neither Sisera's lack of caution nor Ja'el's motivation and actions are textually explained; that ambiguity allows for a variety of divergent but valid imaginative interpretations, but not a Girardian perspective. Sisera is not resurrected; his death is not revered nor is his life honoured. Textually he disappears, never to appear again. Sisera is no Scapegoat.

Further: A Certain Woman and Abimelech

A Certain Woman has no back story. We know only that she is a female resident of Thebez of unknown status, standing on the town tower's roof with other men, women and lords as Abimelech's army attacks the city's final stronghold.⁷⁴⁹ In contrast to Sisera, at this point in the narrative, Abimelech seems unstoppable, consolidating his political power and territorial expansion. For that reason alone, the shock of his precipitous death leaves the story open to the humour of discomfort and surprise.

A Certain Woman has no personal interactions with Abimelech; he is physically and emotionally separate from her. Nevertheless, Abimelech is as much a threat to her as Sisera is to Ja'el. Abimelech's actions directly influence

⁷⁴⁹ There is ambiguity about the nationality of the people of Thebez. They may well have been Canaanites. Neither Burney (Burney, *Judges*, 286), nor Martin (Martin, *Judges*, 128-129) makes mention of nationality. Boling suggest that Shechem and its territories (including Thebez) had entered the Yahwist federation prior to Abimelech's military onslaught, which would make its residents "pseudo-Israelites" at the least (Boling, *Judges*, 183-184).

her life, just as Sisera influences Ja'el. This tale has no Biblical Girardian markers. There is no amalgamation, no consolidation and no cooperation between and among the two groups, the Subject-Thebezites and the Model-Abimelech's army. A Certain Woman acts alone and then disappears. The groups again do not unite, the residents of Thebez remain *in situ* as Abimelech's army disperses. This is the only time that the Casualty's death ends the conflict, yet Abimelech is not a victim of the combined group, he is a war statistic, as were Eglon and Sisera. In a manner similar to Eglon and Sisera, Abimelech disappears as a narrative and pseudo-religious force, neither revered, remembered or resurrected. He is just another war casualty.

Rebutting Girard and these Biblical Pericopes

Girard contends that his scapegoating theory has a different format and focus in the Hebrew Bible. His declaration that "all theological systems place sacrificial operations under the jurisdiction of the divinity,"⁷⁵⁰ affirms *YHWH's* role as a moderator and controller, and shifts the whole activity, from an emphasis on the triumphalism of the ultimate victor/winner to the role and structure of the injured party. He has argued that biblical texts record each "scapegoating" story from the victim's perspective rather than from the victor.⁷⁵¹ Throughout each overall narrative, empathy for said victim is developed. He contends that only two

⁷⁵⁰ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 266.

⁷⁵¹ Job, Abel *et al.* in his examples. Girard, *I see Satan*, 103-120.

of the three strategic components in Scapegoat theorization are evident: the initial conflict and the collective violence that results in the “Scapegoat’s” death. Group consolidation and sacred revelation or religious epiphany are supposed to be absent.⁷⁵² How does this interpretation apply to the three pericopes?

Initial Conflict

In each pericope, the initial crisis transpires before the story commences when the humans rebuff their covenantal obligations to *YHWH*. *YHWH* supports the Model-Aliens, permitting them to politically and militarily control the region and the Object, self-determination/freedom. All actions and responses are direct, as internal mediation.

Unlike the Girardian expectation, the Subject-Israelites are noisy, irresolute, divided and hesitant, unable to rally themselves. The spark for freedom is external, through the deity, not because of the Subject’s internal machinations.(3:12, 4:1, 6:1.) It is *YHWH*, not the Subject-Israelites, who triggers the mimetic conflict, and chooses and gives authority to a distinct leader. This narrative detail reinforces both the Subjects’ unwillingness to take action and their general helplessness without their external support system, *YHWH*. Neither Subject nor Model indicate an ability or willingness to negotiate, leaving only one alternative: physical, military confrontation. Each Subject group aspires to self-determination, with self-directed political and religious oversight, the cultic wish to return to a

⁷⁵² Girard, *I See Satan*, 106-107.

previous state, not to establish a new kind of religiosity after the Casualty's death, as Girard proposed.

Collective Violence

Girard suggests that finding, defining and sacrificing the Scapegoat is the Subject's and Model's co-operative group activity. In these pericopes, this does not happen. The Model-Aliens are considered to be a united company of oppressors and the Israelites are an apostate entity. Within the introductory redaction, Israelites who may have been abiding by the Covenant are neither acknowledged nor affirmed.

There is no profane violence⁷⁵³ nor collective violence where Model-Aliens and Subject-Israelites unite against a common enemy. Violence is approved and sanctioned by *YHWH* within war conditions. The violence against the Casualty is instigated by one Subject member alone, not a large group. At no time do the Subject and Model groups unite in the temporary reconciliation.

Unlike a Biblical Girardian Scapegoat, each Casualty has actively participated in the entire process, as the head of an occupying force. The conflicts hinge on each Subject's disobedience of the *YHWH*-Israelite covenant. With this disobedience, the Subject-Israel is deemed responsible for Israel's invasion and military occupation. The Casualty is, in one respect, another instrument under *YHWH's* control. There is no ambiguity or manipulation of information to justify

⁷⁵³ Where actions are unsanctioned or unauthorized. Girard considers this kind of violence destructive, retributive and self-sustaining and dangerous for the wider group's survival.

the death of the Casualty, as there would be with a Girardian Scapegoat. The accusations are not trumped-up charges created by the Subject and the Model together. The Casualties are punished for their identifiable misdeeds, the occupation and oppression of Israel, as articulated by the Subjects-Israelites' infractions.

It is only near the time of his death that each Casualty is rendered vulnerable, as a potential scapegoat. His death does not end the conflict with reconciliation, group consolidation and tranquility, as Girard proposes, except to a minor extent in the case of Abimelech. Here alone, the Casualty's death ends the conflict and the attacking troops disappear but with no indication of reconciliation (9:55). Their motivation may well have been political and military expedience. They have lost their leader and there is no successor. The question of their personal survival is very much unresolved; there is no textual indication that the Thebezites were prepared to mount an offensive attack, but this possibility adds to the ambiguity of the Invisible Text.

Eglon's death *begins* the violence, Sisera's death in no way influences his army's defeat, nor does it resolve any political conundrum, but it does fulfil Deborah's prophesy. From a Girardian perspective, none of the deaths harmonize or placate the rival groups. Instead, in each case, the Model group is completely eradicated. The tranquility and peace following each death is a direct reflection of *YHWH's* involvement in the process, with the Israelites' reconciliation with *YHWH*. For the Israelites, death precedes concord with *YHWH*.

The Power Dynamic

Dynamics between the Killers and the Casualties are a reversal of Girard's proposals. In direct contradiction, each Casualty begins strong in power and high in status. They are not late arrivals to the scene, they are not isolated from, or by, either the Subject or the Model. Instead, they are integral and vital members of the Model group. It is the Killer-Protagonist who begins as weak, isolated and marginalized in social status, gender and physicalities. The female Killers enter the plot later, not the Scapegoats. Over the course of the plot, all the Killers appear to gain power and subsume the Casualties' strengths, changing disadvantages into triumph. This is a distinct role reversal of Girard's propositions.

The Sacred Revelation and Epiphany?

Girard suggests that the sacred revelation and epiphany are absent in the Hebrew Bible so that no Casualty is deified and revered after his death. This is validated in these pericopes. If there *is* deification, it is *YHWH*, who is again acknowledged as the divine force. *YHWH* is given the ultimate credit for the times of calm and recognized as the cause the battles' success. The link between *YHWH* and Israelite peace and well-being is covertly emphasized. The Casualty is disparaged and minimalized throughout the story's core, with no positive affirmations, nor favourable innuendos. The descriptions of their deaths are not stylized but rather brutalized.

The Casualties are forgotten except in risible memory. Consistent with Girard's proposals for biblical scapegoats, the three Casualties are not resurrected as god-like role models with high status and mystical powers, nor given

credit for the ensuing peace and tranquility.⁷⁵⁴ Their deaths do not trigger the beginnings of a strictly “new” religiosity rather, it is implied, but not stated that the recalcitrant Israelites return to their pre-existing relationship with *YHWH*. If they have re-established that connection, this possibly could be viewed as a sacred revelation that is imposed on the narrative by the final redaction, which itself is ambiguous. Yet the contradiction of this religiosity, with its group cohesion (even if it is exclusively Israelite rather than an amalgam) is compounded by the issue that it is a “renewed” religious fervour, rather than the instrumental initial example as suggested by Girard. These contradictions are established within the interplay between the redaction, and the *märchen* segments of each pericope.

Overview

To reiterate, no Casualty fits scapegoat criteria within the plot. At no time is he portrayed empathically, he is never an underdog, nor separated from his own group, except by his own choice. After death, he is not esteemed, resurrected, worshiped, or remembered with fondness. The Subject and Model groups do not unite in solidarity against the Casualty. The Scapegoat scenario is not apparent.

Examining *Judges* 3 to 16, the six major judges, about whom the text is most detailed, military and societal violence escalates over the course of the

⁷⁵⁴ At no point are they portrayed sympathetically. Eglon never appears after 3:21; Sisera is mentioned in *1Sam.* 12:9, *Ezra* 2:53 and *Psa.* 83:9 as an object lesson of inappropriate behaviour. In *2Sam.* 11:2, Abimelech is similarly belittled.

book. The first three judges, Othniel, Ehud and Deborah, combat only one national group at a time⁷⁵⁵ while Gideon, Jephthah and Samson each deal with a combined force of several distinct nationalities of increasing size and power. At the end of each pericope, the individual Casualty and his army are “completely” destroyed.

