The Book and Its Narratives

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The Book and Its Narratives: A Critical Examination of Some Synchronic Studies of the Book of Judges

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Abstract

During recent decades, there has been a trend among biblical scholars towards applying methods borrowed from literary studies to the familiar texts of the Old and New Testaments. A major reason for this reorientation is the search for a meaningful and interpretable text; hence, it can be seen as a protest against the historical-critical school and its ambition to reconstruct an authentic text by means of a diachronic analysis. Synchronic scholars argue for a new understanding of the biblical text, claiming that the object of interpretation is the text in its present form, regarded as a literary production. Consequently, they can study texts that are commonly considered to be patchworks or conglomerations as meaningful literary works regardless of their pre-history or authorship.

In this thesis I do not focus on studies that concern individual narratives or poems but on those that apply a synchronic approach to large units of texts such as books or collections of books. My example is the book of Judges, and the fundamental issue is whether the synchronists' description of its structure and of the relationship between the individual narratives and the larger text is sustainable.

Through analyses of the book's introduction and the stories about Ehud, Deborah, Jephthah and Samson, I argue that the scholars under consideration are often compelled to form interpretations that are in conflict with a "natural" or "intuitive" reading. I hence claim that they are not reading these stories in accordance with the conventions that are generally applied to narratives. The arguments in which they refer to implicit devices, allusions and the structure of the larger text are assessed as unconvincing.

I argue that that these scholars make two common theoretical mistakes. Firstly, they do not consider the specific restrictions that apply to "the literary point of view". Secondly, they disregard the fact that narratives are autonomous and hence resistant to reworking. If several independent narratives are put together, they are not thereby transformed into a larger single narrative even though they may contain common patterns and motifs. Hence, the individual story represents the primary level of meaning and discrete elements are understood as motifs within a literary construction. The stories of the book of Judges are therefore texts within a text. This explains why the book lacks a coherent ideology or morality.

The tensions and ambiguities in the book cannot be resolved by classifying it as a literary production and studying it synchronically: on the contrary, doing this confirms and explains the difficulties in the book – that is, the inconsistent character of both the book and its narratives and the bizarre events that are recounted therein – and its polyphonic character.

Preface

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I. Introduction

During recent years, the two disciplines of biblical studies and literary studies have come closer to each other. On the one hand, a group of biblical scholars have used methods taken from literary criticism in their study of biblical texts instead of, or as a complement to, the traditional historical-critical method.[1] On the other hand, literary critics have studied the Bible as literature instead of as history or theology.[2]

> Over the past couple of decades, however, there has been a revival of interest in the literary qualities of these texts, in the virtues by which they continue to live as something other than archaeology. The power of the Genesis narratives or of the story of David, the complexities and refinements of the Passion narratives, could be studied by methods developed in the criticism of secular literature. The effectiveness of this new approach – or approaches, for the work has proceeded along many different paths – has now been amply demonstrated. Professional biblical criticism has been profoundly affected by it; but, even more important, the general reader can now be offered a new view of the Bible as a work of great literary force and authority, a work of which it is entirely credible that it should have shaped the minds and lives of intelligent men and women for two millennia and more.

This account, written by literary scholars Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, can be found in the introduction to their edition of *The Literary Guide to the Bible*.[3] The methodological reorientation adopted by the two editors is claimed to have rescued the Bible from the domain of archaeology and to have benefits for both professional biblical scholars and general readers.[4]

However, the new literary study of the Bible is, as Alter and Kermode rightly observe, not a unified movement, and can hardly be described as *a* method or *an* approach. Rather, it seems as if biblical scholars, at least in some quarters, have opened the floodgates for a range of new methods or perspectives that have characterized general studies of literature.[5]

The reorientation away from the classical historical-critical method towards new and different methods among biblical scholars has, of course, been adopted to a greater or lesser degree in different countries and at different universities and colleges. In some places its influence has probably been very shallow. However, the number of scholars applying modern methods borrowed from the study of literature, and the studies that have been published within this particular field, are considerable.

A Search for a Meaningful and Interpretable Text

Why has this reorientation taken place? Why are biblical scholars applying new methods to the study of the Bible? Why, suddenly, are literary critics interested in the Bible? It is, as usual, very difficult to establish the different reasons and factors explaining why scholars within a particular field start to apprehend their specific

objects in a new way or to use new methods in their analysis of these objects. In the passage quoted, Alter and Kermode suggest that an important reason in this case is that traditional biblical studies have not done justice to the literary character of the biblical texts, and, as a consequence, have been unable to explain their influence on our culture. This is one of many possible explanations, although probably one that is more appropriate for literary critics than for biblical scholars. Another explanation, very relevant for this study, is that some biblical scholars in particular are dissatisfied with the historical-critical method, as this method, involving the attempt to reconstruct an authentic text and interpret it in relation to its historical context, has led to a situation where the student of the Bible lacks a meaningful and interpretable text. According to this explanation, such scholars have turned to new methods in order to regain the text. Even though it cannot be claimed that this is the sole reason, or even one of the primary reasons, behind this methodological reorientation, it is interesting to note that biblical scholars often describe the two different approaches, with terms borrowed from linguistics, as a conflict between diachronic and synchronic studies. Diachronic studies adopt the historical-critical method and its historical approach. For the Bible, this involves a study focusing, according to its critics, on genetic explanations and segmentation or fragmentation of the text. The term "synchronic" describes studies that approach the present text as a meaningful literary unit. Kermode stresses this aspect in a lecture about literary studies on biblical narrative:

> On the whole they have not concerned themselves with deconstructive analysis; they use more traditional methods, though with a new intensity. But they are a varied company, and generalization is difficult. For example, it is true of some but by no means of the majority that they have simply bracketed the question of historical reference; some, perhaps most of them, regard it as inescapable. But by and large they agree that whatever else the Bible may be, it is certainly, in the first place, a form of literature; and they go on from there in their different ways. Some are indebted to the Formalist revival of the sixties, French and Soviet, some to various kinds of 'reader-response' theory, some to the severe style of narratological analysis developed in Israel. Some are eclectic. On the other matter they tend to agree. Though not disrespectful of traditional scholarship, they choose to treat narratives in the forms in which they have come down to us, ignoring speculative earlier versions (truer, perhaps, to fact) which may lie behind them.[6]

In spite of the fact that Kermode points out that there is great variation among those scholars borrowing methods from literary studies in their study of biblical narratives, he also makes clear that they all tend to agree about the text. It seems thus as if the common denominator in this methodological reorientation is not primarily the method or methods, but rather a mutual understanding of the object studied. That object is the final version of the text, a text that is regarded as literature. This aspect of the reorientation is of course closely connected with a new understanding of textual meaning and of where this meaning can be found. We

can identify the same progression – from a notion where the meaning of a text was restricted to the original author's intention, to the notion that a text's meaning can only be found in its own form, or that meaning ensues from the encounter between text and reader – as in secular literary studies during the twentieth century.

This description indicates that there is an interesting connection in literary studies of the Bible between the assumption that the text is to be regarded as literature and studied with appropriate methods on the one hand and a synchronic approach on the other. Some scholars seem almost to assume that a literary approach automatically leads to a synchronic harmonizing and synthesizing interpretation even if few are as outspoken as Richard G. Bowman when he describes "narrative criticism". Bowman claims that the adherents to this method share three common presuppositions:

> (1) the final, present form of the text functions as a coherent narrative; (2) this narrative has a literary integrity apart from the circumstances relating to the compositional process, the historical reality behind the story, or the interpretative agenda of the reader; and (3) an analysis of the literary features of this narrative will reveal an interpretative focus.[7]

According to the first of these presuppositions, the text – in Bowman's case the book of Judges – is a coherent narrative.[8] The second and third are variants of the assumption that the meaning of a text is related to its form and do not concern us here. But we have to ask if it really is obvious that a scholar who does a literary analysis presupposes that any mere collection of linguistic signs constitutes a coherent narrative or text. Might it not be possible that a literary interpretation – an interpretation that requires a coherent text – runs into difficulties precisely because the interpreter is not able to find any coherence? A literary interpretation is usually performed on a literary unit, but does such an analysis automatically make a text into a unit?

However, it is important to call attention to the fact that there is a difference between scholars who treat units like stories or cycles of stories synchronically and scholars who apply this approach to entire books, collections of books or the canon. It is mainly the latter group that will be examined in this study. My example will be the book of Judges and the relationship between the stories in the book and the "larger text". The basic question can be formulated in the following way: If the larger text, in this case the book of Judges, can be understood as a coherent and consistent narrative, then is it possible for each individual story to be understood in the same way? Are not several coherent and consistent narratives actually an anthology rather than a single textual unit?

The Book of Judges as Literature

The biblical scholar David M. Gunn gives a survey of the literary study of Old Testament (OT) narratives in an article. He also tries to make some predictions

about the future for this kind of study: "I close with a few further prognostications. First, I expect to see soon appearing some major new readings of extensive segments of narrative, with the book of Judges a favourite subject, Kings following hard in its wake, and soon the whole Deuteronomistic History."[9] Gunn is critical of the existing studies in this particular field, claiming, among other things, that scholars using this approach have been too influenced by New Criticism, and that they have consequently neglected the role of the reader in their interpretations. He believes that there will be major change in this area in the future, and that the study will become more reader-oriented. This will result in a higher degree of relativism.[10] If Gunn's predictions come true, and it certainly seems likely, it will mean that the literary study of the Bible will challenge traditional approaches in two major areas. The first challenge is that the stress on the literary qualities of the text will result in a fictionalization of the Bible with the result that historical aspects will be marginalized. The second challenge is that an emphasis on reader-oriented interpretations will result in a higher degree of relativism and subjectivism.

An important aspect of this approach, of which Gunn, in spite of his criticism, seems to approve, is its synchronic starting point. This implies, at least in some cases, that large units of text, which historical-critical scholars have regarded as patchwork, can be treated as coherent literary texts. This assumption is a condition for his prediction that the book of Judges and other parts of the so-called Deuteronomistic History (DH)[11] – Gunn refers to them as "extensive segments of narrative" – will receive special attention in the future. These books are generally regarded as conglomerates and patchworks, without the kind of coherence and consistency that is usually found in a literary text. According to the dominant hypothesis, they contain older material that has been revised in several steps. Therefore, these books are a particular challenge for scholars who claim that the final text is a meaningful literary unit.

The Book and the Narratives

The belief that it is possible to read and interpret for example the book of Judges as a literary unit, that is as a coherent and consistent text, if methods taken from literary studies are applied, is the subject of this study. Scholars who maintain this view claim that there exist, besides the strategies used in historical-critical studies, strategies of interpretation according to which the book is meaningful regardless of its pre-history and authorship. They also assume that those strategies can be described as literary.

However, it is not at all obvious that a literary analysis of the book confirms this belief. There are at least two issues that make the connection between synchronic studies and literary methods problematic in this particular case, even if we accept the premiss that the biblical text can be studied in the same way as secular literature. The first issue concerns the definition of text and the factors that consti-

tute a literary text; that is, what criteria are used in an explicit or implicit way when we decide whether a particular collection of linguistic signs shall be regarded as a coherent literary unit. Even though this question is relevant for literature in general, it has a special relevance to the study of the Bible, as the books of the Bible have been formed through a long and almost boundless process. For now, we can identify two distinct extreme positions on the text issue. According to the first position, arising from a simple model of communication, a text must have an author and a specific historical context. In contrast, the other position is the claim that anything placed within the covers of a book is a text. These are, of course, extreme positions, and eventually we must introduce to the discussion such topics as genre, degree of coherence and so on. Closely connected with the issue of text, and the factors that constitute a text, are questions about meaning and interpretation.