Yet the enemy in the succeeding story is more empowered and effective, with a larger tribal base. In other words, there appears to be a resurrection of the defeated army in a different form as they unite more efficiently against the Israelites.⁷⁵⁶ The initial conflict, the *skandal*, and the individual and group violence that defeats successive Aliens is always clear. Each time, the enemy rises up stronger, larger and more dominant than before. This escalation of power and authority might imply a type of resilience and resurrection on the Aliens’ part, until they are summarily and completely defeated at each pericope’s end. While their nationalities and allegiances may vary, their foreignness and overall effect on the Israelites expands throughout the process of the entire book. Their “resurrection” is accompanied by a more powerful force.

This cyclical and repetitive nature of the death and resurrection of the entire Alien military force fits within Girardian purview, as it also supports the idea of

⁷⁵⁵ Othniel fights Aram; Ehud takes on Moab primarily with some, though seemingly limited, support from the Ammonites and the Amalekites who are mentioned only once; Deborah deals with Canaan.

⁷⁵⁶ Gideon deals with Midian and the Amalekites and the people of the East as well as the Ishmaelites; Jephthah fights the Ammonites and Ephraimites; Samson battles Aram, Sido, Moab, Philistine and Anmo, among others.

a cyclical decline in Israelite power and effectiveness. The increase in the numbers of Alien enemies implies a regeneration of power and resilience, a resurrection of intent. If one takes the pericopes sequentially and gives credence to the idea that the text, being pro-Hebrew might set up an Alien as Scapegoat, within Girard's definition, the cyclical nature is undeniable and the potential for the Scapegoat process is insinuated. The target of antagonism and conflict continues to be a person arbitrarily chosen who will be blamed for all previous antagonism and conflict. The arbitrarily chosen Casualty can be blamed for previous conflicts, which contradicts Girard's contention that the Scapegoat is blameless.

We move to the idea that the rhetoric of the text may well present opportunities for a Girardian Scapegoat.

Innate Literary Prejudice

The rhetoric of these biblical texts engenders an innate sense of exclusivity because they were designed to be read, understood and utilized by people who had a proclivity towards Hebrew-Israelite religious, theological beliefs.⁷⁵⁷

Therefore, to begin with, all texts must be considered theologically partisan, presenting identifiable subjective theological inclinations, interpretations and beliefs. Let us approach the Biblical text employing Girard's *non-Biblical* Scapegoat theory as it is only in the Bible that Girard proposes that the Scapegoat is validated.

Identifiable groups, the Subject-Israelite, the Model-Alien and the Object-self-determination, remain constant in all three pericopes. The initial conflict and

⁷⁵⁷ Discrimination against non-Israelite groups is consistent throughout with important exceptions when foreigners assist Israelites.

all mimeses are clear, as is the resolution. The three Casualties are anti-heroes, who, over the course of the narrative, evolve from positions of strength and power to a weakened and victimized condition, separated from their protective societies, isolated and friendless as Girard's Scapegoat is friendless. There is no indication of their personal perspectives, no attempt to establish empathy for them, contrary to Girard's proposition. They have no advocate and are almost voiceless within the literary composition.⁷⁵⁸ They are each targeted by the text's narrative sub-structural prejudices. Their positions of authority and their nationality are preconceived negatives, prejudices that identify them as outsiders and targets, transferred subconsciously to readers by the plot's structure. They are all isolated from their centres of safety and their political power structure. Their physical vulnerability is reflected in the final setting: Eglon and Sisera are unprotected and alone, Abimelech is in the midst of a brutal and long-lasting progression of battles, a hallmark of which is corporeal uncertainty. By each narrative's conclusion, each Casualty is vulnerable, powerless and dead, in the non-Biblical Girardian Scapegoat behavioural ideal. In contradiction of Girard's suggestions, a single Subject, not an amalgamated mob, has killed each.

There is a time of calm, peace, relief, joy and tranquility for the Subject community because not only has the "Scapegoat" been eliminated, so has the entire Model group. Literally and figuratively, they no longer reside within Israelite

⁷⁵⁸ Eglon utters only one word, (3:19); Sisera issues only two orders (4:19, 20); Abimelech speaks only once (9:54).

territory. In agreement with Girard's proposal, the Israelites do not blame themselves. And, within the narrative structure, this is partly accurate: it was *YHWH*, not the Israelites, who began and perpetuated each story's violence. The entire process distracted and diverted attention from the real motivation for *YHWH*'s intervention: the Israelites' evil ways within *YHWH*'s parameters. There is never indication of repentance on the Israelites' part. Nowhere do they apologize to *YHWH* for their malfeasance nor is it stated that they return to appropriate worship patterns.

The Israelites' cyclical return to their True God *might* be considered a "sacred revelation" in the idea of the creation of a new harmony with a pre-existing God, rather than creating a "new" God, as the object of adoration. Is *YHWH* substituted for the now dead Casualty as the resurrected God to be worshipped? Is *YHWH* the scapegoat who has been targeted by the original Israelite misbehaviour and who rises up at the end of each pericope as a powerful and significant entity? If such is affirmed as an element within the Scapegoating process, we have a refinement of one of Girard's basic premises. It is possible to suggest that these three Casualties could be non-Biblical Scapegoats if the deification stage could be interpreted as *a return to and affirmation of YHWH worship* rather than a worship of the recently deceased Scapegoat. With such a suggestion, we have modified examples of the *non-Biblical* Girardian Scapegoat Mechanism. While the Scapegoat himself is *not* deified, there is a regenerative narrative *process*

through Chapters 3 to 16. Each time that the Israelites err, the Alien domination becomes a stronger and more powerful amalgamation.

Beyond an examination of the Girardian Scapegoat Theory, the language of the text supports the idea of a non-Biblical Girardian Scapegoat scenario, within the rhetoric. There is validity in suggesting that the aforementioned Eglon, Sisera and Abimelech, could be Scapegoats of the rhetoric, rather than scapegoats of the plot. As far as I can find, any discussion of scapegoating does not delve into linguistic choices made by the creators of each text. The composition of any well-crafted story involves the Creators' individual selections of words, plots and characterization. The Creators begin with implicit ideas and prejudices about the story and their greatest challenge is to choose words that explicitly and implicitly reflect those attitudes. In that process, there are times when Creators make the decision to designate one or several of their characters as Antagonists within which can be expressed components of Girard's scapegoat theory. Within the plot and actions, all components may not be evident, but may otherwise be evident through the selection of specific vocabulary. In these three cases, the language enables some aspects of each story to appear derisive towards the Antagonist, whether it is through an interpretation of the language as humourous or a creatively violent incident.

10-Summary and Conclusions

In this summative chapter, I recapitulate my observations and posit possible interpretations for the three Biblical narratives. I am working from the premise that *all* Biblical texts are theological, and *all* Bible reading is theological.⁷⁵⁹ The Bible's creators wrote what is clearly ambiguous and abstruse⁷⁶⁰ and dare readers to engage with the text imaginatively, analytically and theologically. Though these pericopes are short⁷⁶¹ and have few extra-textual connections or canonical emphasis,⁷⁶² I found seemingly contradictory elements that are not antithetical with components that challenge the theological assumptions of other Biblical passages.

I believe readers impose their personal values on texts because they are incapable of full disengagement. They are unable to disconnect their personal belief systems, instinctive responses, culturally specific motivations and biases when they evaluate any work. Theological and philosophic exegesis, therefore, will always be open to scholarly challenge. Every facet of each story offers opportunities to question, challenge and reach dissimilar conclusions. This critical lens is conducive to my interdisciplinary

⁷⁵⁹ Webster, "Reading Theology," 53-63.

⁷⁶⁰ "The Bible always forces us to choose because the Bible is ambiguous, and ambiguity requires us to make a choice." Crossan and Watts, *Who is Jesus*, 79.

⁷⁶¹ The 50 verses of the three stories included Ehud's 19 verses (3:12-30), Deborah's 24 verses (ch. 4) and 63 verses for the entire Abimelech tale (8:30-9:56) although only 7 involve a Certain Woman.

⁷⁶² Only once in the three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary: 4:1-7, Year A, Proper 28. There are three external mentions of the Antagonists in other biblical texts: *2Sam.* 11:21 (Abimelech); *1Sam.* 12:9, *Psa* 83:9 (Sisera) and none for Eglon. There are no other references to Ehud, Deborah, Ja'el or A Certain Woman.

stance, where I am trying to avoid dogmatic acceptance of any specific theological categorization, using instead a broad range of philosophical, social, literary and theological theories as an methodological basis.

Imagination is another element within a person's intellectual capacities that cannot be "turned off." I argue that the intellectual and emotional role of imagination must be acknowledged and emphasized. The foundations of imagination are innate, an intellectual ability to create ideas or concepts that cannot necessarily be independently verified by other senses. The ability to prophesize that which is to follow is limited only by imaginative abilities and acuity.⁷⁶³ Without the ability to conceptualize and extend ideas beyond that which is observable, there can be no intellectual progress. Divergent, or imaginative, thinking is crucial to the interminable development of theological exegesis.⁷⁶⁴ Imagination and its offspring, fantasy, do not destroy or insult reason; they enhance, stimulate and enliven. What I consider clear from Bettelheim's and Peseschkian's work is that an imaginative interpretation of texts permits an individual to intellectually consolidate and transfer ideas from a text to the Interpreter's life experiences in a safe environment.⁷⁶⁵ This is particularly relevant to the *Judges* texts where violence is crucial to the plot.

⁷⁶³ Frye, "Imagination," 442-445.

⁷⁶⁴ "The truth of the imagination leads us to compassion. These two, imagination and compassion, are the only possibility of salvation." W.S. Merwin, the Joseph Warren Beach Lecture, University of Minnesota, March 26, 2001.

⁷⁶⁵ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 24.

The pericopes contain what I view as amusing, contradictory and challenging narrative strands. It would initially appear to be unwise to base an entire, all-encompassing theology upon these three pericopes, so we will examine each element carefully. Fundamental to any exegesis is an understanding of the narratives' configuration.