A second important issue raised by the assumption that the book of Judges is a meaningful text is the question about the relationship between independent narratives and a larger text. I will speak about these levels as the micro- and macro-levels of the book. If independent biblical narratives really do combine to form "larger texts", then we must ask ourselves in what way this will affect our reading and interpretation of the separate narratives. For now, I will again describe two extreme positions. The first would be to assume that the different levels of meaning stand in a hypotactic relationship to each other so that the narratives receive a new or modified function and meaning when they are integrated into a larger text. According to the second position, narratives are resistant to integration, and will therefore function as texts within the text in a paratactic relationship with each other and with the larger text or texts. These texts can and will create tensions in the book that cannot be harmonized.

A Topic for a Literature Department

The study of the Bible is usually conducted in a theology department of a university and not in a department of literature. However, the fact that the two disciplines have come closer during recent decades raises new questions and suggests new areas of research. For example, it is interesting for a narratologist to examine whether a paradigm that has been developed in the study of fictional novels from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be applied to texts from another time and culture. For instance, can the kind of dialogical poetics that Mikhail Bakhtin claims to have found in Dostoevsky's novels be found in the DH, as Robert Polzin claims?[12] Biblical scholars, on the other hand, must not only try to keep up-to-date with the many new methods and perspectives that are now available, but must also reflect upon and evaluate these methods and the interpretations they have produced. New research within literary studies often provides new perspectives on old and well-known material. There are, however, good reasons for studies that examine the theoretical basis for these perspectives and evaluate the problems and benefits they generate.

Method

This study can be described as narratological. Modern narratology is a rapidly expanding field and this is not the place to present a thorough survey. I will instead provide a running analytical discussion and deal with specific issues as they arise. However, it is necessary to give a preliminary account of some basic premisses.

Two of the most significant precursors of narratology are formalism and structuralism. These are in their turn influenced by linguistics.[13] This is a vital link since it is often claimed that literary texts communicate according to rules in a way that is analogous to the rules of grammar and syntax. This claim implies that communication always relies on conventions and that these can be analysed and described. An objection that is sometimes raised against a literary study of the Bible is that sacred literature communicates in a unique way, or that literature from another time and culture reflects conventions well known to the first readers but now long forgotten. While acknowledging that we should not impose conventions from our own time on this literature in an uncritical and anachronistic way, I still claim that all communication needs conventions and that it must be possible to describe and analyse them. It is furthermore interesting to note that the rules of narratives are surprisingly consistent, a fact that has led some scholars to speak about the universality of narratives and basic cognitive structures.[14]

As a consequence I shall concentrate on how the text communicates meaning and shall present quite simple analyses of some of the narratives in the book. I shall even claim that these interpretations are natural or intuitive. While whether they should be more natural or intuitive than other interpretations cannot be proved, I still think that these designations are valuable, since I assume that readers have a fundamental knowledge, conscious or unconscious, of the grammar of narratives and are competent to understand their narrative meaning.[15]

The premiss that narratives are formed and read according to identifiable conventions puts the focus on questions such as: How adjustable are narratives as elements placed in new units? Are there different possible models for the relationship between narratives and a larger text? Can the relation between the micro- and macro-levels clarify at least some of the difficulties related to the interpretation of the book of Judges?[16] The description of this study as narratological can hence be qualified. My main purpose is not, for example, to classify the stories in the book or to describe them as narrative structures, even though such descriptions can be found in this thesis. I am instead oriented towards certain problems and intend to examine whether narratological theory can be beneficial in cases of fundamental disagreement regarding the interpretation of the text.

Interpretation – A Difficult Concept

Monroe C. Beardsley has described three different aspects of the elusive concept of interpretation: explication, elucidation and interpretation.[17] Explication deno-

tes chiefly the linguistic and grammatical understanding of the text, elucidation the understanding of implications and gap filling, while interpretation is reserved for comprehension of the theme or thesis in the text. This distinction implies that the process of interpretation involves different levels of understanding.

Lars-Åke Skalin analyses different kinds of interpretations in *Karaktär och Perspektiv* [Character and Perspective] chiefly in relation to the aspect of elucidation. He argues that it is possible to make a distinction between interpretations that are rule-bound and those that are not.[18] This should not be confused with a distinction between true and false interpretations; it is rather a separation between interpretations that are made according to praxis and those that are not.[19] Skalin's point is that it is possible to speak about "disturbing" interpretations and interpretations that do not disturb us. Hence we react in different ways when we come across an interpretation that differs from our own. If we take a closer look at an interpretation that is not "disturbing" and the text that has been analysed we will be able to find out and describe how it has come about. That is, we recognize the process of interpretation although we ourselves have a different understanding. This can mean that we change our opinion, since the alternative interpretation seems better than ours does. However, a "disturbing" interpretation is something completely different. We realize, when we come across this kind of interpretation, that if it is correct then we ourselves must have read the text in a wrong way – not in the sense that there might be elements that we have not observed or understood but in the sense that we have used an inappropriate set of rules and have not been competent readers.

In this study I will therefore discuss whether interpretations of the book of Judges and its narratives that are presented by scholars with a synchronic approach are to be regarded as "disturbing" or not – that is, whether they demand that we read the book and its stories in a way that does not conform with the conventions/rules that apply to narratives in general.

A Specific Language Game

A second important premiss in this study is that readers make a distinction between the interpretation of fictional and of non-fictional narratives as two different activities.[20] An implicit assumption is, of course, that the reader is not actually interpreting the story or the discourse at all, but is interpreting the act of storytelling. The difference between fictional and non-fictional narratives is therefore not whether the events are true or not, but is related to the language game and its purpose.

A fictional narrative can be described as a "narration–narrative". Such a narrative is a separate and complete unit: it is mainly scenic and its aim is to entertain and hold the listener's or reader's attention. A non-fictional narrative is first and foremost a report and has therefore a higher degree of referentiality. The assumption that the narratives in the Bible are literary – that is, fictional in conformity

with the above-mentioned description – generates questions such as: How do we interpret fictional narratives? How do we fill in gaps and understand different cruxes in a fictional narrative? How do we comprehend fictional characters? How do we interpret values in a story? These questions relate to Peter Lamarque's *Fictional Points of View* and his thesis about a "literary point of view".[21] Some of these issues will be addressed in this study.

Material

I have divided the material that I will use in this study into four different priority groups.[22] The first group consists of the biblical text itself. I will use a common version, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with American spelling. In those cases where I use another version or my own translation of the Hebrew text, this will be clearly stated in the text. The second group comprises studies of the book of Judges or the DH that more or less closely adhere to a synchronic approach. This group contains Robert Polzin's *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, Barry Webb's *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading*, Lillian Klein's *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, Robert O'Connell's *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* and Yairah Amit's *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*.[23] It is obviously a simplification to group these studies under a single label, but, in spite of the fact that these scholars hold different opinions on many specific matters, they share some important features. The first is the claim that the book of Judges is a meaningful and coherent text. The second is the more-or-less explicit declaration that they analyse the book with methods developed in literary studies. These agreements, together with the fact that they study the book of Judges rather thoroughly, explain why they are grouped together in this study as representatives of a certain kind of approach. Tammi J. Schneider's *Judges* will only be commented upon in connection with some of the text studies, since it was published just before my own study.[24] Schneider's study is very close to the synchronic approach as I have described it, and can hence be regarded as yet another example of this trend.[25]

A third group contains different kinds of material, as, for example, a group of commentaries. I have mainly confined myself to the three commentaries that A. Graeme Auld describes as "the standard commentaries in English":[26] John Gray's *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Robert G. Boling's *Judges* and Alberto J. Soggin's *Judges*.[27] This group also includes studies by scholars with a feminist and eclectic approach, such as J. Cheryl Exum, Phyllis Trible and Mieke Bal. I have located these studies in this group because they diverge from the synchronic approach that I intend to analyse.[28] Another important study included here is David Jobling's structuralist study *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*.[29] This group also includes articles that deal with either the entire book or separate sections from a literary or synchronic perspective.

The fourth group contains such studies on OT poetics as Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Simon Bar-Efrat's *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Adele Berlin's *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Jean Louis Ska's *"Our Fathers Have Told Us": Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, and David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell's *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*.[30] These scholars adopt an approach that might be described as formalistic but not necessarily synchronic and moreover they have not written about the entire book as a literary composition, a text.[31]

The Book of Judges and the Deuteronomistic History

Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings are usually regarded as belonging to the historical books of the OT and are placed immediately after the Pentateuch in the Christian Bible. In the Jewish Bible they are placed among the prophets and are therefore also known as the "Former Prophets". These books recount the history of Israel from the occupation of the land under Joshua (c.1200 BC) until the Babylonian exile (c.586 BC).[32] While the material in the books seems to be relatively disparate, it has some degree of coherence. The division into books is, however, rather arbitrary, and is usually not reckoned to be of any significance. These facts, among others, have challenged biblical scholars, who have tried to produce a hypothesis about the pre-history of these books that can explain their character. For some time they searched for sources similar to those in the famous hypothesis regarding the Pentateuch. According to this approach, different sources that cover a range of material would explain their coherence, just as the inconsistencies in the texts would be explained by the fact that the sources themselves had not been thoroughly revised. In 1943 Martin Noth hypothesized that the entire history had been put together by a Deuteronomistic redactor during the exile (c.586–539 BC).[33] According to this hypothesis, which has been generally accepted although in a modified form and in several different versions, the character of the work, with its inconsistencies and coherence, is explained by the fact that the editor put together already existing material into a history.[34] The material is reworked only slightly, but is held together by the chronology, style, and a common theme that the redactor imposed on it. However, the degree of coherence is disputed, and furthermore the DH is an earlier text-level than the canonical books. The division into books and certain sections of the text is the result of later reworking. Noth suggested that the intention of the Deuteronomistic redactor was to explain the exile. The theme of the history is accordingly that the national catastrophe is the logical result of a history characterized by Israel's unfaithfulness to God and his covenant.

The books of Joshua and 1 Samuel 1 – 1 Kings 12 encompass relatively short periods of time, and the narrative pace is therefore rather slow. The book of Judges and the later part of Kings relate to longer periods of time and accordingly

have a faster narrative pace.[35] The former books are held together by a few central characters that function both as protagonists and as unifying motifs. For instance, the account of the united kingdom in 1 Samuel 1 – 1 Kings 12 is centred on four main characters: Samuel, Saul, David and Solomon. The redactor proclaims his theme or message in these books mainly by letting the main characters give long speeches at important turning points in history. In these speeches, they interpret their time in accordance with the general theme of the work.[36] The book of Judges and the later parts of Kings include many interesting characters, but these are not used as unifying motifs in the same way as in the other parts of the history. Consequently, the redactor proclaims his theme in other ways. He does this mainly through plain and clear patterns and through the voice of the narrator, but he also uses, as in the other books, prophets, angels and even God as his messengers.

The Book of Judges

The book of Judges is not regarded as an independent part of the DH, and sections of it such as the prologue and Chapter 17–21 are generally treated as later additions.[37] The Deuteronomistic redactor has used pre-existing stories that might already have been placed in a book, giving them a chronological scheme and applying the local stories to the nation of Israel. In spite of the fact that scholars usually assume that the redactor has reworked the stories only very slightly, it has been claimed that they no longer have their original function.[38] The prologue and the reiterated frame make the narratives into examples of the schema of sin – punishment – prayer – salvation that, according to the redactor, characterizes the history of his people.

The book has a relatively exhaustive introduction (1:1–3:6) in which the new epoch that started after the death of Joshua is described. The introduction also contains a variety of explanations for the disturbing fact that God has not driven out the former inhabitants of the land, and outlines the cyclical pattern that characterizes the stories of different judges presented in the book. Gunn gives the following description of the six elements in this cycle: "(1) Israel does what is evil in YHWH's sight; (2) YHWH gives/sells the people into the hand of oppressors; (3) Israel cries to YHWH; (4) YHWH raises up a saviour/deliverer; (5) the deliverer defeats the oppressor; (6) the Land has rest."[39] In spite of the fact that the introduction serves as an exposition and an interpretation of the book, it has caused its readers and interpreters many problems as it lacks coherence and consistency. A well-known example is the introduction of Joshua in 2:6. A common explanation for these problems is that two different introductions have been put together. Moreover, the different accounts in the introduction about the fate of the inhabitants of the land are at least partly contrary.

The main part of the book contains stories about different judges[40] who were supposedly active during the time between the death of Joshua and the inauguration of the monarchy (c.1400/1200–1000 BC).[41] They are mainly presented as

charismatic war-heroes who, endowed with the spirit of God, delivered the people in times of distress. It is generally held that the redactor integrated the different stories in his history without major changes.[42] Accordingly, the character of the narratives varies, even though they all reflect the cyclical pattern outlined in the introduction to the book. However, this pattern is not static.

The story about Othniel recounted in 3:7–11 has a paradigmatic character as it follows the pattern described in the introduction very closely. The following narrative about Ehud (3:12–30) has a very different style. In this narrative we are told, in a lively and dramatic way, about the "one-armed" hero who assassinates the fat king of Moab. The double causality that was introduced in the introduction – in which God's relationship with Israel is seen as the cause behind, and in the actions of, both the human protagonist and antagonist[43] – can be found also in this narrative, but it is not focused in the same way as in the story of Othniel. In 3:31 we are told, in a single verse, about Shamgar and his remarkable exploits. Thereafter follows the famous narrative about Deborah, Barak and Jael and their conflict with King Jabin and his general, Sisera (4:1–23). Like the story of Ehud, this narrative can be described as a story with a quite simple plot and a single main conflict. The next chapter, Chapter 5, is a hymn in which Yahweh is praised for his support in the war. Chapter 6–8 is a cycle of episodes about Gideon and the war against Midian. In close connection with this story comes the tale about Abimelech, Gideon's son by his concubine (Chapter 9). Abimelech kills his seventy brothers after his father's death and successfully seizes power with the support of the citizens of Shechem. The narrative has a retributive character, and in the end Abimelech and his supporters suffer a suitable fate. Chapter 10 starts with some short notices about Tola (v. 1–2) and Jair (v. 3–5). We are told who they were, that they judged Israel, that Jair had thirty sons, and where they were buried. The story of Jephthah is told in 10:6–12:7. The narrative contains five different episodes that all relate to the protagonist and the war against the Ammonites. Chapter 12:8–15 is a short report about Ibzan, Elon and Abdon. The latter, we are told, had forty sons and twenty grandsons. Chapter 13–16 relate the well-known story about Samson.

Two stories of a new and different character follow the section about Samson. These do not display the pattern presented in the introduction, and they are not about a judge or any other hero. They can instead be described as chains of events. The first story is about Micah, who steals eleven hundred pieces of silver from his mother to make an idol. After a time he employs a Levite as his priest. When the tribe of Dan passes by in search of new territory, they steal the idol and the priest and bring them to the city of Laish. The final narrative is about another Levite who has gone to Bethlehem to bring back a concubine who has escaped from him. On his way home he and his company spend the night in Gibeah where a mob rapes and kills his concubine. The Levite cuts the body in pieces and sends them throughout the territory of Israel. Israel is thereby called to a holy war against the

tribe of Benjamin. The fortunes of the war change repeatedly, but Israel finally defeats and almost exterminates the tribe of Benjamin. During these last stories the resigned narrator claims over and over again that this was a time of anarchy, and the book ends with the words: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." (21:25)[44]

Two Problems for the Common Reader and for the Professional Interpreter of the Book

A basic problem for the reader or interpreter of the book of Judges is that both the book and its stories seem to lack consistency and coherence. On the surface the book therefore appears to be a loosely connected anthology of narratives from roughly the same time and the same area. However, a closer look reveals that the narratives have been reworked and provided with elements that must be understood as an attempt to give the book a common pattern. This editing is nevertheless rather incomplete. The book certainly has an introduction but hardly a resolution, and it is difficult to find out in what way the separate narratives relate to each other and to the macro-level. This is important since a great deal of the research regarding this book has centred on the message or ideology of these texts. The focus has been on issues such as: What is the message of the book? Where can this message be found? How do the different levels of meaning in the book relate to each other?

Another problem is the bizarre content of many of the stories. Marc Brettler expounds the problem: "Why have these odd stories been integrated in the book of Judges?"[45] He elaborates the question further in the same article: "To phrase the problem differently: Is there any plausible historical or ideological background that would help explain why the author/editor chose/wrote these particular stories and arranged them in this order?"[46] Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, in a similar point of departure, wants to see studies like those done on the *Odyssey* since he thinks that these two books have a comparable structure. This study should, according to Gros Louis, focus on issues such as: "Why these heroes? Why these particular stories? Why in this particular order?"[47] These scholars manifest a common assumption among biblical scholars that biblical texts are, regardless of which genre they seem to belong to, always first and foremost ideological.[48] It is therefore not possible to explain the bizarre character of some of these stories by reference to such motivations as plot or historical veracity. That is why a scholar like Brettler is not content with compositional or historical accounts, but accepts only an ideological reason (a message) that explains these stories and their content.

The lack of consistency on the compositional level and coherence on the ideological level has been handled in different ways in the history of interpretation. Precritical and conservative scholars seem to regard the book as history. The author/editor intended to write down as truthfully as possible the most important events in Israel during the days of the Judges. The bizarre content of the stories is explai-

ned by the fact that it is history and a consequence of turbulence in the society. The author has, according to this reasoning, told us what happened, not what ought to have happened. Scholars within the historical-critical tradition have solved the problems in another way. Both the form and the content of the book and its stories are explained as a result of the long and complicated process that shaped them. However, this solution is not accepted by scholars with a synchronic approach, who treat the final version of the book as a single coherent text.[49] Consequently, they deny that the book has a structure that lacks consistency and try to show that the stories and their remarkable content are meaningful features in a larger composition and that they dramatize the ideological message of the book. They cut the Gordian knot and simply claim that there are no problems and that the final version of the text is coherent and meaningful.

Disposition

The subject of this study is thus one aspect of the so-called literary approach to the Bible. I will confine my attention to a group of scholars who claim that they can interpret the book of Judges as a coherent and meaningful literary text and that the book or the DH contains a coherent religious message. However, it is possible to object to this claim that other scholars have not considered the book or the history in this way and have instead understood it as an agglomeration that has been formed in a long process.[50] Furthermore, the book or the DH has not been treated as an important unit in the history of interpretation, and units such as the entire canon or the individual narratives have been focused on instead. But synchronists claim that the book or the DH has a good or at least acceptable literary coherence and that it is unified by one or several themes.

However, it is not this first claim – that the book is a meaningful literary unit – that is the prime object of this study, but a second claim that is closely related to it. For the scholars under consideration believe that the individual stories are integrated into the larger text and that they exhibit the message of this macro-level. However, it can be claimed that these stories have never been read in this way and that narratives, at least fictive narratives, are autonomous and therefore resistant towards reworking that gives them a new meaning and function. While it is also possible to object that a careful close reading does not confirm these scholars' claims, they would argue that the stories are more thoroughly reworked than is generally assumed, and that a close reading shows that they contain and exhibit the central themes of the book. Moreover, the narratives are not, according to these scholars, arranged at random but constitute a single text, and they illuminate and explain each other.

Chapters II–IV

Chapter II–IV looks more closely at these scholars and their opinions about the book of Judges or the DH. The focus will be on the relationship between the

micro- and macro-level of the book, and I shall ask questions such as: What does it mean to do a literary study of the OT? How does this kind of study differ from a traditional historical-critical study? What happens if such an approach is applied to an entire book of the Bible?

In Chapter II the story of Ehud is analysed in order to decide whether or not this story is a narrative in a qualified sense. I also discuss the relationship between the different levels of meaning that can be seen in the text, both when it is studied as a separate unit and when it is read in relation to the other stories and the larger text.

In Chapter III the different strategies of interpretation that scholars have used in their analysis of the book of Judges are more closely presented and examined. Special attention is given to the relationship between historical-critical research and the strategy of interpretation associated with this method, and synchronic research. An important reason for this examination is to determine the way in which scholars representing different strategies adopt different theoretical assumptions, and thus to highlight the most important differences between these groups.

In Chapter IV the different strategies will be examined in relation to a certain interpretational crux. In the story about Jephthah we are told that the protagonist has to sacrifice his daughter in order to fulfil a promise made to Yahweh in a moment of distress. This episode has always troubled readers and professional interpreters. The episode can therefore be used as a test case for the different strategies – mainly the synchronist.

Chapters V–VIII

In these chapters the synchronic scholars' understanding of the book and its narratives will be examined critically. An important element in this discussion, which will be presented in Chapter V, is the question of narrative autonomy: whether some kinds of literature, such as narratives, have more resistance to recontextualization than other texts, and how this phenomenon can be explained. This discussion is followed by an analysis in Chapter VI of the relationship between the stories and the book and how this should be described. In this section I shall refer to an article by Marie-Laure Ryan, "Modes of Narrativity and their Visual Metaphors" and *The Composite Novel* by Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris.[51] Ryan presents a set of parameters that describe the relationship between narrative elements and a larger text, and the different functions that these narrative parts can have within a larger text. Dunn and Morris discuss so-called "short-story cycles" or "composite novels". They claim that independent narratives brought together in a single volume can be treated as a novel even though the meaning in this kind of text is not linear. After this, I examine the different strategies of interpretation in relation to the story about Samson. I have chosen this story as an example because it is well known, has an obvious literary character, and is the last story about the judges. Scholars who claim that the macro-level of the book is a cohe-

rent literary text interpret the story of Samson in relation to its placement in the book. It is therefore seen as an example of sin and the failed leadership of the judges, and accordingly the protagonist is seen as the worst of the judges. Thus, after the story about Samson there is nothing left but the state of total anarchy that is described in the final stories of the book. I will compare this kind of interpretation with a strategy that assumes that the primary level of significance is at the level of the individual story.

In Chapter VIII I will concentrate on synchronic strategies that do not assume that the elements of the book should be harmonized or that an overall meaning should be synthesized. Klein and Polzin claim that the book of Judges is a coherent literary text, but that it contains different perspectives that must be identified and acknowledged. They contend that the different perspectives can be found both on the micro- and the macro-level of the text. In this connection I will examine the introduction to the book and the story about Deborah and Barak.