The Theological Impact of the Narrative's Shaping

Every pericope has a deliberate design, meant to enhance theme(s) and lead to particular interpretations. Two distinct parts constitute each entirety: the original oral story, the *core*, and the editorial overlay, the redaction, which surrounds it. The redaction imposes a theology on the pre-existing core saga. The complete pericopes were likely permitted within the canon *because of* the redactors' ability to construct a meta-narrative with theological uniformity throughout Chs. 6-13 of *Judges*. To reflect contemporary biases, the redactors appear to have amended the text at least three times as theological opinions adapted and changed.⁷⁶⁶

The final redaction is being examined here, the expression of the Babylonian Exile, 535± BCE.⁷⁶⁷ The narratives likely reflect and embellish historical incidents, to create fictionalized, imaginative accounts of actions that may or may not have occurred to demonstrate the theological priorities of that time. Even with experiential roots, "historical saga", "historicized narrative" or "narrative history" are more accurate terms than "historical record."

⁷⁶⁶ Boling, *Judges*, 30-31.

⁷⁶⁷ Although not necessarily written immediately thereafter. See Gray, *Judges*, 6-7.

The Theological Implications of The Cores as Märchen

Märchen is an appropriate term for these stories because it identifies narratives that cannot necessarily be historically verified. *Märchen* involve marvellous, but not necessarily miraculous, events, undefined locations, unexpected heroes, irredeemable villains and happy endings.⁷⁶⁸ A *märchen*'s primary theme is the quest for freedom from an oppressive situation, followed by peace, an improvement in social order or financial status and, in some cases, the attainment of a kingdom.

The Divine, as a character, presence, or influence, is seldom in evidence in a *märchen*, but a strong moral stance of right/good and wrong/evil, with attitudes of appropriate behaviour is deeply ingrained in each story, covertly yet clearly indicated. Right is equated to an individual's personal freedom and self-determination, wrong involving oppression and threats to those freedoms. Other theological reflection is minimal. Protagonists persevere when all seems impossible and the texts imply that attainment of their goals/kingdom/spouse, is a result of their superior moral and ethical code, enhanced by creativity and persistence. Imaginative ideation could suggest those ethical behaviours are a subliminal indication of unstated but implied theological values. Within imaginative ideation, the reader is able to create, evaluate and accept whatever Invisible Texts he finds appropriate.

⁷⁶⁸ Thompson, *The Folktale*, 8.

My observation is that each pericope's core displays *märchen* properties. It begins with the premise that core stories developed orally over an extended period.⁷⁶⁹ Most *märchen* began as oral "fireside tales" and it is valid to assume the foundations of the cores have similar roots.⁷⁷⁰ These cores are hero tales with ambiguous settings that emphasize their universal applicability. The quest for an appropriate, morally suitable, response to adversity, hardship and oppression is a central theme, the desire for political freedom with the resultant moral and theological dilemmas. The Protagonists' initial appearances and their subsequent disappearances augment the *märchen* aura, amplifying mysteriousness, enhancing the imaginative realm, consistent with the *märchen* sense of incomplete ambiguity. Nowhere is theological intentionality expressed.

Protagonists' limitations in both *märchen* and core are not detrimental. Ehud's physical divergence and the other heroes' gender as negative components lack validity: each is a premise projected upon the text by reader bias.⁷⁷¹ The reader's understanding of disadvantage creates the storyline advantage. Actions emphasize ingenuity, initiative, and self-reliance while remaining within realistic limitations, minimizing supernatural involvement. With Ja'el to a lesser extent, A Certain Woman is the ultimate "EveryPerson," whose actions emphasize the universality of war with its negative consequences. In triumph, all three Protagonists become *märchen*-champions when they fulfill Bettelheim's image of heroes seeking a secure place in the world.⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁹ Written versions were likely recorded between 1 200± and 535± BCE. While I tend to agree with Niditch, that the oral tradition and subsequent recording of biblical stories cannot be *irrevocably* determined, I contend it is highly likely. Niditch, *Folklore*, 6.

⁷⁷⁰ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 5-6, 150-54.

⁷⁷¹ In North American society, this perception has modified within the past 50 years with the changes in attitude about left-handedness and female leadership.

⁷⁷² Bettelheim, *Uses*, 11.

Märchen humour is similar to the triumphant superiority of the pericopes. In both situations, the underdog prevails, defeats the Antagonist and restores the appropriate *status quo* upon the land. The humour is always at the Antagonist's expense, highlighting the incongruous nature of the Hero's accomplishments. It is dark, sardonic humour, not "vaudeville laughter."⁷⁷³

The extent and ramifications of "the land had rest" is as brusque, mysterious and dismissive as a *märchen's* "happily ever after." This imprecise phrase articulates neither worship, peace, nor economic recovery but does imply the "happy ending" of the reestablishment of some kind of personal and political freedom.

Common to both, Antagonists are clearly identified as evil, unredeemable, and worthy of enmity. Their accomplishments are painted in broad generalities, while their defeats and deaths are focal points for each story. Each death is encased in the humour and ambiguity of the Antagonist's lack of self-awareness, accomplished through the Protagonist's ingenuity and persistence, subterfuge, creativity, strength and good timing.

In the portrayal of violence, *märchen* and cores diverge. *Märchen* do not normally involve extensive civilian or military exploits or such actions are limited to one violent incident or episode. In contrast, widespread violence is critical to each core. The brutality of gaining freedom dominates the cores, prompted by a clear moral definition that it is right for the Israelites to be free of outside domination. It is considered morally appropriate that Israelites employ all manner of deception and duplicity, including widespread

⁷⁷³ Trent C. Butler, *Judges*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), lxiii.

warfare, to defeat the enemy because the Enemy has no redeeming moral authority. While the cores use widespread oppression as a narrative device, at the same time, they downplay and almost romanticize the physical costs of general warfare and personal commitment, not dwelling on its bloody and fatal aspects, its economic and emotional costs or other long-term effect on people and land. This is similar to *märchen* where evil people are defeated and die, peace is established, good will and determination triumph, and heroes are rewarded, all expressed simplistically.

As Bettelheim and Peseschkian suggest for *märchen*, the cores provide opportunities for readers to identify and learn in a remote, symbolic way with role models and plots in which a character overcomes adversity and develops moral fortitude. With an active imagination, readers may accomplish *märchen* ideals: developing self-confidence, overcoming fears, learning new attitudes, behaviours and knowledge, while facing unexpressed negative emotions without placing themselves in immediate physical danger.⁷⁷⁴

Similar to *märchen*, in the cores, *YHWH* is an almost invisible presence, whose theological imperatives have a *sub rosa* influence on each Protagonist's behaviour, shown in the redactions alone. The moral and ethical compass of good and evil is clear. Right and justice involve Israelite freedom and the enemy's eradication. Each Protagonist labours to accomplish that goal, using imaginative strategies, flexibility and verbal subterfuge. Ehud and A Certain Woman hope to liberate their nation while Ja'el aspires

⁷⁷⁴ Bettelheim, *Uses*, 7-9.

to save (or free) herself. An absence of conflict follows their success. Ehud and Deborah succeed to “kingdoms” in the Israelite understanding of *YHWH*’s kingdom.

YHWH’s one appearance as an active character in Barak’s core story could be plausibly explained as a redactive insertion to link *YHWH* to the introduction and conclusion, an example of Todorov’s “fantasy miraculous.”⁷⁷⁵ To designate Sisera’s defeat in battle as a *YHWH*-directed miracle moves the entire story to an overtly theological tale that encourages the reader to see *YHWH*’s presence elsewhere. Removing *YHWH* from the scenario moderates divine primacy, placing the emphasis on Barak’s ability to optimize Sisera’s weak battle strategies, something that is inconsistent with the general tone of the book in its entirety, where *YHWH* is meant to be the overwhelming power and authority. The presence of *YHWH* within the minds and thoughts of the core’s composers and through them, the Protagonists, is suggested in Ehud’s and Deborah’s orations signalling their expectation of divine involvement, strengthening the story’s theological intention beyond most *märchen* expectations.

Considering these cores *märchen*-like is substantiated and supported by the impression of each story’s oddity with its ephemeral and illusionary sites. Only a few geographic locations can be definitively situated within a 21st century understanding, because the locations cannot be verified within acceptable, present-day criteria. The sanitized portrayals of battles, the strange and fortuitous, bizarre deaths of each enemy leader and the literal and figurative eradication of enemy forces, featured without detail

⁷⁷⁵ Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 31-40.

or subtlety, compound the mythical sense of place and occasion. Imaginative speculation is possible further enhancing the *märchen* ambience.

I argue that the use of *märchen* as a comparative device adds to narrative insights when considering covert theological attributes. I further submit that the editors have revised little within each core story, retaining its traditional rhythm and sense. Imposing an introduction and conclusion, perhaps even amending the characters' names to create descriptive nicknames and inserting *YHWH*'s presence in one pericope, was meant to alter each pericope's entire shape and theme to create an obvious theological form, while encouraging the institutional memory of the original tale. Equating a moral code with a theological value system is not a quantum leap, which the redactors tried to optimize. By placing such a strong theological bias within the introduction, with its emphasis on the wickedness of the Israelites and *YHWH*'s actions, I would evaluate that the casual reader would not perceive the shortfalls within the core, where the deity plays no role and is not present (except with Barak's battle). For the adroit Interpreter, these deficiencies appear to be manifestations of an inconsistent editing process, which reinforces the perception of the limited theological efficacy of the pericope as a whole. Each pericope remains a three-part patchwork saga, instead of an integrated master-tale.

The Theological Implications of the Redactions versus the Cores

Employing a similar, but not identical, structure and vocabulary, the redactors endeavoured to create a uniformity of theological understanding as they nuanced the decline of the Israelites' general behaviour and enhanced and embellished whatever theological substance they imagined resided in each core. Redaction was meant to minimize finer details, shifting the major theological emphasis to the ramifications of the Israelites'

rejection of *YHWH* over the long run. Through the subtlety of varying content, a reader may note changing societal and godly norms, such as the increase of Israelite evil and corruption, *YHWH*'s lesser involvement in each pericope and the textual absence of Israelite repentance or return to appropriate behaviour and worship.⁷⁷⁶

I see the redactions' theological essence involves an inexplicit sense of the divine, presented through subtle dimensions of *YHWH*'s infrequent involvement. Warfare, the use of subterfuge to defeat Israelite enemies and the overall importance of *YHWH* are clearly endorsed. As the third revision of these tales, one may deduce this configuration was meant to appeal to those believers affected by the Babylonian Exile and reflects that era's theological priorities.⁷⁷⁷ Gray states irrevocably: "[T]his was a post-Exilic work, a frank self-scrutiny imposed by the discipline of the Exile."⁷⁷⁸

The redactors highlight religious/spiritual *gravitas* with the deity's direct involvement from the first verse. Beginning each plot with a draconian invasion rather than the rise of a talented Israelite, shifts the emphasis from human creativity to godly collusion and effectively downplays the role and effectiveness of all human participants. In the Ehud saga, it is *only* the redaction that distinguishes him as a left-handed Benjaminite, an indication that the redactors may have sought to weaken Ehud's status and label him as a lesser individual than the following core displays. This maximizes *YHWH*'s covert influence when Ehud is successful and emphasizes Ehud's ability to overcome implied

⁷⁷⁶ See Greenspahn, "The Theology of the Framework of *Judges*," 386-89, and O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 266-67, 304-305.

⁷⁷⁷ Boling, *Judges*, 30-32. There is great discussion as to the dating of the "final" copy. The following scholars assume historical roots to the book. Hamlin asserts it was composed about 500 years after the events (Hamlin, *Judges*, 4), while Martin claims 250 years (Martin, *Judges*, 4). Boling dates the third redaction to the seventh century. Boling, *Judges*, 184-85.

⁷⁷⁸ Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, 5.

disabilities *and* his tribe's (ir)relevance, expedited by *YHWH*'s intervention. Since only Ehud is mentioned in a redaction, one might suggest that the redactors felt that the women did not need further identifiable weaknesses as their gender was sufficiently deleterious.

Each redaction launches and shapes the war storyline. The emphasis on wide scale violence is compounded in the redactors' linguistic choices. The Hebrew word, "war," appears nowhere, which might imply that the redactors considered these conflicts not worthy of that all-encompassing term.⁷⁷⁹ By avoiding this term, the redactors are rejecting restrictions that would be imposed had a "real" war been declared, legitimizing all ensuing actions.

YHWH's dynamic, anthropomorphic presence in the redaction affects all subsequent plot developments, dominating the plot's evolution in the core by implication alone.⁷⁸⁰ *YHWH* strengthens Eglon, sells the Israelites to Jabin, and gives them to Midian before Gideon. This vocabulary implies sequentially less divine commitment and involvement, reinforcing the notion of the Israelites' increasing recalcitrance and *YHWH*'s dissatisfaction over time. This is amplified at the same time by the increase in the Oppressors' ruthless actions and ferocity. The theological implication is clear: *YHWH* is distancing divine presence and support from the Israelites. This abstruseness is typical

⁷⁷⁹ Neither מִלְחָמָה, nor לָחֶם, "war," found elsewhere in *Judges*, are in these pericopes.

⁷⁸⁰ This is a consistent view. Soggin, *Judges*, 5-6; Burney, *Judges*, xii-l; Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 6-7, 286-87; Mayes, "Deuteronomistic royal ideology," 246.

of other biblical texts and encourages the reader to imaginatively engage with the Invisible Text.

Abimelech's introduction is unique because it details Israelites' religious and social collapse. Neither a clearly defined Israelite leader nor an Antagonist are named, an unusual ambiguity in biblical narratives.⁷⁸¹ By establishing Abimelech as a son of an appropriate leader, with potential for good by implication, the authors/redactors are encouraging the reader to observe character development, airing Abimelech's less admirable attributes by degrees, implying that evil can come from good.⁷⁸² Redactors are delineating why relying on a leader's heritage, rather than his abilities, outlook and attitude, can prove to be dangerous. There is no Israelite call for godly assistance and *YHWH*'s name is never mentioned, further accenting Abimelech's malfeasance and unacceptability. This structure encourages readers to save any evaluation until all evidence is available and the story completed. I would suggest this is the creators' critique of unjust leadership, unjust being Israelite against Israelite, as a hint of upcoming events that carry this theme further.

The three pericopes present no ground swell of group physical rebellion against foreign oppression, only complaint to *YHWH*. The Israelites passively expect divine intervention through someone else's leadership. Each return to political and religious independence is facilitated by individuals, ostensibly at *YHWH*'s behest. The *YHWH* cause-and-effect found in each redaction is not confirmed or repeated in any core.

⁷⁸¹ Usually the Protagonist is designated at the beginning of the story and prominently featured in the plot. S/he faces adversity, overcomes it and somehow exemplifies a follower of *YHWH*. The stories of Joseph, Job, Moses, Esther present examples of this strategy.

⁷⁸² I evaluate five verses as a "gradual" revelation.

YHWH's evaluation is not affirmed nor is there any recorded Israelite understanding of the ramifications of their behaviour. The redaction alone recognizes *YHWH* as the primary force of good, the major instrument of liberation. By *not* directly affirming *YHWH*'s involvement in the core, the core separates and isolate the Israelites from their god.

Leadership approval begins in the redaction with the presence or absence of one or more of the ten cyclical attributes. One could suggest that the redactors were covertly showing that Israelite decline began immediately after Othniel. Adaptations within the redaction allow the redactor to maintain the impression of preserving the original tale while deliberately amending its impact to meet latter-day theological biases. The redaction implies that *all* military actions are at *YHWH*'s behest. Only in the redaction does *YHWH* withdraw support from the Israelites and enable their subjugation.

Concluding redactions are short and inconsistent. "The hand of Israel" vanquishes Eglon's army, *'elohim* thwarts Sisera and Abimelech's army disappears. Human agency is minimalized. Only Ehud has the summative and contentious "the land had rest," Deborah's prose account has a variation and Abimelech has none.

The dynamic contradictions between the redaction and core are unresolved on many levels. If the redactors' purpose was to meld the three parts into a sensible, unified whole, in structure, plot and theme, I argue they were not entirely successful. Not only is *YHWH* an inconsistent presence, there is disparity within the plot structures, which the redaction is unable to reconcile. I would suggest that the redactors' expectation that the theological bias of the introduction and the conclusions would encompass

the story's core is not entirely realistic or effective because of the lack of overall narrative cohesion. That does not distract from the perception of each core plot as a rip-roaring adventure where good triumphs over evil and freedom replaces slavery because of the actions of divergent individuals. In spite of any editing, the cores remain *märchen*-like.

If this text was structured to present theological premises to the returning Babylonian Exiles, it would help explain *YHWH*'s inexplicable "absences." If *YHWH* is not always present in narrative, then the Exiles should surmise that *YHWH* similarly need not have been present during their sojourn in Babylon. I would further suggest that part of its message was that the Exile was a result of Israelite sin and their return to Israel was solely because of *YHWH*'s benevolence. Israelite search for, and acceptance of, a *YHWH*-designated leader would ensure their continuing political survival. What is clear is, that while the welfare of the nation depends on all peoples, the actions of a single individual are most likely to lead to political renewal within *YHWH*'s realm. Israelites are further cautioned of the evils of familial conflicts, brutality and internecine warfare and the likelihood that the downfall of their nation would continue if they do not follow *YHWH*.

While the integration of the redaction and the core is not entirely successful, violence and humour as narrative strategies are effective. The humour is subtle and complex, interacting with the plot and the violence to create a tangled tale.

Theological Implications of the Humour

An individual reader's inability to recognize the humour in the core stories does not rebut, contradict or lessen its presence. Leacock's comment that someone, somewhere would understand the humour, but it need not be understood by each and everyone, is relevant.⁷⁸³ Its appreciation depends upon the reader's imaginative ability to interpret contradictory and ambiguous scenarios, to think divergently and prophetically envisage future actions. It relies upon the assumed misogyny of the cultural context in which the story was created. It creates discomfort for the contemporary reader who must wrestle with the philosophical idea that violence can be connected to, amended by and enhanced by being amusing. This is not humour that necessarily evokes laughter, rather it is Leacock's highest form of humour, which excites pity, pathos and empathy along with a reflection on life and losses.⁷⁸⁴ The humour is not meant to generate laughter and is not gentle; it is, in one sense, like the dandelion that sprouts on a lawn. It does not change the lay of the land, nor its *raison d'être*, what it does do is presents a contrast that enriches the reality. Plot intention remains constant as the humour massages each story's impact and theological purpose. This is humour as subversion.

These stories include all necessary constituents of humour as I define them. The text is structured towards a pro-Israel and pro-YHWH partiality, designed for an Israelite *community* to show the *commonality* of oppression and redemption by "ordinary" people

⁷⁸³ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 73.

⁷⁸⁴ Leacock, *H.*, 261.

where each Protagonist represents the common person.⁷⁸⁵ Israelite commonality is reinforced through the plot and language. Each story encompasses *surprise* and *incongruity*, in the choice of Protagonists, and in the language, the *hapax*, the unexpected plot convolutions, surprising, anomalous actions, that integrate humour with the violence to enhance creativity. Nowhere is the surprise and humour with which the Protagonists accomplish their goals predicted.