Notes

[1] "Strictly speaking, the term [historical critical method] refers to that underlying principle of historical reasoning which came to full flower in the 19th cent." Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Guildford and London, 1977), p. 78. Soulen points out that the term often is used erroneously for biblical criticism in general. However, I will use the term in this study to denote traditional biblical criticism and methods as Textual Criticism, Source Criticism (often called Literary Criticism), Form Criticism and Redaction Criticism.

[2] This methodological reorientation and its effect can be described in different ways. For example, David Robertson, speaks about a paradigm shift in "Literature, the Bible as" in Keith Crim (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville, 1976), pp. 547–551. According to this view the older paradigm was history and the new is literature.

[3] Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, "General Introduction" in Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1987), p. 1f.

[4] "By serious literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else; the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy". (Robert Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible", *Commentary* 60/6 (1975), p. 70.)

[5] A recent example of this trend is Gale A. Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis, 1995). The contributors study the Book of Judges with such methods as "Narrative Criticism", "Social Scientific Criticism", "Feminist Criticism", "Structural Criticism", "Deconstructive Criticism" and "Ideological Criticism". See J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, "The New Literary Criticism" in Exum and Clines (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 143 (Sheffield, 1993), in which the authors state that rhetorical criticism, structuralism and so on are passé, and that the new methods are, for example, feminism, Marxist analysis, reader-oriented criticism, deconstructivism etc. (p. 12). In spite of the fact that Alter and Kermode state that there can be no methodological consensus, they exclude scholars representing some kinds of "contemporary criticism" such as "approaches mainly interested in the origin of a text in ideology or social structure", Marxist criticism, psychoanalytical criticism and deconstructionism (*The Literary Guide to the Bible,* p. 5f.) This has been criticized by, for example, Burke O. Long in "The 'New' Biblical Poetics of Alter and Sternberg", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 51 (1991) pp. 71–84.

[6] The lecture "New Ways with Bible Stories" is published in Frank Kermode, *Poetry, Narrative, History* (Oxford, 1990), p. 31f.

[7] Richard G. Bowman, "Narrative Criticism of Judges: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence" in Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method*, p. 17.

[8] Sternberg quotes and comments upon Kenneth Gros Louis, who asserts that a literary study has five distinctive features: "1. 'Approaching the Bible as literature means placing emphasis on the text itself – not on its historical and textual backgrounds, not on circumstances that brought the text into its present form, not on its religious and cultural foundations.' In short, 'our approach is essentially ahistorical'.... 2. 'The literary critic assumes unity in the text'.... 3. 'A literary critic begins by being primarily interested in how a work is structured and organized.... 4. 'Teachers of literature are primarily interested in the literary reality of a text and not its historical reality,' literariness being equated here with fictionality: 'Is it true, we ask, not in the real world but in the fictional world that has been created by the narrative?'.... 5. 'The literary reality of the Bible can be studied with the methods of literary criticism employed with every other text'...."(Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and*

the Drama of Reading (Bloomington, 1987), p. 6f.) Sternberg, who is very critical of different naive descriptions of the method, says: "I am sorry to say that, with the possible exception of the second, I do nor share any of these tenets, certainly not as they stand and least of all as a package deal." Sternberg can only accept the feature that a literary scholar assumes that the text is a unit. In this study I will test and criticize this very feature.

[9] David M. Gunn, "New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative" in Paul R. House (ed.), *Beyond Form Criticism* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1992), p. 419. The article was first published in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (1987), pp. 65–75.

[10] "It has become my conviction, if not always affecting my critical practice, that the major challenge to biblical criticism mounted by literary criticism cannot be expressed in terms simply of a shift from 'diachronic' to 'synchronic' analysis but rather involves the question of normative reading. This is especially so for those many among biblical scholars who are interested in theology and, in whatever tradition, the authority of the Bible. For it seems clear to me that those theorists who recognize the reader's inextricable role in the production of meaning in text have the future on their side" (ibid., p. 415f.).

[11] Steven L. McKenzie gives the following description of the Deuteronomistic History in the article "Deuteronomistic History" in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 2* (New York, 1992). "The name commonly used to designate the book of Deuteronomy as well as the section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Former Prophets, i.e., Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings. The name reflects the scholarly theory that these books comprise a single literary unit alongside the other two great historical works in the Hebrew Bible – the Tetrateuch (Genesis through Numbers) and the Chronicles complex (1–2 Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah). According to this theory, a later editor shifted the notice of Moses' death from its original position at the end of Numbers to its present location at the end of Deuteronomy (Chapter 34) in order to group the first five books of the Hebrew Bible into the Torah or Pentateuch." (p. 160)

[12] This issue will be discussed in Chapter VIII.

[13] For example: Jonathan Culler the chapter "The Linguistic Foundation" in *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London, 1975), pp. 3–31 and Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" in Barthes, *Image, Music, Text: Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath* (London, 1977), pp. 79–124. This article was first published in French 1966.

[14] For example: Marie-Laure Ryan, "The Modes of Narrativity and Their Visual Metaphors", *Style*, 26/3 (1992), p. 371 and Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology'* (London, 1996), p. 10f.

[15] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, pp. 113–30; Gerald Prince, "narrative competence" in Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, (Lincoln, 1987) p. 61.

[16] Culler discusses the task of literary theory in *Structuralist Poetics*. "Indeed, the striking facts that do require explanation are how it is that a work can have a variety of meanings but not just any meaning whatsoever or how it is that some works give an impression of strangeness, incoherence, incomprehensibility. The model does not imply that there must be unanimity on any particular count. It suggests only that we must designate a set of facts, of whatever kind, which seem to require explanation and then try to construct a model of literary competence which would account for them." (p. 122f.)

[17] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Indianapolis, 1981), p. 129ff., 242f., 401ff.

[18] Lars-Åke Skalin, *Karaktär och perspektiv. Att tolka litterära gestalter i det mimetiska språkspelet* [*Character and Perspective: Reading Fictional Figures in the Mimetic Language Game*], Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia litterarum 17 (Uppsala, 1991), p. 40f.

[19] Ibid., p. 47.

[20] Skalin refers to Don Quixote's attack on a marionette-theatre: this scene is comical not because the knight has a higher degree of feeling than an ordinary listener does but because he is making a category mistake, not realizing the difference between fiction and fact.

[21] Peter Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View* (Ithaca, London, 1996). For his discussion about a literary point of view see pp. 199–220.

[22] In recent decades, many studies on the book of Judges have been published. They can with some simplification be divided into three groups: a. Traditional studies, b. Feminist studies, and c. Synchronic studies.

[23] Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History: Part One Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (Bloomington, 1993 [1980]). Barry Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 46 (Sheffield, 1987). Lillian Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 68. Bible and Literature Series 14 (Sheffield, 1989). Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum vol. LXIII (Leiden, 1996). Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, Biblical Interpretation Series 38, translated from Hebrew by Jonathan Chipman (Leiden, 1999 [1992]).

[24] Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, Minnesota, 2000).

[25] Schneider argues that the theme of the book is leadership and that it tells the story of a downward spiral, and relates its message to the conflict between David and Saul.

[26] A. Graeme Auld, "Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament", *Vetus Testamentum* XXXIX/3 (1989), p. 259f.

[27] John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, 1986). Alberto J. Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, translated by John Bowden (London, 1987 [1979]). Robert Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (New York, 1975).

[28] Mieke Bal has published three important studies concerning the book of Judges: *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington, 1987), *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington, 1988), *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, 1988). These studies are characterized by a feminist approach, methodological eclecticism, narratology and metacriticism. I will not refer to them extensively as her approach and aim differ from the scholars I am mainly interested in. However, when I relate to Bal it is first and foremost with regard to her metacritical analysis.

[29] David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analysis in the Hebrew Bible II*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 39 (Sheffield, 1986).

[30] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard Trask (Princeton, 1953). Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981). Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, 1987 [1985]). Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 70, Bible and Literature Series 17, translated by Dorothea Shefer-Vanson (Sheffield, 1989 [1979]). Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake Indiana, 1994 [1983]). Jean Louis Ska, *"Our Fathers Have Told Us": Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*. Subsidia Biblica 13 (Rome, 1990). David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, The Oxford Bible Series (Oxford, 1993).

[31] Philip Satterthwaite introduces "narrative criticism" in "'No King in Israel': Narrative Criticism and Judges 17–21", *Tyndale Bulletin* 44.1 (1993). He says in footnote 2, p. 75 that: "'Narrative Critics' could be glossed as 'those critics who have studied the artistry of OT narrative and its implications for interpretation'". He mentions two features that characterize this study: "Firstly, a tendency to approach Old Testament narrative texts on the assumption… that they are unities.… The second characteristic feature is a conviction that Old Testament narrative in general displays considerable literary artistry." (p. 75f.) The latter point is in my opinion very important since the aim of several studies seems to be to prove the literary quality and value of these texts.

[32] These dates – particularly the time for a hypothetical occupation of the land – are debated.

[33] Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Tübingen, 1943); an English translation of pp. 1–110 of the second German edition (1957) is *The Deuteronomistic History*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 15 (Sheffield, 1981). According to McKenzie in "Deuteronomistic History", scholars such as Kaufmann and Engnell had reached the same conclusion independently of Noth. (p. 161)

[34] I will speak about the redactor as if he or she were an individual although the dominant hypothesis now is that there might have been several redactors or a school.

[35] Narrative pace designates the relationship between the time of narrating and the time of the narration; see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London, 1983), p. 51f.

[36] "The Dtr's use of the traditions before him was basically conservative. However, he did make changes where necessary in order to introduce his own theological view of Israel's history. He also formulated speeches for the main characters and inserted them at key junctures in his account in accordance with his periodic division of Israel's history. So, for example, Joshua's speeches in Joshua 1 and 23 initiate and conclude, respectively, the time of the settlement. Samuel's speech in 1 Samuel 12 stands at the point of transition between the era of the judges and that of the monarchy, while Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8 highlights the dedication of the Temple and closes the first part of the monarchy. Other Deuteronomistic compositions are in narrative form (Joshua 12; Judg. 2:11–22; 2 Kings 17:7–18, 20–23). The Dtr introduced his history with the old Deuteronomic law code (4:44–30:20 minus additions) for which he constructed a new framework (Deuteronomy 1–3 plus original parts of chap. 4 and 31:1–13 plus original parts of chap. 34). Hence, all of the book of Deuteronomy took on the appearance of a speech of Moses." (McKenzie, "Deuteronomistic History", p. 161.)

[37] Bertil Albrektson, "Berättande litteratur och lagar" [Narrative and law] in Bertil Albrektson and Helmer Ringgren, *En bok om Gamla Testamentet* [A Book on the Old Testament] (Oslo, 1979), p. 171.

[38] Alberto J. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament: from its Origins to the Closing of the Alexandrian Canon*, 3rd ed. (London, 1989), p. 181.

[39] David M. Gunn, "Joshua and Judges" in Alter and Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, p. 104f.

[40] There are some quite extensive narratives about judges who acted as war-heroes and some shorter notices about other judges. It is usually assumed that the structure of the book in this matter reflects different types of leadership in the historical Israel. Fohrer speaks, for instance, about "warlike heroes" such as Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah and Samson, and leaders whose context was cities not tribes and who represented the law of the Canaanites, such as Gideon, Tola, Jair, Ivzan, Elon and Abdon. See Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* translated by David Green (London, 1986 [1965]), p. 207.