This is not empathic or peace-seeking humour. It is meant to denigrate and humiliate the Aliens, to shame their existence *and* their memory in perpetuity, to remind all subsequent readers of their ignoble defects as it exposes their personal and military incompetence.⁷⁸⁶ Leacock would deem this humour to be cruel, because it pits one group (Israelites) against the other (Aliens), with the latter group always portrayed negatively.⁷⁸⁷ The humour is unexpected, dependent on three general misconceptions: left-handedness as a handicap, women as deficient and men in authority as indomitable. The faulty cultural understanding of left handedness as a deficiency continues today in some quarters. In no other part of the Hebrew Bible is it considered a handicap.⁷⁸⁸

Irony is the most evident humorous attribute. In characterization, irony is in the forefront. Traditional female expectations are overturned when Deborah, Ja'el and A Certain Woman defy every male-based stereotype. Deborah's acclaim hinges on her status as a prophetess, judge and military leader. Ja'el's linguistic deceit, creative use of

⁷⁸⁵ If only in the abstract concept of Israelite redemption being linked to personal preservation.

⁷⁸⁶ "In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently, to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed ..." Bergson, *On Laughter*, 136-137.

⁷⁸⁷ Leacock, *H. and H.*, 11.

⁷⁸⁸ *Lev.* 14 discusses what the priest does with his left hand.

resources and physical strength along with her infantry-like, in-your-face tactics portray a powerful person, beyond her gender and ethnic labels. A Certain Woman's more distant, sniper-like exploit, with her ability to pre-plan and accomplish a military objective using a female's tool, further defies conventional standards. While espousing Israelite superiority through each plot, the writers at the same time are contradicting that superiority in the creation of non-Israelite and low-ranking Protagonists.

These are archetypal characters and situations, where each Protagonist's MacGyver-like creativity and Jungian tricksterism enlivens the stories and challenges the reader to applaud that ingenuity.⁷⁸⁹ These scenarios do not necessarily prompt laughter, but they do provoke thoughtful self-reflection.⁷⁹⁰ It is the humour of Israelite triumphant superiority, Frye's "ironic comedy," where self-reflection rather than laughter, is the preferred outcome when people challenge the *status quo*.⁷⁹¹

Situational ironies present well-protected locations successfully challenged, strengths reversed and power and authority overthrown. There is the gender-specific irony of disadvantaged women defeating a stronger enemy and the ethnic irony of non-Israelites saving the Chosen People.

Other humorous exemplars are shown in the language choices. Vocabulary choices portray a clever wit, in the names, in the physical descriptors and the word

⁷⁸⁹ MacGyver is a fictional North American television character who uses extensive knowledge, personal creativity, common items and a Swiss Army knife to unravel seemingly unsolvable problems (television program: 1985-1992; 2016-present).

⁷⁹⁰ Frye, "The Argument," 84ff.; Leacock, *H.*, 261.

⁷⁹¹ Parkin, *Humourists*, 179.

plays and innuendos. Each enemy is portrayed in entirely negative terms in witty, unexpected ways, abetted by the potential meanings of several *hapax*. Each Antagonist condemns himself in word and deed; the truth of their speech, followed by their ensuing contradictory actions, firmly entrenches the humour. The overt signs of Israelite superiority, including the defeat of the enemy and the extended times of "rest," are complemented by covert evidence. Names emphasize humourous cultural traits. It is plausible to suggest they may have been redactive insertions: nicknames that encourage further comic or humourous repercussions and thematically consolidate each tale as satirical irony. Descriptions of each Antagonist's death are creatively inventive and demeaning, with embellished details and exaggeration. Nowhere are Antagonists treated with Leacock's "kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life."⁷⁹² These portrayals reinforce Israelite superiority, compounding and supporting each plot's violence through humour. The humour becomes another instrument of *YHWH*'s discipline, reprimand and agency as it "throws reflections upon [Israelite] social life."⁷⁹³ These culturally-shaped stories depend upon a consistent negativity towards Aliens, introduced within the redaction and reinforced by the humour of each core.

This prejudice continues in the plots' creative twists. The humour weakens any empathic acceptance of the opposition and intellectually distracts the reader from the violent methods being utilized. The literary structure gives prominence to the amusement created by an individual death, rather than to seriousness of that death and the deaths of massed military forces.

⁷⁹² Leacock, *H. and H.*, 11.

⁷⁹³ Meredith, *The Egoist*, "Prelude."

The humour guarantees the recollection of each story's psychological and symbolic violence. The levity diverts the intellect. The rivalry between Israelites and Aliens is accentuated, their disparities enhanced as the political, religious and social ramifications of the deaths are minimized. A humorous, creative and detailed rendition of each leader's death manages to effectively eliminate the visceral impact of the military ruthlessness of the ensuing genocide, which is evident but not emphasized. Humour distracts the reader's emotional responses to de-emphasize the reality of sudden death and instead to embrace an character's creativity, courage, insightfulness and intellectual strength. This mollifies the reader, strengthening the actions' impact as "amusing," not "horrifying." These are biting and witty comedies intended to "ridicule [each Antagonist's] lack of self-knowledge."⁷⁹⁴

The humour of these tales moderates the theological understanding of violence within each narrative's plot: violence is not an evil, it is appropriate and almost laughable. Without violence, the theological expectations of the Israelite god cannot be enacted. The humour reinforces the relevance of the violence, minimizing its impact and distracting the reader. It subversively minimized the impact of the textual reality for the imaginative reader.

Each story supports Frye's contention of an ultimate integration into the "new" society or a "newer" society. The Protagonist has created a society in harmony with the deity, free from oppression, a social reconciliation.⁷⁹⁵ The commonality of that humour

⁷⁹⁴ Frye, "The Argument," 81-82.

⁷⁹⁵ Frye, *Anatomy*, 43, 182; "Frye, "Argument," 81.

unites empathic people to acknowledge it and the challenges of societal living, necessary for successful integration with their god. If the triumph of Israel is considered the optimum expression of happiness, these stories could be considered humorous because, at each conclusion, the land is at "rest," linguistically implying rest from war and reassertion of calm and civility. Even here, ongoing ambiguities appear since it is not stated that there is a return to *YHWH* worship, or civilian stability *per se*.

An analysis of these pericopes is rife with contradictions. There is a universality of *YHWH*'s effect and influence beyond the borders of the nation and people that self-identify as "Israel." Every modicum of Israelite behaviour, attitudes and religious expectation comes into question. The rigidity of each death, the absolutism of defeat and the manners in which each is portrayed, in the trickster-based and witty scenarios, construct a seemingly inflexible wall between the Chosen People and the Alien. This is immediately contradicted by the unusual Protagonists, whose gender and ethnic origins destroy stereotypes and gender differentiation along with that absolutism. Those who free Israel do not meet expectations of citizenship, gender or tribal affiliation, nor do they necessarily appear to understand their mandate within the *YHWH* scheme of narrative reality. Their behaviour is creative and appropriate to protect themselves, beyond any theological intentionality. The social balance of power and authority is countermanded. The Protagonists are non-conformist, seditious people who exhibit seemingly abnormal behaviours that are not truly anomalous, whose deliberate trickster conduct and speech acts subversively and subconsciously influence the reader to re-enforce an anti-Alien stance, while they themselves violate all those strictures.

These tales challenge readers to examine, and question their own traditions, beliefs and attitudes. Such self-examination and reflection is appropriate for theological deliberation, consistent with the suggestion that such contemplation enhances learning and maturity, as argued by Bettelheim and Peseschkian. Laughter need never be a prerequisite as the reader develops a new perspective on violence; the humour takes away its power but does not necessarily inspire enjoyment *or* laughter. The humour *becomes* another form of *aggression* to complete the moral, physical, emotional, intellectual and theological defeat of the Enemy. Its retention in the text continues that defeat *in perpetuity*.

The male/female dichotomy encourages the use of a feminist lens. Bledstein's suggestion that these texts were authored by women,⁷⁹⁶ posits that the contemporary reader consider these stories satire showing the ironic triumphant superiority of women with depictions of male shortcomings. Bledstein's proposal confronts the theological ramifications of a male/female imbalance within the texts and the society that created them. Physical abilities/dis-abilities, the role of hospitality, the specificities of gender, rank and dominance, the manipulation of language, the Israelite/Alien polarities and the relevance of iconoclastic partiality as underlying motifs are all affected by this proposition.

That the humour has been preserved, and can be identified by contemporary readers, is a signal of the original culture's understanding that the linguistic denigration of the enemy, using such devices as humour, was an apt method of domination, warfare

⁷⁹⁶ Bledstein, "Is *Judges* a Woman's Satire?", 34-57.

and symbolic violence, relevant for the Post-Exilic theological milieu. It also confirms the ensuing redactors' and editors' continuation of that judgement. What materializes is a discriminating, canny rendering of the theological substance.

Theological Implications of Violence

In these pericopes, eighty percent of the plotted time was peaceful. Because violence is the primary thematic, and structural emphasis, this is minimized, implying a societal focus on conflict, not quietude.⁷⁹⁷ Defining violence as "any action which contravenes the rights of others, injury to life, property or person,"⁷⁹⁸ these pericopes clearly disclose subversive and overt physical and symbolic violence beyond the humorous overlay.

Identifiable physical violence is strictly departmentalized. Individual physical acts are painted in detail whereas group warfare is expurgated.⁷⁹⁹ Minimizing descriptions of group violence makes it palatable for the reader. The enhancement of the individual violence and its visceral effects is negated by the injection of humorous and potentially salacious details, combined with a "noble triumphant hero" and an irredeemable villain. Together these strategies allow the inclusion of details that do not overwhelm the plot's overall theme: the creative overthrow of evil invaders.

⁷⁹⁷ Assuming these stories are sequential, 40 peaceful years precede 18 years of oppression before Ehud; before Sisera's rise, 80 years of peace, 20 years of tyranny. Gideon's story begins after 40 peaceful years and 7 captive years, with 40 years peace following, then Abimelech's reign of 3 years. This generates a total time continuum of 200 years of peace, 48 years of despotism. Therefore, while 20% of the time was spent on war activities (actual calculation: 19.3%), 80% was peaceful. No time frame is described for each of the three Protagonists' activities.

⁷⁹⁸ Burt, *Friendship*, 162.

⁷⁹⁹ An inventory ("about 10 000" for Ehud and "all the army" for Barak) does not describe the battle. Abimelech's military and civilian fatalities are also described in the broadest of terms and sanitized. The effect on the civilian population is clearly described with Abimelech but nowhere else.

Subterfuge, covert manipulation of language and other trickery are critical components of the symbolic violence. It begins with the Casualties' ironic, shaming names that shout of Israelite bias. It continues when their original successes are dismissed in short shrift, while their personal and military incompetences are emphasized. It is also expressed through deception when the mendacious Protagonists, Ehud and Ja'el, employ puns, word plays, coded messages and hidden weapons. For *A Certain Woman*, the chicanery is widespread and pervasive, but Abimelech is the source. Abimelech's entire life story hinges upon deceptions and military conquests until his guileful death. Deception is a universal device.

Theologically, violence is equated with justice as a natural divine and state-approved methodology, a reflection of the natural tendency of organized groups to ultimately resort to military conflict.⁸⁰⁰ Israel's sense of national identity and connectedness to their deity depends on successful military endeavours, perpetrated and encouraged by *YHWH*. The deity's involvement is critical to success but is separated from the violence. The *only* tactic considered worthy of textual mention is violence, implying a society ruled by brute force, or at the least, a society that highly regarded it as a management technique.

The boundaries between military and civilian entities become progressively blurred as the stories proceed, showing the increased effects that war/violence has on a population *as a whole*, with its unspoken economic, social and political consequences. Civilians play no role in Ehud's tale and he clearly protects non-combatants whereas

⁸⁰⁰ See Bobbitt, *The Shield*.

Ja'el and A Certain Woman are undeniably civilian. By structuring the stories from least to most civilian involvement, the writers emphasize the impact of Israel's continuing rejection of *YHWH* as they desensitize the reader to the quantity and effects of battle-related death and destruction, encouraging a societal perception of the positiveness of wide-spread violence against Aliens. An ongoing denigration of the enemy continues as each successive Casualty is portrayed as more dishonourable than the previous one.

These pericopes do not support either Girard's Biblical scapegoat or Frye's *pharmakos*. The Casualties are never portrayed compassionately. They are commanding, controlling individuals, elite authority figures who are never marginalized or isolated prior to their deaths. The two groups, Israelite and Alien, never show cooperative behaviour nor do they amalgamate. Each Casualty *is* targeted for death, but the reasons are based on previous behaviour and ethnicity. This is contrary to Girard's hypotheses for a Biblical scapegoat.

Similarly, Frye's *pharmakos* cannot be identified because Frye's *pharmakos* should never be apparent until the dénouement. These pericopes do display archetypal characters who introduce and disseminate humour⁸⁰¹ but the humour is not intentionally created by the Protagonist as Frye proposes. Instead, it is a creation of plot devices, settings and props and its reception is a direct reflection of the individual reader's appreciation.

⁸⁰¹ Frye, "The Argument," 81; Frye, "Secular," 168.

The Casualties' personalities and behaviours have been shaped by the texts' creators to produce Antagonists who will serve as effective *narrative* foils for the Protagonists. The structures that minimize the possibilities of a scapegoat also decrease the likelihood of empathy for the Casualties, strengthening their unsavoury portrayals to reinforce the positive nature of each Protagonist. This creates an either/or characterization dynamic, so the reader is led to empathize with only one character keeping the narrative and theological focus upon Israelite partisanship. The narrative ploy of an Israelite expulsion of Alien invaders reinforces the suggestion of theological ethnocentrism within the concept of Israelite exclusivity. Like so much within these pericopes, this idea is then almost instantly contradicted and subtly challenged by the presence of the triumphant non-Israelite Protagonists. Such textual realities pose quandaries for any who strongly champion ethnic purity and exclusivity on theological grounds.

The absence of Girardian and Fryean patterns reinforces the perceptions that the violence has been employed to support theological themes. Lacking an "acceptable" scapegoat/*pharmakos*, each story becomes more straightforward affirmation of two premises: *YHWH* is all powerful and might is right to attain right (political freedom).

How does one evaluate the overall impact, influences and validity of the violence and humour on any theological exegesis of these texts?

Theological Thoughts and Implications

The whole point of theology is to understand the meaning of God's message to the world today.⁸⁰²

⁸⁰² Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 33.

The redactions give each pericope its religious, or quasi-religious substance and pose theological challenges about the roles and behaviours of *YHWH* and the Chosen People. The cores remain as rollicking, if slightly recast, adventure stories with *märchen* roots, where good triumphs over evil because of devious, creative Protagonists.

Theological commentaries of *Judges* suggest *YHWH*'s power and sovereignty are everlasting and the book is prophetic, warning of the consequences of Israelite movement away from *YHWH*. This is coupled with *YHWH*'s never-ending ability to rescue them. *YHWH* is considered a benevolent and helpful presence with empathy for Israelite malfeasances, but no indication of forgiveness. Surprisingly, when isolated from the *Joshua/Judges/Samuel* spectrum,⁸⁰³ the three pericopes generally reflect different perspectives for the role and personality of *YHWH* from those shown elsewhere.

From my analyses, *YHWH*'s presence and influence as a character seems ill-defined beyond the redactions. Only Deborah's *YHWH*ian power and authority are established in both redaction and core. Ehud's full sanction by *YHWH* in the redaction is not confirmed in the core. Neither Ja'el, who is crucial to the Deborah mega-narrative, nor A Certain Woman are textually affirmed by *YHWH*.

Yet *YHWH* is the premier authority, the arbitrator of all that is appropriate. This is not a loving, accepting god. The redactions generate a *YHWH* who appears to castigate the larger group of those who do not fulfill the divine will with no concession to those

⁸⁰³ Most commentaries view the book of *Judges* as a part of a larger tome, where the division into "books" and "chapters" was for convenience, not literary significance or narrative effect., remembering that the original division of the English bible into chapters and verses was established by Stephen Langton in approximately 1205 CE and consolidated in the 16th century by Stephanos (Etienne), the French printer, among others. Martin Noth seems to be the instigator of this development. Webb, *Judges*, 20-22. Also Soggin, *Judges*, 7-10, 305. Webb, *Judges*, 8-12; Niditch, *Judges*, 8-12.

who were quietly faithful among the heretical group. The deity's relationship and involvement are unilateral: everyone is punished by the wholesale violent overthrow of the dominant Israelite structure, followed by harsh and autocratic foreign governance. This god expects absolute, complete unquestioning obedience; hesitation has social and political consequences. At the same time, within these pericopes, there is no guidance given to indicate what is required by the Israelites. At no point in these pericopes does *YHWH* express empathic emotional or spiritual support for any humans. Nowhere does the deity appear to protect non-combatants or the physical environment or *forgive*. Instead, the deity is detached, like the director in an epic play, who orchestrates the actors and ascribes behaviours upon them.

Yet this is also the god who appears to rescue the Chosen People when they complain directly and even when they say nothing. While the deity seems to *influence* Israelites, creating individual heroes and empowering armies in battle, *YHWH* does not seem to limit the individual *behaviour* that leads to the original Israelite abandonment, implying that humans begin with free will and *YHWH*'s trust. Eventually Israelites are deemed fickle by the deity, who then intervenes. At all times, it is *YHWH* who makes the decision to interfere. Until Abimelech, there is no detailed description of Israelite wrongdoing, other than they "did what was evil," allowing one's imagination full rein. One may suggest that the complexity of the Abimelech rendition marks a nadir of Israelite malfeasances as a reminder to the Exile population.

By choosing Protagonists who do not fit the social and physical expectations of other biblical texts, *YHWH* is challenging prejudices, affirming the validity of all persons

who fulfill divine will. The divisions between public and domestic venues and male/female authority and spaces are confronted. *YHWH* surreptitiously questions every modicum of Israelite behaviour, attitudes and religious expectations.

Israelite sovereignty is directly related to *YHWH*'s approval and collusion. Israelites' relationship with *YHWH* is connected to the individual's and group's understanding that violence to expel non-Israelites from Israelite territory and bring recalcitrant Israelites back to *YHWH*'s fold was a theological necessity. This is violence for the greater (*Israelite*) good, where the impact of violent death as a reality is minimized using humour to make it palatable. Because each Protagonist overcomes adversity in witty and creative ways, the humour weakens the impact of the violence, amending the story's focal point to the humour's incongruities and unexpectedness, creating a theological imperative that maximizes *YHWH*'s role. This is compounded and contradicted by the narrative actuality that the purveyors of Israelite deliverance, as *YHWH*'s designates, are not confirmed as believers, or necessarily Israelite. At no point is religion or worship scrutinized, only political autonomy.

All kinds of violences are condoned. *YHWH* instigates physical violence against the Covenant People, encourages and facilitates their oppression and is the eventual, ironic instrument of their delivery, always through brute force. The text never condemns the Israelites' persecution or the behaviour that frees them from foreign domination. The linguistic choices, the possible demeaning nick-names for the Antagonists and the salutary names for the Protagonists enhance the subversive violence of each text. There is

no consideration of other methods of conflict management, or ethical and moral reflection on the implications of warfare. All creativity demonstrated by Protagonists involves personal violence. Punishment is differential, non-Israelite enemies are ruthlessly eradicated while Israelite renegades are allowed to meld back into the general population without penalty. This would suggest that *YHWH* supported Alien genocide as an acceptable Israelite military strategy. Israelite battle success and the Aliens' absolute destruction are necessary theological ramifications of Israelite misbehaviour. Israelite physical reactions towards the Alien overlords are not profane; they are part of a religious epiphany, in the truest sense of the word, as a manifestation of the will of the Divine, accomplished through human agency. While we may term these methods as draconian in 21st Century terms, *YHWH* indicates that this cycle of apostasy, intervention and rescue is customary and understandable.