[41] According to the Bible the time-span is approximately 400 years. Historians usually claim that the time-span was actually c. 200 years. See John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 144ff.

[42] Boling calls attention to the fact that the different narratives have been revised very superficially and are therefore unique examples of the art of storytelling in early Israel: "The structure of Judges is distinctive, with indications of successive editing throughout introductory and concluding chapters, but much less frequently in the connections between stories that make up the body of the book. Rarely did the redactional activity in the body of the book invade essential contents of narratives. This is in striking contrast to the preceding book, where the model leadership of Joshua is displayed in highly stylized narrative. Thus early Israel's narrative art survives in its purest form in Judges." (Robert Boling, "Judges, Book of" in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 3* (New York, 1992), p. 1113.)

[43] The term "double causality" is used by Amit, who refers it to Seeligman; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 172.

[44] This phrase can be found in 17:6, 18:1, 19:1 and 21:25.

[45] Marc Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 108/3 (1989), p. 397.

[46] Ibid., p. 403.

[47] Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges" in Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, Thayer S. Warshaw (eds.), *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (Nashville, 1974), p. 141.

[48] Brettler states that the basic question is: "How is the book organized?" ("The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics", p. 396).

[49] Jay G. Williams refers in "The Structure of Judges 2:6–16:31", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991) to Webb and gives the following statement: "In particular, Barry G. Webb, in his *The Book of Judges. An Integrated Reading* has demonstrated conclusively that Judges is certainly more than a pastiche of sources glued together by a clumsy redactor. The work as a whole has a unity which transcends what was thought to be its incontrovertible diversity." (p. 77f.). In spite of this statement, Williams' suggestion that the book is structured in accordance with the months of the year implies that there is no consensus among synchronists regarding the structure of the book.

[50] I am speaking about the canonical version. This has to be said since Noth was actually speaking about the redactor as an author who created a text. In spite of this his standpoint is not to be confused with a synchronic position. Synchronists are not working diachronically and they do not try to identify different concrete voices in the text, and consequently their opinion regarding the ideology of the book differs from that of Noth.

[51] Marie-Laure Ryan, "The Modes of Narrativity and Their Visual Metaphors", *Style*, 26/3, (1992), pp. 368–387. Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris, *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (New York, 1995).

II. The Story about Ehud – A Simple Narrative?

II. The Story about Ehud – A Simple Narrative?

In examining the work of scholars who study the book of Judges synchronically there are at least three different possible points of departure. Firstly, one can begin with an analysis of their rather thorough methodological sections. Secondly, it is also possible to begin with their hypotheses regarding the structure of the book or the DH. Finally, one can embark upon this enterprise from the angle of their interpretations of the individual narratives. Because the main issue of this thesis is the relationship between the narratives and the larger text, I have chosen the latter alternative.

I will begin with an analysis of the story about Ehud (Judges 3:12–30), since it is the first of the longer stories about the judges. My main intention is to examine whether it can be described as a literary and fictional construction, but I will also discuss the relationship between its meaning as an autonomous story and its meaning as part of a larger text, and some of the interpretations that have tried to cope with this issue.

The story has a rather simple plot with a central conflict and no real complications. In a classical way it starts with a broken equilibrium and ends with a restored balance in which "the land had rest".[1] However, I have divided the story into sections assuming that the words "and it was",[2] which can be found in the Hebrew text in vv. 18 and 27, function as episode markers.[3] Verses 12–18a are regarded as an exposition, vv. 18b–26 as the first episode and vv. 27–30 as the second episode and resolution. In spite of the fact that the story holds two episodes, in which Ehud first assassinates Eglon and then leads Israel in a successful war against their oppressors, it is obvious that the slow pace of the narrative and its scenic character put the emphasis on the encounter between the protagonist and antagonist.[4] Although the narrative covers a time span of about 100 years, the focus is on a single episode. This concentration of attention on the remarkable, or that which is "reportable", characterizes all the stories in the book.[5]

Some Comments on the Text

My comments regarding syntax and grammar concerns the Hebrew text.

Chapter 3:12–17

> 12 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. 13 In alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, he went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms. 14 So the Israelites served King Eglon of Moab eighteen years.
>
> 15 But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him to king Eglon of Moab. 16 Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length; and he fastened it on his right thigh under his clothes. 17 Then he presented the tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man.

In this section the narrator speaks in a summary fashion.[6] The sentences are mainly verbal clauses and all the events are related causally and temporally. The subjects shift constantly: the acts of Israel lead to the acts of the Lord, which lead to the acts of Eglon, which lead to the acts of Israel, and so on. However, the flow of the narrative is interrupted now and then by sentences having a descriptive function. The last clause of v. 12, for example, is an explanation with the verb in the perfect tense. It stresses, by intensification and repetition, the reason already given in the first clause.

The antagonist and the oppression are presented in vv. 13–14. We are told that Moab had an alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites and that they took possession of the city of palms. The information about the alliance does not seem to have any significance for the plot, and might be historically motivated. The note about the city of palms provides geographical orientation. Perhaps this is the place where the following events took place.[7] It is generally assumed that the expression refers to Jericho, even though this identification causes problems.[8] In vv. 15–16 the protagonist is introduced. Ehud – his name refers, according to Soggin, to the majesty of the Lord – is characterized in a nominal clause that states that he is left-handed.[9] This sentence provides more detail than the normal description of a character in the OT and the reader realizes that this information will be important in the ensuing story.[10] The Hebrew text uses a phrase that can mean "restricted" and that can be interpreted as either an idiomatic expression for left-handedness or a literal description of a defect.[11] Left-handed Benjaminites are also mentioned in Judges 20:16, which might be ironical since Benjamin means "the son of the right hand".[12] In this particular text the motif can characterize Ehud as a trained warrior or, more probably, can serve as a realistic motivation for the reaction of the king and his guards.[13] In the latter case, it is either his left-handedness and the unusual placement of the sword that help him pass the weapons search, or his handicap that makes him harmless in their eyes.

The verbal clause – "The Israelites sent tribute by him to king Eglon of Moab" – sets the story in motion. Israel is once again the subject but does not seem to know that it is in the hands of her saviour that she sends the tribute. The clause is difficult since it is not wholly obvious how it relates causally and temporally to the foregoing sentences. However, it is necessary in the narrative economy since it explains how the confrontation between the mighty king and the lonely Benjaminite could take place.

Verse 16 is a portrayal of the sword. This motif is common in ancient literature but is very rare in the OT. The expression is, according to Gray, unique; but it is often assumed that it denotes a thirty centimetre-long sword.[14]

Eglon the king gathered his weapon – the Ammonites and Amalekites – and took possession of a city. Ehud the man with a restricted right hand made himself a sword and killed a king. God's using remarkable and unexpected heroes when saving Israel is a common motif in the OT that appears over and over again in the book of Judges.[15]

In v. 17 the story continues with a verbal clause that recounts how Ehud carries out his mission and delivers the gift, but it is immediately interrupted by a descriptive nominal clause that states that Eglon is a very fat man. This explicit description completes the characterization provided by his name, which might mean "calf".[16] Fatness is not used pejoratively in the OT, and the sentence might be seen as a mere suspension. However, a more plausible interpretation is that there is a connection between the gifts of Israel and the fatness of the king, or that this is a complication since the sword is so short.[17] Another explanation is that the narrator is indicating that the antagonist is a fat calf ready for slaughter or sacrifice.[18]

Chapter 3:18–26

> 18 When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent the people who carried the tribute on their way. 19 But he himself turned back at the sculptured stones near Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." So the king said, "Silence!" and all his attendants went out from his presence. 20 Ehud came to him, while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber, and said, "I have a message from God for you." So he rose from his seat. 21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into Eglon's belly; 22 the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out. 23 Then Ehud went out into the vestibule, and closed the doors of the roof chamber on him, and locked them.
>
> 24 After he had gone, the servants came. When they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "He must be relieving himself in the cool chamber." 25 So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor.
>
> 26 Ehud escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the sculptured stones, and escaped to Seirah.

This is the dramatic centre of the narrative, in which the protagonist encounters the antagonist and defeats him. The section begins with a clause that functions as a transition from exposition to scene. We are then told that the first meeting between the two main characters has taken place and that Ehud has fulfilled his official mission, but also that he has returned alone to complete his secret task. Commentators have difficulties with the interpretation of the "sculptured stones".[19] However, they do at least mark the border between Israel and Moab and hence function as an inclusio.[20] When Ehud passes the stones in v. 19 he is alone in a hostile country; when he passes them again in v. 26 he is safely home and the second phase of the story can begin.

When Ehud encounters Eglon the pace is slowed through direct discourse and the accumulation of details. The result is a scenic narration with a dramatic character. The words of the protagonist in v. 19 are ambiguous, since the Hebrew

word *dabar* might refer to a thing or a word. Ehud uses this phrase in order to be alone with the king, who for some reason misinterprets it and understands it as referring to a word. But the reader knows that Ehud is actually speaking about a thing, a thirty centimetre-long double-edged sword. The effect is to stress the strength and superiority of the hero and the stupidity of the enemy.

The flow of the narrative is constantly interrupted by descriptive clauses, as in v. 20. In this case the verse functions as a description of the setting for a new scene in which the two opponents are on their own. Commentators have called attention to the fact that the account of the different rooms, which seems to be significant in the story, is very difficult to understand. Gray supposes that what is intended is a room on the roof that is used because of its coolness.[21] Anyhow, the important point for the plot is that Ehud can enter into the innermost room and be alone with the king.[22]

In vv. 21–22 the assassination is related exhaustively. All the details from the exposition are now explained and the murder can be performed with an extreme precision. The fact that Ehud reiterates his speech (vv. 19 and 20) has led some commentators to the conclusion that this version of the story is a conglomerate of two different sources.[23] In any case, the phrase has an important function in the plot since it gets Eglon on his feet and turns him into a possible target for Ehud's attack.[24] The narrative is then suspended by an explanation in which the narrator says: "for he did not draw the sword out of his belly". In his study of oral narratives William Labov states that storytellers often use evaluative clauses.[25] One class of such clauses is the "negations", which are evaluative because they stress a choice that the character makes. In this case Ehud chooses not to draw the sword out, and as a consequence the fat swallows it. This motif can be seen as a variation of the motif involving the locked doors and the secret thing. The next line is very difficult to translate. NRSV has: "and the dirt came out", which seems reasonable since it explains the reaction of the servants in v. 24.[26] The locked doors and the smell from the room motivate their conclusion that the king is relieving himself.

Verse 23 recounts Ehud's escape. The following verse begins with two clauses that can be used to describe simultaneous events.[27] That means that the servants enter the room at the same moment as the hero leaves it. Another effect of these two lines is that the narrative now changes focus. In the next lines (vv. 24–25) the servants are the centre of interest. The story remains, so to speak, in the vestibule while Ehud runs away.