There is an increase in ferocity and civilian involvement as *YHWH* seems to become progressively less active in the transfer of power to the enemy. One could suggest that *YHWH's* direct involvement is necessary to minimize military and civilian casualties. The redactors signal a cause-and-effect relationship between Israelites' misbehaviour and *YHWH's* actions with Israelite triumph equated to *YHWH's* mediation. This logic does not consistently transfer to the cores where all assumptions of *YHWH's* divine involvement are just that: conjecture. The use of the deity's name by Ehud, Deborah and Barak functions solely as a literary technique to show the characters' expectation of divine intervention, which it in no way guarantees.

I infer that *YHWH*'s stated presence in the Sisera-Barak battle is a redactive amendment to strengthen the story's religiosity to unify the pericope's three parts. Confirming the battle's success through the deity's influence minimizes functional human-based plot elements: Sisera's inappropriate military manoeuvres and Barak's expertise. It reinforces the theological determination that *YHWH* is the major warrior, the source and guarantor of all Israelite battle successes and the only element necessary for that triumph.

Nowhere can we conclude that *YHWH* is gentle, either to Israelites or to foreigners if we assume an anthropomorphized deity with human-like emotions. Divine judgment is the only standard by which Israelites measure themselves yet neither *YHWH*'s behavioural expectations of the Chosen People nor their malfeasance are specified. There is no description of pre-existing government or ruling structures nor their replacement. *YHWH*'s observable behaviour contradicts the supposition that *YHWH* suffers when Israelites misbehave. There is no indication of emotional commitment, only disciplinary oversight and direct military intervention.⁸⁰⁴ *YHWH*'s focus may appear to be centred upon the Israelites peoples' welfare, yet divine involvement is not equated to peaceful negotiations. Violence is the only tool employed. *YHWH* appears to be mindful of the humorous layer, with irony, wit and wordplays continuing as conspicuous ingredients. Actions predominate; speech's primary purpose is deceit or ironic emphasis. The redactors do not appear to have amended the stories to limit any potential humour, rather they may have enriched it through amended names at the least.

⁸⁰⁴ As McCann suggests, *Judges*, 25.

The rescued Israelites give no indication of relief, gratitude or repentance, nor is there any celebration or ritual religious expression of thanksgiving to *YHWH*. Regret and repentance, as words reflecting Israelite attitudes, are rare in the entire Hebrew Bible and found nowhere in *Judges*.⁸⁰⁵ It is only when one superimposes the redaction's nuclear ideas throughout that one might imply that the Israelites feel contrite about their misbehaviour; there is no other textual indication of that remorse. I suggest that they do not lament their misbehaviour, they regret only that which ensues.

The culmination of each story does not indicate a re-establishment of *YHWH* worship, only a return to a more peaceful existence and a hypothetical reinstitution of normalized life whatever that might have been. No orthodox belief system is espoused, nowhere does *YHWH* demand or institute cultic worship or standardized practices and nowhere do the Israelites participate in any kind of worship.

The deity and the stories are a paradox: an all-powerful, judgmental god who may, or may not be actively involved in the lives of the Chosen People, who may or may not be peace-oriented and obedient to divine instruction. In each story, the Protagonist's primary motivation is not religious fervour, but a quest for political and personal autonomy, the release from oppression.

Can people be acceptable to *YHWH* when their ethnicity is indeterminate? Can they be physically divergent? Do they include all genders? From these stories, it would

⁸⁰⁵ שָׁב, *shv*, translated as "to turn/back" is rare, first in 1Kings 8:47. נָחַם, *nchmt*, "to regret," is even less common. Any synonyms for regret and repentance, like "contrition, penitence, shame" and "guilt" are similarly absent. None of the classic Hebrew words for an indication of Israelite repentance appear in these stories.

seem that each answer must be a resounding yes. One may conclude from these pericopes that all humans are potentially acceptable to *YHWH* and can serve as *YHWH*'s agents. Neither Israelite lineage, ethnicity, gender, disability nor knowledge of the divine is important; the crucial factor is individual behaviour. Anonymity, or the limited involvement of the pivotal Protagonist, highlights the relevance and importance of individual decision making and creativity.

Theological premises for the Babylonian Exiles

The book's overall theme assumes the Israelites' rejection of *YHWH* and the deity's reaction. These progress as a downswing, with an increase in violence and civilian participation and the deity's lessening involvement over the time of the three pericopes.

Tying these thoughts to a theological context for the Babylonian Exiles, the exegete must make several assumptions. Consistent *YHWH*-based support for each plot and each Protagonist is presupposed and the deity's unwavering support for the Protagonists implies that all actions by them against a clearly defined enemy are acceptable including genocide, deception, trickery and all forms of violence. These are their moral exemplars.

These stories present appropriate archetypes for both Israelite clusters of the Post Exilic audiences who first read them. I presuppose that the divisions between the Returning-Exiles and Those-Who-Remained created a power dynamic that likely needed mediation and conciliation to meld into a more unified political and theological entity. These texts present exemplars of behaviour for both groups that transcend ritual-

istic expectations and limitations, emphasizing the commonality of experience submitting examples of success that validate *YHWH*, and occur in deviant ways to de-emphasize previous life experiences, cultic and gender restrictions and permit the reader to enjoy stories that present a sardonic overview of the quest to obtain political independence. As such, these stories could have been a point of unity for the two disparate groups, as they vicariously shared a common text. A humorous overlay on these pericopes places extra stress on the denigration of those being pilloried, highlighting the overall superiority of the victors, both morally and facetiously.

21st Century Canadian Perspectives?

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2Tim. 3:16-17)

This perspective, to which I espouse, recognizes the exegete's authority to evaluate scriptural chronicles and examine role models and behaviour patterns that may contribute to the individual reader's growth in theological, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual understanding,⁸⁰⁶ remembering always, Crossan's caution that "the Bible is ambiguous, and ambiguity requires us to make a choice."⁸⁰⁷

One might anticipate a narrowly-focused set of conclusions with a limited theological validity when one examines three short pericopes alone. I would argue that here such is not the case. Specific tenets may be identified within these stories that are universally applicable to the entire Bible.

⁸⁰⁶ As espoused by Bettelheim and Peseschkian.

⁸⁰⁷ Crossan and Watts, *Who is Jesus*, 79.

I contend that the larger Hebrew and Christian theme of universal human equality can be discerned despite such seemingly contradictory and ethnocentric elements. The overall biblical expectation proposes that the Protagonists have some, however tenuous, understanding of *YHWH* and the Israelite belief system. Knowledge of *YHWH* is not an observable attribute in these pericopes, and the identifiable heroes and defenders of *YHWH*ist society could well be deemed to be non-believers. While it would seem plausible to consider them apostate, since they do not share the beliefs of the text's creators, they do fulfill *YHWH*'s instructions. I conclude that the Protagonists' leadership behaviours are consistent with the expectations of the *YHWH*ist belief system. One may propose that each individual need not be aware of, or *know*, *YHWH* to fulfill godly expectations.⁸⁰⁸

The primary manipulator of history and human achievements is *YHWH*, whose grace and favour are expressed in interesting manifestations of physical power and personal oppression, from which *YHWH* consistently rescues the people for whom the deity has a commitment. This intervention is a manifestation of *YHWH*'s will and grace, not a reaction to human actions or behaviours. Neither vocalized human repentance nor legislated human-based ritualist worship is necessary. It would appear that the commitment could easily be evaluated as primarily one-sided, *YHWH*'s continuing dedication to the well-being of the Chosen People regardless of their reactions(s) to the deity or the deity's guidelines.

⁸⁰⁸ Jean Daniélou, *Holy pagans of the Old Testament: translated by Felix Faber*. (London: Longmans, 1957) and Clark H. Pinnock, *A wideness in God's mercy: the finality of Jesus Christ in the world of religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) both deal with "holy pagans."

I would argue that ubiquity becomes theological: all humans have a theological validity under *YHWH* and can be appropriate role models and agents of the divine without restriction or reservation.⁸⁰⁹ *YHWH* is the sole and final arbitrator of acceptable behaviour, the force that sets standards, enforces them and provides every type of success, military included. *YHWH* exhibits no discrimination towards either humans or methodologies and appears to encourage alternative interpretations beyond that which may seem fair, decorous and genteel. Political upheaval and despotism are equated to lack of religious and moral obedience. The Israelite inability to follow divine mandates does not influence *YHWH*'s commitment to them. *YHWH*'s original response sanctions and enhances Israelite repression and then *YHWH* condemns this oppression by engineering their rescue. This all-encompassing clemency superficially appears to be in contradiction to the remainder of *YHWH*'s behaviour of stoic control and regulation.

Personal behaviour and actions are the keys to salvation, expressed as liberation from oppression. In each story, one person makes the difference. Non-Israelites, marginalized women and the "disabled" successfully complete divine tasks.⁸¹⁰ The women are not hampered by gender lines, or the male/female paradigm of spacial interactions.⁸¹¹ Similarly, it could be argued that Ehud might also be blurring gender lines, within the possible sexual innuendo of his interactions. Actions accomplish the deeds;

⁸⁰⁹ See e.g., *1Pet.* 2:12; *Mt.* 12:50 and *Mark* 3:35.

⁸¹⁰ Consistent with the New Testament where women like the Marys (*John* 20:18 etc.), Martha (*Luke* 10:38-42), Prisca and Phoebe (*Rom.* 16.1-4) play critical roles.

⁸¹¹ E.g., *Luke* 10:29, Mary joins the apostles. Jesus, for one, enters female personal space without reprimand (*Luke* 4:38; *Mark* 5:38-41). Women often appear in public areas (*Luke* 10:40-43; 7:32-36).

words play the jester's role. Social constructs, cultural expectations and stereotypes are destroyed.

The maintenance of an Israelite homeland or the re-establishment of Israelite autonomy is an ideal that has *YHWH's* full support and approval. Acceptable righteousness necessitates the defeat of oppressive overlords and the re-establishment of political autonomy; there are no restrictions to methodology. Divine support is linked to moral behaviour evaluated by divine standards. "Rest" is the optimum goal but there is no indication of religious commitment or ritualistic rites in that phrase.

The rigidity of each death, the absolutism of defeat and the manners in which they occur, separate the Chosen People from the Other. Through the specific choices of Protagonists, the inflexible parameters previously recorded to define the Chosen People are challenged. This provocative situation is compounded by narrative shortfalls when *YHWH's* involvement is implied and imposed by the blanketing redaction but not confirmed within the cores. Every Protagonist was self-selecting and self-serving, each had the choice of the actions, each exercised free will. Their individual strength of character, integrity, and commitment is emphasized without reference to the divine. Their success was a result of strength and personal imaginative behaviour, not divine intervention.

There is no direct affirmation of appreciation of the Protagonists by the larger group of Israelites. The implied, seemingly, successful rule of both Ehud and Deborah after their adventures is implied only in the number of peaceful years. It is further obscured by texts in which both Ja'el and A Certain Woman effectively disappear. All Pro-

tagonists do their deeds knowing only that they were successful by their own observations; there are no external acknowledgements by their peers. What one is led to surmise is the theological relevance of self-directed modesty towards one's own conduct and achievements, such being deemed appropriate by the deity.

The confrontation and contradiction — rigid ethnicity and religious fervour versus questionably qualified heroes — presents and reinforces a humourous intellectual conundrum as it challenges all assumptions. The humour amends each narrative's theological impact as it minimizes the visceral effects of the psychological and symbolic violence, distracting the reader while simultaneously guaranteeing recollection. It subversively facilitates each story's surprise as it engages and posits emotional responses that counteract the horror of death and destruction. It linguistically humiliates the enemy through exaggeration, word plays, puns, wit, and tricksterism, beyond the plot machinations.

That jocularity gives these stories their cachet for some 21st Century readers. Amusement facilitates the story's recall as it minimizes the "real life" impact of the stories' brutal themes and actions, shifting the theological emphasis in the direction that the redactors preferred: the overwhelming importance of *YHWH* in all aspects of life and the insignificance of every human in the accomplishment of *YHWH*'s designs.

While not disparaging or minimizing the problematic and capricious behaviour of these Protagonists and the overall violent, genocidal dimensions in these pericopes, I suggest that these stories affirm and model the *YHWH*-based theological structure found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible that may provide encouragement to present-day

readers. All humans who behave in ways that meet *YHWH*'s expectations and extend, or recover, *YHWH*'s kingdom on earth, are acceptable to *YHWH*. They need not be "believers" or practice acceptable cultic behaviours. No tactic is forbidden to fulfil *YHWH*'s biddings. No human-based social and political constructs or restrictions affect *YHWH*'s evaluation methodology. Negative situations are surmountable because something creative can always be done to alleviate detrimental circumstances. Tyranny, as indicated in the enemy occupation of Israelite land, is considered immoral and must be counter-acted through individual endeavour.

The 2Timothy citation above implies that learning is a never-ending discipline. It suggests a level of personal safety during this learning, which supports Bettelheim and Peseschkian. Thus, the same text can be appropriate for every age, intellectual and emotional levels. The 2Timothy text places no restrictions on the written form of the language, implications or construct, making narratives and humour valid tools to strengthen evidence of *YHWH*'s power and influence. These stories are rare in that they transcend time and culture, making them "contemporary with its own time and ... with ours."⁸¹²

These opinions do not negate the possibility that some of these texts may be unacceptable or even incomprehensible to 21st Century Canadians. Most Canadians have not experienced war, or similar disorders. Canada has never begun a war.⁸¹³ The last enemy military invasion of Canada withdrew in 1814.⁸¹⁴ The general political focus for

⁸¹² Frye, *Anatomy*, 51.

⁸¹³ Canada entered the Boer conflict, WWI, WWII and Korea as allies of the major instigators.

⁸¹⁴ The Niagara Peninsula was the last place in Canada where there was an invasion-based military conflict. *Heritage Moments*. Note should be made of the ongoing conflicts between the First Nations and the colonial/settler groups that became the federal government system.

the Canadian government and the armed forces has been peace-keeping, dating back to the 1950s, which encompasses the life time of 81.38% of the Canadian population.⁸¹⁵ There is a minimal “military complex”; the Canadian military defence budget is negligible.⁸¹⁶ Non-violent tactics, negotiation and peaceful intervention are strategies supported by the education system. Pope Francis declared that murder in God’s name is satanic, and later decried the death penalty, statements that galvanized reflection from commentators beyond Roman Catholic communities.⁸¹⁷ The Nobel Committee in 2018 awarded the Peace Prize to two individuals for “their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.”⁸¹⁸ All these factors influence the Canadian mindset.

While there is a general tone of male dominance over society and women throughout the Hebrew Bible, recalling that preeminence need not be physical or textual, these story presents alternate patterns of behaviour with deadly, forceful, creative women characters. The women successfully compete with, and defeat, dangerous men. Each story's humour depends upon questioning the roles of men in leadership. Such

⁸¹⁵ Beginning during the Korean Conflict and continuing through the United Nations, through the political influence of Lester Pearson. In recent years, there has been amendments to this policy. Taking a base line of 1955. Data from Index Mundi, “Canada Demographic Profile 2018”. https://www.indexmundi.com/canada/demographics_profile.html , accessed 06.10.2018.

⁸¹⁶ The American defence budget in 2015 was \$637 billion (Am.) for 321 million people or \$1 990.65/per person. “Historical Tables, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2015,” *United States Government Publishing Office 2015*. Canada had 35.8 million people the same year with a defence budget of \$19 billion, \$53.07 (Cdn.) per person. Lee Berthiaume, “Canadian military Spending by the numbers,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, September 3 2014.

⁸¹⁷ The Times of Israel, 14 September 2016. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/murder-in-gods-name-satanic-pope-says-at-mass-for-is-slain-priest/> . The Independent August 2 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/pope-francis-death-penalty-catechism-capital-punishment-trump-executions-catholic-church-vatican-a8475026.html>

⁸¹⁸ Adomaitis, Nerijus and Terje Solsvik, “Advocates for sex-assault victims receive None Peace Prize”, *Globe and Mail*, October 6 2018, A7.

scenarios extend the reader's knowledge base, affirming creative responses to oppositional situations. It can be argued that the stories portray a god who encourages both genders to engage in creative problem solving and leadership.

It is understandable why such Biblical plots could create concern and make women uncomfortable. The rise of the #MeToo movement of 2017 encourages responses to these plots.⁸¹⁹ It is easy to identify that sexual exploitation could be considered within Ehud's and Ja'el's stories. The episodes before Thebez clearly detail violence against women. Unstated but implied are other ramifications of war: sexual abuse, deprivation, malnourishment, physical mistreatment, all of which can be directly linked to specific men's behaviours. For me, these narratives do not fit the context of this valid, appropriate movement, since it concentrates on behaviours and patterns found within the normality of "peaceful" times, whereas our narratives arise within a war footing.

I would propose that, for 21st Century Canadian female biblical scholars and theologians, the idea of physical subjugation and war are unusual, and potentially unacceptable, expressions of salvation. Violence seems equated with divine justice. There is light "guidance," negotiation or intercession, as is evident in narratives where guidance and intervention are employed at the town gates.⁸²⁰ Nor is empathy for any level of deviation on the Israelites' part shown within the narrative structure.⁸²¹ Divine participation signals military intervention, physical oppression, persecution and repression of the

⁸¹⁹ #MeToo is a hashtag campaign to encourage women who have been sexually assaulted to self-identify to raise awareness and highlight its pervasiveness. Not to forget the 2018 American Supreme Court appointment brouhaha about Brett Kavanaugh.

⁸²⁰ See *Ruth* 4:1-11.

⁸²¹ A "Geneva Conventions" kind of intervention or accordance is not in evidence.

Chosen People. *YHWH* shows no “steadfast love, grace and mercy,”⁸²² rather the opposite. No mercy is shown to military non-Israelites. *YHWH*’s expectations and beneficence are not clarified beyond “the land had rest,” that neither confirms nor denies divine involvement and any change in religious status. Worship rituals and behaviour limitations of the recently-freed Israelites are not indicated or explained, and the text does not affirm *YHWH*’s approval.⁸²³ Forgiveness is always forthcoming from the deity, or at least it is *implied*, but a great deal of death precedes it.

Although contemporary readers may find the juxtaposition of humour and violence troubling, it is worth remembering that narratives are a reflection of the values, morals, theologies, humours and quirks of the society in which they are created⁸²⁴ and the ritualistic way in which these three are constructed, confirms their relevance.⁸²⁵ The additional point that these three stories remained in a religious canon for almost 2 000 years, leads me to suggest that they remained because of their veracity and theology.

Story telling is everything.⁸²⁶

⁸²² McCann, *Judges*, 24-25.

⁸²³ At no time is ritual worship mentioned in the phrase “the land had rest.” *Josh.* (11:23, 14:15); *Judges* (3:11, 3:30, 5:31, 8:28); *2Chron.* (41:1, 6) and *1Mac.* 14:4. In three examples, the sentence is completed with the equivalent of “And the land had rest *from war*” (*Josh.* 11:23, 14:15; *2Chron.* 14:6)

⁸²⁴ “Narrative does as society does.” Don Michael Hudson, “Living in a land of Epithets: Anonymity in *Judges* 19-21,” *JSOT* 19, 62 (June 1994), 49-66.

⁸²⁵ “Stories that matter attract a ritual way of being told,” Bradshaw and Hoffman, *Passover and Easter*, 5.

⁸²⁶ Global Television Toronto motto for news programming December 2012.

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ESVS: English Standard Version Bible; GENEVA: The Geneva Bible; KJV: King James Version; KJVS: King James Version Study Bible; MESSAGE: The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Terms; NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint; NKJVS: The New King James Study Bible; NLT-SE: New Living Translation Second Edition JJ

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version; RV: Revised Version; WEB: World English Bible; Accordance 12.2.5, its Masoretic Text (Biblia Hebraica), and the NRSV.

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