The author uses dramatic irony – that is, the readers are more informed than the characters, and realize that they misunderstand the situation when they misread the smell and the locked doors – to stress the stupidity of the enemy while at the same time giving the escape a realistic motivation. The irony is reinforced by the use of *hinnēh* clauses. *Hinnēh* is an almost untranslatable adverb that is often followed by a nominal clause with a participle.[28] It is used to recount what a character sees, and often serves to mark a change to an internal point of view.[29] In

this case it is used both when the servants misunderstand the situation and when they finally realize what has happened.[30]

In v. 26 the focus returns to Ehud. This verse emphasizes the relationship between the servants' hesitation and his escape. Ehud has now left hostile ground and has fulfilled the first part of his mission.

Chapter 3:27–30

> 27 When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, having him at their head. 28 He said to them, "Follow after me; for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and allowed no one to cross over. 29 At that time they killed about ten thousand of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; no one escaped. 30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest eighty years.

In this section, the second phase of the liberation, in which the Israelites defeat the Moabites, is recounted. The narrator speaks in a summary fashion and the author "tells" rather than "shows". The report about the war is, as usual in the OT, very superficial, and it completely lacks the intense scenic atmosphere found in the foregoing episode. The motif of slaughter at the fords of Jordan is well known and recurs, for example, in the story about Jephthah. The final verse is a resolution that reports that the equilibrium has been reinstated.

A Simple Story

This presentation of the story makes it clear that this short narrative – about the left-handed Benjaminite who manages to murder Eglon, the fat king of Moab, and lead his people in a successful war of liberation – is quite simple and without any real obstacles. It is narrated in a way that is familiar to us from narratives from other times and places, and we have no difficulty whatsoever in understanding its meaning.

A closer look at some of the scholarly commentaries reveals that the problems under discussion are mainly related to translation and reference, such as the length of the sword, whether Eglon's dirt came out, what place is intended by the "city of palms" and the meaning of the "sculptured stones". Another issue is: which parts of the story belong to the original version and which parts were added later? In this case the prologue and the resolution are said to originate from the redactor. Some commentators suggest, moreover, that Ehud's reiterated speech indicates that two different versions can be traced behind the existing story. However, although these problems are interesting and, in many cases, difficult or impossible to solve, they do not prevent the reader from understanding the narrative.

Fiction or History?

Alter uses the story about Ehud as an example when he argues that the historical writings of the OT should be described as fiction.[31] Scholars such as Sternberg and Baruch Halpern have criticized this reasoning.[32] The distinction between these alternatives is almost classical, since Alter refers to the form of the text while Sternberg and Halpern refer to the intention of the author. Charles Fensham, who supports the latter view, claims that the form-argument is anachronistic and that the original authors did not separate fiction and fact in this way. [33]

A complicating factor in this discussion is the fact that the term "fiction" is used in at least two different ways. It might be used to denote either that the author makes everything up or that the text has a certain artful style that separates it from, for instance, a mere report. Usually, of course, these nuances converge since narratives with a fictional form generally recount imagined characters or events – but this is not necessary. And when Alter suggests the term "fictionalized history", he states that the events certainly might be made up, but his main point is that the authors (redactors) were free to give the text a literary shape.[34] In this he seems to be completely in agreement with Sternberg.[35]

An important argument for Alter is the satiric tendency of the story and its joking with the enemy, who is described as laughable, fat and stupid. His conclusion is:

> In all this, as I have already said, it is quite possible that the writer faithfully represents the historical data without addition or substantive embellishment. The organization of the narrative, however, its lexical and syntactic choices, its small shifts in point of view, its brief but strategic uses of dialogue, produce an imaginative reenactment of the historical event, conferring upon it a strong attitudinal definition and discovering in it a pattern of meaning. It is perhaps less historicized fiction than fictionalized history – history in which the feeling and the meaning of events are concretely realized through the technical resources of prose fiction.[36]

Hence, the story has a fictional form. It may or may not refer to historical events. Whatever the case, the result is that it can be analysed as an artefact that has been shaped in order to create a certain effect.

A "Narration-Narrative"

It would consequently be possible to replace the term "fiction" with "literariness" or "narrativity", inasmuch as Alter emphasizes the fact that the text is an artefact.[37] A fictional narrative thus can be described as a special language game that the listener or reader perceives differently than, for instance, a report.

The literary or fictional character of the story of Ehud becomes obvious if we compare it to the first story about a judge.

> 3:7 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs. 8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. 9 But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. 10 The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. 11 So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

The most interesting feature in the commentaries is that they all tend to agree that this text is of a different kind than the rest of the narratives in the book.[38] Some have suggested that it has been created by the redactor in order to concretize the pattern that was presented in the prologue, or to fill out the number of the judges and/or the geographical scheme with a judge from each tribe. Others think that it serves as a paradigm to which the story of each and every judge should be related. Whatever function the interpreters propose, they all realize that the character of this story demands some kind of explanation. They have hence acknowledged that the want of features that Alter calls "fictional" and that modern narratology calls "narrativity" signals that this is a story having a different function and purpose than the other narratives in the book. It could never, at least in this version, have been narrated merely in order to entertain an audience. Instead it has a form that has been refined in order to correspond to its ideological, chronological or paradigmatic function.[39]

I suggest that the story about Othniel is a "report-narrative" while the story about Ehud is a "narration-narrative". Hence, each story has a form that is appropriate to its purpose, a situation that a reader recognizes almost intuitively. The "report-narrative" is first and foremost referential while the "narration-narrative" has a value that does not depend on its referentiality but on its aesthetic character.

A closer look at the two stories reveals that the story about Othniel is characterized by "telling" and that there are no scenic parts or dialogues. The stress falls heavily on the different features of the pattern that was introduced in the prologue. In the story about Ehud, on the other hand, we are not merely *told* that the deliverance has taken place but are also *shown*.[40] Thus is the emphasis shifted so that the "human" level of the story is focused on and the ultimate, transcendental level fades into the background. Othniel is never allowed to take the stage but is reduced to a mere agent or functionary, while Ehud is a hero with almost romantic traits. He is the unexpected protagonist who defeats a physically superior but intellectually inferior enemy by his courage and cleverness.

A storyteller has two main devices by which to gain and maintain the attention of an audience. The first can be described as "tellability", which in this case denotes the skill of the author – that is, the ability to effect identification and intimacy.

The second would then be "reportability" – that is, anything new or sensational. In the book of Judges both these devices are used. There is a fascination for the bizarre and remarkable but there is also the use of "scenes" and identification, and the narratives are usually centred around a decisive encounter between two characters, such as Ehud and Eglon, Jael and Sisera, Jephthah and his daughter, or Samson and Delilah. The narratives thus cease to be reports and become drama since the storyteller displays or performs the story.[41]

The Narrative and the Larger Text

My analysis of the story about Ehud, as an autonomous unit, shows that it has a literary or fictional character, that it is rather simple and that the author has used traditional and familiar stylistic devices. However, we cannot be content with this but must ask how the fact that this story is placed in the book of Judges and in the OT affects its meaning.

Historical-critical scholars assume that a redactor has employed pre-existing stories in a larger work of history. According to Soggin, the original story was in this case "an eminently secular narrative; there are a great many observations of a humorous kind… there is a large number of jokes based on proper names and on physical defects; there is even a scatological theme which contributes to a ridiculous tension".[42] However, this story about a local clan hero has been given a new prologue and resolution, a pan-Israelite perspective, and its war has been transformed into a "holy war".[43] The function of the story would now be to fill out the history, to display the pattern that characterizes Israel's history and explains the destiny of the nation, and to exhibit an edifying example of God's saving acts.

It is not least the new prologue that is supposed to give the story its function and meaning in its new context. The pattern of causal connection that is introduced in the first chapters of the book is reiterated and the separate stories are connected chronologically. The author declares that the ultimate reason behind the oppression of Moab is the sin of Israel.[44] He thus claims that he can display the transcendental, other-worldly causes that govern the events on earth. The initial equilibrium is broken by the sin of Israel, and the conflict with Moab is considered to be a mere consequence. Ehud and Eglon can therefore be apprehended as pawns, pieces in a game that they themselves know nothing about. They are the tools of God and have different tasks with regard to the relation between Israel and their Lord. Eglon and Moab are used as punishment and Ehud is a saviour.[45] Hence, the text displays three levels of conflict, but two of these are mere results of the first. However, the narrative form reverses this order and the interest of the reader is primarily focused on the conflict between Ehud and Eglon.

These observations are important for two reasons. Firstly, the narrative does not merely exhibit a pattern in the larger text in a mechanistic way; it is a real narrative with its own significance and meaning. According to the hypothesis of a DH, this is explained by the fact that the redactor took existing stories and used

them to dramatize his message. Secondly, it is important to note that the conflicts on the transcendental and national levels are strictly moral: every time the balance is shifted, the author is eager to explain this in terms of morality. But the issue is whether this is applied on level three – that is, on the human level – or whether the narratives work according to another logic. However, this does not seem to bother the historical-critical scholars very much, since they isolate two distinct voices in the text: the original storyteller and the redactor. In my presentation of the story, these voices are not separated, although the hypothesis seems to be very reasonable. The author appears therefore in two roles simultaneously. He is on the one hand a historian and a theologian who interprets historical events in order to display the factors that govern history, and on the other hand a storyteller who recounts the old narratives in order to entertain and edify his audience.

These propositions – that the stories are not mere examples that display a pattern and that they might work according to a different logic than the other levels of conflict in the book – relate to the main topic of this thesis and I will return to them later.

Synchronic Scholars

Amit and O'Connell assume that the book of Judges is a coherent text and that the process of redaction or a compiler has given the book such consistency that we read it as "someone's". Although they admit that the book still contain tensions and contradictions, they think that the task of the interpreter is not to isolate different voices in the text or to reconstruct its sources but to interpret the text as if it contained a single voice that speaks both on the macro-level and in the individual stories.

The Narrative Displays a Theme in the Larger Text

The function of the narrative about Ehud is, according to Amit, not only to fill out the history or to present a vague historical pattern. It has also been integrated into the book in such a way that it displays a central theme in the larger text.[46] This theme is "signs" – that is, acts that God performs in history in order to arouse faith. The author recounts a chain of events that is so unlikely and so full of gaps that the reader has to see the hand of God in the affair and realize that Ehud is merely a utensil. The real hero is God, who saves Israel by governing the events and making Ehud's achievement possible.

According to O'Connell, the narrative as an autonomous story is about a left-handed Benjaminite's heroic deed.[47] However, this interpretation is insufficient, as is the opinion that the redactor has used the story to exalt the Lord and his unwarranted grace. Instead, one ought to estimate the rhetorical meaning of the whole book and interpret the narrative in this context.

> Whatever may have been the primary rhetorical function of the Ehud story in its traditional context, it does not at first appear, from a reading of the story in isolation, how the Judges compiler/redactor intended it to further his/her overall purpose in Judges. However, insofar as Judges' deliverer stories have been made to serve the book's overall purpose, one may be able to discern this purpose from tracing the development of deuteronomic, tribal-political and monarchial themes shared among the deliverer accounts.[48]

The tribal-political tendency that is said to be a major theme in the book is displayed in the satirical portrait of the foreign king, who is contrasted with Yahweh; in Ehud's deed; and in the parallelism between the hero and his people.[49] Another important theme, the deuteronomic tendency that mainly concerns the cult, is displayed in this narrative because Ehud does not abolish the idols that he twice travels past.[50] O'Connell admits that the idols do not have this meaning in the story but claims that they receive a new significance as a result of its recontextualization.[51] He claims furthermore that there are features in the characterization of the protagonist that intimate that he is one of the opportunists in the book. Even though this is not obvious in the text, "the subsequent growing concern of the Judges compiler/redactor with the leadership qualities of Israel's deliverers leads one, in retrospect, to inquire whether Ehud's characterization as a self-promoting saviour is an intended nuance".[52]

It is apparent that O'Connell does not treat the story as an autonomous unit but believes that its motifs have received an expanded or new significance and meaning via its placement in the book of Judges. The individual narratives are accordingly integrated parts of a rhetorical message with a specific purpose in a concrete situation. He can therefore question Ehud's role as hero.[53]

Schneider argues that the stories of the book display the conflict between Saul and David.[54] Othniel is, like David, from the tribe of Judah while Ehud, like Saul, is from the tribe of Benjamin. That a judge from the latter tribe can have a relatively positive role is explained in the following way: "The book presents a decent judge from the tribe of Benjamin early in the narrative to highlight the extent of the downward spiral, especially by the tribe of Benjamin, exhibited in the book's final stories."[55]

The Narrative Is Transformed into an Episode Within a Larger Narrative

Webb and Klein state that the entire book is a coherent narrative and that the individual stories can be read as episodes in it.

However, Webb's interpretation of the story of Ehud conforms broadly with the one I have presented.[56] He points out that it is satirical and that the main target is Eglon, the fat and stupid king of Moab, who is easy prey when he is alone with Ehud.[57] But the servants and the army are also portrayed satirically.[58] God, whom Webb sees as one of the main characters of the book, is, according to this story, prepared to use methods such as fraud. Ehud fools them all and can perform his deed in secrecy. It is not until he blows the trumpet that Israel identifies him as

their saviour. Webb argues that "[the] grotesquely comic character of the story makes moral judgements irrelevant. We are clearly meant to identify with the protagonist and to enjoy the sheer virtuosity of his performance."[59] In spite of the fact that he interprets the narrative as an individual unit, Webb points out that in its larger context it can be read as a critique of the monarchy.[60] This is said to be signalled by the reiterated epithet, "the king of Moab".

Is Ehud an Antihero?

Already in older commentaries such as C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch the notion that Ehud's deed is not to be seen as a model can be found. These interpreters thus reveal their assumption that these are didactic stories, and their anxiety that readers should draw the right conclusions from the text.[61] Keil and Delitzsch base their conclusion on two arguments. The first argument, which is exterior to the text, is that Ehud's "conduct must be judged according to the spirit of those times, when it was thought allowable to adopt any means of destroying the enemy of one's nation."[62] The second argument is that the text never states "that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Ehud".[63] This reasoning could probably be dismissed with a reference to the fact that these commentators were writing for preachers who wanted to apply the text, but a similar interpretation can also be found in Klein's monograph.[64] Since Klein regards the book of Judges as a coherent narrative, she is able to read this story as dependent on the larger text.[65]

Klein sees the episode about Othniel as a paradigm. She thus examines closely how the individual stories keep up with it and establishes that the narrative about Ehud diverges in three ways. Firstly, the Lord does not "raise" him as a deliverer but "gives" him to Israel. Secondly, the spirit of the Lord does not come over him. Thirdly, although he is a saviour he does not judge the people. These observations lead Klein to the conclusion that Yahweh does not participate in Ehud's deed, and that the latter in his speeches uses the name of the Lord for his own purposes.[66] Klein gives the following description of the irony in the narrative:

> Variation of motifs is, perhaps, the only stylistic 'constant' in Judges. The irony of the Ehud narrative is invested in the *action* of Ehud, made possible by his character and thereby differentiating him from Othniel. Yahweh has chosen a warrior impeded in his fighting arm – a 'crippled', left-handed warrior – an 'unnatural' warrior. As an agent of divine power, of course, Ehud's infirmity is of no significance. But, apparently unwilling to rely on Yahweh, Ehud practices deception and trickery, achieving the Israelite goal of freedom from oppression but ironically negating the higher goal: contact with Yahweh.[67]

Thus Ehud is regarded almost as an antihero who breaks the norm[68] of the narrative, and the reader is supposed to see him as an ironic figure.[69] Even though Klein's might be dismissed as an over-interpretation, there is a certain logic to her reasoning. She assumes that the reader has been informed in the prologue of the book that the real problem during the days of the judges is Israel's relationship

with Yahweh. Hence, the oppression that the people experience time and again is not the ultimate conflict but is a mere consequence of Israel's sin. A true equilibrium can only be reached if the people return to the Lord and the covenant. Every judge who does not achieve this is therefore only a temporary relief. Ehud is, according to this perspective, an ironic figure since he is just another Israelite who believes that the problem is solved only if the present enemy is defeated. The narrative that uses dramatic irony with ambiguities and misunderstandings is hence ironic on yet another level. On a superficial level, the reader is amused since he or she knows, together with Ehud, what Eglon and his attendants do not realize, but on a deeper level the same reader is alarmed since he or she, together with the storyteller and God, realizes things that Ehud and his people do not understand.

The Narrative Displays a Hermeneutic Discussion

Polzin regards the entire history (DH) as a single literary unit. He argues that this text is dialogical and that the dialogue is displayed in the shifts of perspective on different levels. He performs, in his interpretation of the Ehud story, a compositional analysis in which he points out phraseological, geographical and spatial ambiguities.[70] He assumes that these are significant and that they exhibit important elements in the underlying thematic message of the book. One such theme that runs through the whole work is how God's words and God's acts in history should be understood.[71] The implied author exhibits a different opinion on this issue than the mechanistically and retributive ideology that is traditionally considered as the redactor's. If the book displayed such an ideology, argues Polzin, it would have stated why the Moabites were first successful and then defeated. If no reason is presented, we have to cope with the "undeserved loss" of a king and 10 000 men.[72] Polzin reaches the following conclusion: "We have therefore the impression that *retribution* is really not what is at stake here in the story, but rather the inability of man always to predict his destiny, whatever may be his current relationship with the LORD."[73]

Polzin is, in other words, suggesting a different theme than I did in my analysis of the narrative. The implied author of Judges is said to represent a concept similar to the author of Job and to consider God's acts in history as enigmatic and mysterious.[74]

Another interesting point that Polzin makes is that the judge symbolically and unknowingly proclaims a message, as when Ehud "turns away" from the idols in Gilgal.[75]

How Should These Divergent Interpretations Be Explained?

If we put these interpretations together, we will observe that historical-critical scholars use a different strategy of interpretation than synchronic scholars, although they all tend to agree that the original narrative has been integrated into a new context and that it has thus received a new meaning and function. The former

scholars assume that the narratives are rather loosely applied to the larger text while synchronists read the book or the history as a coherent literary unit. The different strategies lead in turn to different opinions about the significance and meaning of the stories and, in the long run, about the ideology of the larger text.

The Interpretations of the Synchronists Cannot Be Synthesized

Keil and Delitzsch, and Klein consider Ehud to be an antihero, since he breaks the norm of the narrative or the book.[76] Keil and Delitzsch argues that there is an exterior norm according to which God cannot participate in assassination and fraud and that it is never stated in the text that the spirit of the Lord came over Ehud. Klein refers first and foremost to the ironic structure of the book. Via a comparison with the Othniel paradigm she reaches the conclusion that Ehud is a judge who is not raised up by Yahweh and who acts on his own behalf. Amit, on the other hand, states that Ehud acts according to the norm, but that he is not the real hero of the narrative: the hero is God. A common denominator in these interpretations is that Ehud is not the actual hero. However, they cannot be harmonized since Keil and Delitzsch, and Klein state that God does not participate in these deeds, while Amit claims that it is God who is in fact the ultimate actor.

Webb is sure that Ehud is the protagonist and has no problems whatsoever with the morality of the story. However, in contrast to Amit, he believes that it criticizes the monarchy. Polzin, O'Connell and Schneider examine how the narrative displays themes within the larger text, such as the hermeneutical dilemma, leadership or the conflict between Saul and David.

These divergences are of a different kind than problems that relate to translation or reference, since they reveal different opinions about the genre, theme and norm of the story. In spite of this, these scholars claim that their interpretations are confirmed by the text and so imply that theirs is a correct understanding that every competent reader can acknowledge.

How Can These Interpretations Be Evaluated and Explained?

An "implied reader" is often stipulated in narratological theory. One of the premisses behind this stipulation is probably that all communication demands rules. That is, every author writes, consciously or not, for an implied reader who understands and shares certain conventions. It is the task of narratology to describe the literary system that is a condition for narratives. Now, if we accept these assumptions, it must be possible to describe and explain divergent interpretations such as those about Ehud, for they cannot be understood as more-or-less enlightened readings of the same narrative since it is obvious that these scholars have contrary opinions about the structure and meaning of the story.

If we try to understand this phenomenon, we have some possible explanations at our disposal. Firstly, it is possible that the narrative has a structure that is so inconsistent that it is impossible to establish whether Ehud is a hero or not. We

would in such a case have either a narrative that is so awkwardly composed that it is marked with ambiguities and paradoxes or a narrative where the author consciously has stretched the system in order to challenge and puzzle his readers. This is, of course, possible – especially since the narrative has been reworked in several stages. However, my analysis proves that it is relatively consistent and well made. Furthermore, none of the interpreters under discussion refers to this argument.

A second conceivable explanation is that one or several of the suggested interpretations are wrong – that is, they do not conform with the conventions of narratives. That would mean that this narrative has a character such that it is possible to establish whether Ehud is the hero who acts according to the norm or not.

How Can the View That Ehud Is an Antihero Be Explained?

I will assume that a reader who understands this narrative to be consistent regards it as obvious that Ehud is a hero who acts in accordance with the norm of the story, and that the reader considers the interpretations that Keil and Delitzsch, and Klein have presented to be surprising and needing some kind of explanation.

One such explanation would be that these scholars lack competence or that they plainly neglect the conventions of this kind of narrative. This could be because they have decided to read the story in accordance with other rules – that is, conventions that apply to another literary system (or "genre") such as a didactic text, a morality play or an allegory. If so, we have a delicate problem, since either the new system has repressed the old one and thus given the narrative a new meaning or there are several systems existing concurrently side-by-side so that the text can hold contrasting meanings simultaneously. If, for instance, Ehud were the hero according to the narrative system, the morality and ideology of this system would be in conflict with that of the other systems. However, this explanation seems improbable, since we have to ask how this second or concurrent system is manifested in the text.

A better explanation is that Keil and Delitzsch, and Klein have read a different text than the one that I have presented and analysed. That is, scholars who argue that Ehud is an antihero do not treat the narrative as an autonomous literary unit but as an extract from a larger text. They assume that the narrative has been integrated into the book or the DH in such a way that it has become a fragment or an episode. They further assume that the larger text has a theme, a message and norm that have been impressed on the individual narratives. Keil and Delitzsch can therefore presume that God cannot act in this narrative in a way that is in conflict with his character in other narratives or in the larger text. Klein can claim that there are signals in the larger text that inform us that the story should be read ironically or that the Othniel paradigm gives the reader intertextual keys that can be applied to the rest of the stories.

A Narrative Integrated into a Larger Text

A common denominator among synchronists is their opinion that the narratives should be interpreted in accordance with the larger text. Some of their interpretations conform to a reading of the narrative as an independent unit in this case simply because they have differing opinions about the larger text's structure and message. That is why Amit, Polzin and Webb do not present interpretations that are disturbing in the same way as, for instance, Klein and O'Connell. Although we could criticize Amit's argument that the unrealistic timing of the story portrays God as the hero, since this feature can be found in almost every adventure story, nevertheless her view of the role of God is not in conflict with the story. It is also quite possible that the narrative about Ehud could have been used to display the theme of leadership that eventually led to the inauguration of the monarchy. These interpretations can hence be seen as more-or-less probable extensions of the narrative meaning, but they are not controversial, since they do not challenge our intuitive reading.

Keil and Delitzsch's interpretation can be explained as a concession to homiletics, but Klein's must be deemed disturbing, since the larger text, according to her opinion, has given the narrative a new meaning that cannot be harmonized with its narrative meaning.

Notes

[1] This is a traditional plot-structure, see Prince "Freytag's pyramid" in *A Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 36.

[2] NRSV interprets these words temporally, "When…"

[3] So Nicolai Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua: A Computer-assisted Rhetorical Structure Analysis*, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 40. Ph.D dissertation presented to the Faculty of Theology in the University of Lund (Stockholm, 1995), p. 173f. He analyses the function of the expression as an episode marker in the book of Joshua.

[4] According to Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* p. 40f., the two episodes are in many respects analogous. He mentions examples such as the fact that the same Hebrew word is used for the two "blows" – the one with the sword and the one with the trumpet – and that both Eglon and the Moabites are said to be "fat".

[5] See Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 81: "Situations and events that are (shown to be) extraordinary, wonderful, bizarre (as opposed to ordinary, commonplace, humdrum), are reportable." The concept "tellability" was introduced by William Labov in *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Oxford, 1972), p. 370f. See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington and London, 1977) p. 136.

[6] Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 94, explains "summary" by the use of time that is, the time of narration is shorter than the time of the narrative. "Summary…is traditionally contrasted with scene…and, in classical narrative, constitutes the connective between scenes as well as the background against which they come to the fore."

[7] The stories in the book of Judges do often contain seemingly exact geographical information. However, these are often a problem for the commentators.

[8] For example, Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 250 and Soggin, *Judges*, p. 49.

[9] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 49f.

[10] Sternberg lists the elements that are used in a normal presentation of a character in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 326ff. Although he admits that it might contain information about appearance or personal traits, these are always compositionally motivated.

[11] Several commentators assume that Ehud was handicapped and hence yet another of the unexpected heroes in the OT. O'Connell, however, claims that there is no reason for such an interpretation, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 87, n. 45.

[12] Boling, *Judges*, p. 86.

[13] For example, Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 250. Prince defines "motivation" as "[the] network of devices justifying the introduction of a motif, a complex of motifs, or, more generally, a constituent feature of a (literary) text; the reason for the use of a given textual element… Tomashevsky distinguished between compositional motivation (referring to the usefulness of the motif), realistic motivation (stressing the lifelikeness, realism, or authenticity of the motif), and artistic motivation (justifying the introduction of the motif in terms of the requirements of 'art'". (*A Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 55.) Boris Tomashevsky "Thematics", *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays,* eds. Lee T Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965).

[14] Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 250.

[15] J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 52 (1990), says that all the judges "are unlikely heroes in some sense". (p. 412)

[16] Boling, *Judges*, p. 85; Soggin, *Judges*, p. 49.

[17] Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges", says: "The one small detail opens up for us the vast differences between the lives of the Moabites and the conquered Israelites – inside versus outside, cool versus hot, fatness versus leanness, palms versus the hills." (p. 147)

[18] So Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 39.

[19] Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 251; Soggin *Judges*, p. 51.

[20] So Boling, *Judges*, p. 86.

[21] Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 251.

[22] According to Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 39, the narrative may imply a "grotesque feminization" of the king. "Ehud 'comes to' the king, an idiom also used for sexual entry, and there is something hideously sexual about the description of the dagger-thrust. There may also be a deliberate sexual nuance in the 'secret thing' Ehud brings to Eglon, in the way the two are locked together alone in the chamber, and in the sudden opening of locked entries at the conclusion of the story."

[23] See for examples, Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 198f, where he relates to Moore and Burney.

[24] The lines are not totally identical. In the second, Ehud specifies that his *dabar* is from the Lord. The Rabbis, who looked for a psychological motivation that could explain Eglons reaction, claimed that he rose in awe for the Lord. See A. Cohen (ed.), *Joshua and Judges: Hebrew Text & English Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Soncino Books of the Bible (London, 1982 [1950]), p. 182. However, the biblical author does not give this kind of explanations and the compositional motivation is simple. Eglon rises so that Ehud can kill him with his dagger.

[25] Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, p. 380f. Evaluative clauses are used to stress that something is remarkable and astonishing and has "tellability", which is Labov's term for the effect that I have called "reportability".

[26] Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 251; but Boling thinks that the verse refers to Ehud's escape, *Judges*, p. 86f.

[27] Helmer Nyberg, *Hebreisk grammatik* [*Hebrew Grammar*] (Stockholm, 1972 [1952]), § 85k, p. 260.

[28] Ibid., § 28g., p. 54.

[29] For example, Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 35; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives*, p. 62f; Ska "*Our Fathers Have Told Us*", p. 68. For other functions of the term, see O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 96f.; Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (London, 1982), pp. 168–171; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake Indiana, 1990).

[30] There is a motif of realization that is used several times in the book of Judges. Here it is ironic; other examples are Judges 4:22 and 11:35. In all three cases a *hinnēh* clause is used.

[31] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 23–46.

[32] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 23ff; Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (New York, 1988), p. 4f. Sternberg states that Alter makes a category-mistake: "The shift of meaning leads to a symbiosis of meaning, whereby history-writing is wedded to and fictional-writing opposed to factual truth. Now this double identification forms a category-mistake of the first order. For history-writing is not a record of fact – of what 'really happened' – but a discourse that claims to be a record of fact. Nor is fiction-writing a tissue of free inventions but a discourse that claims freedom of invention. The antithesis lies not in the presence or absence of truth value but of the commitment to truth value." (p. 25)

[33] Frank Charles Fensham, "Literary Observations on Historical Narratives in Sections of Judges" in Daniele Garrone and Felice Israel (eds.), *Storia e tradizioni di Israele: Scritti in onore di J. Alberto Soggin* (Brescia, 1991). His conclusion is that the Semites did not distinguish between fiction and history but used the same style in both genres (p. 83). He claims boldly that the book of Judges was intended as history (p. 86f.).

[34] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 25. Alter states that the texts nevertheless have a historical dimension but: "The point is that fiction was the principal means which the biblical authors had at their disposal for realizing history." He continues: "Under scrutiny, biblical narrative generally proves to be either fiction laying claim to a place in the chain of causation and the realm of moral consequentiality that belongs to history, as in the primeval history, the tales of the Patriarchs and much of the Exodus story, and the account of the early Conquest, or history given the imaginative definition of fiction as in most of the narratives from the period of the Judges onward." (p. 32f.) "There is…a whole spectrum of relations to history in the sundry biblical narratives…but none of these involves the sense of being bound to documentable facts that characterizes history in its modern acceptation." (p. 24)

[35] Alter suggests some scepticism regarding the traditional assumption "of the tyrannical authority of ancient tradition" and foresees that a close reading will reveal that "the writers exercised a good deal of artistic freedom in articulating the traditions at their disposal" (ibid., p. 24).

[36] Ibid., p. 41.

[37] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 128, argues that poetics first and foremost is a theory about reading not about the properties of the text: "Rather than say, for example, that literary texts are fictional, we might cite this as a convention of literary interpretation and say that to read a text as literature is to read it as fiction."

[38] For example, Boling, *Judges*, who analyses the differences between the stories of Othniel and Ehud (p. 85).

[39] Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics", p. 403, n. 42, has observed this difference but he calls the reports "narratives" and the narratives "stories".

[40] A tendency in the book is for the recurring frame to get shorter and shorter while the reportable acts of the judges take more space.

[41] For example, Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction* (London, 1966 [1921]) states: "[The] art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shown*, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself.… The book is not a row of facts, it is a single image" (p. 62).

[42] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 53.

[43] Ibid., p. 53f.

[44] The nations are quasi-characters that are given personal traits and are seen as agents in the story.

[45] Although the narrative has a resolution in which the equilibrium is reinstated when Moab is defeated it is not totally clear that the primary conflict between Israel and the Lord reaches a solution. It is often claimed that Israel's cry to the Lord signals their repentance, but scholars such as Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 155, thinks that this is not the case and that the relationship is never balanced, which motivates new conflicts and new stories.

[46] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, pp. 167–198.

[47] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, pp. 84–100.

[48] Ibid., p. 100.

[49] Ibid., p. 84.

[50] "The predominant deuteronomic concern…remains implicit in Ehud's failure to remove from the land the twice-mentioned idols that frame the portrayal of Eglon's assassination.… This failure to remove the idols characterizes negatively both Ehud (as microcosm) and the tribe

whom he delivers (as macrocosm) and ostensibly leads to the religious apostasy that begins the following deliverer account" (Ibid.).

[51] Ibid., p. 90. In a footnote (n. 50) he gives an account of different opinions about the sculptured stones and suggests: "its recontexualization, so as to be interpreted in the light of deuteronomic standards, suggests that it should now be taken to refer to idols".

[52] Ibid., p. 97f.

[53] Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold", p. 415, gives a similar interpretation: "Only in retrospect will we note the irony produced by the conjunction of several elements that reappear at the end of the book: a left-handed deceiver from the tribe of Benjamin; a location in the hill country of Ephraim; and the double reference to the *psylym* which seems incidental here until seen in the light of the *psl* and other cultic objects in chaps. 17 and 18."

[54] Schneider, *Judges*, pp. 45–52.

[55] Ibid., p. 47.

[56] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, pp. 123–132.

[57] However, it is important to note that the statement that the story is satirical implies that interpreters such as Webb and Alter do not read it as fiction, since satire always refers to something in the real world.

[58] "The point is not that Eglon, his courtiers, and his troops were all blundering incompetents (witness the past eighteen years!) but that they were no match for a saviour raised up by Yahweh. Eglon has served his purpose (v. 12); now he is removed with such ease that it is laughable." (Ibid., p. 130)

[59] Ibid., p. 131.

[60] Ibid., p. 130.

[61] C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, translated by J. Martin (Grand Rapids, 1963 [1868]), pp. 295–299.

[62] Ibid., p. 298.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Preachers seem to use a hermeneutic that seeks to find out the significance of a narrative besides its aesthetic function, which is to be a narrative. The basic question is therefore: What can we learn from a narrative? – that is, What is its moral or ideological message?

[65] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, pp. 37–39.

[66] "Ehud's 'playing' with the name of god underscores that Yahweh has, indeed, been absent from the action. He has given Israel a deliverer, but the divine spirit has not come upon Ehud. In his actions, Ehud has valued ends over means; implicitly, Yahweh is not in accord. Yahweh withdraws his help in conquering the Moabites, but Ehud is a good leader and manages on his own." (Ibid., p. 38)

[67] Ibid., p. 46.

[68] The concept "norm" is used by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Harmondsworth, 1983 [1961]) to denote the implied author of a narrative and hence the implied values of the text (for example, p. 73f.). I use the concept in a similar fashion.

[69] Heroes, according to Prince, "usually represent positive values." (*A Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 40). An "antihero" is a "hero defined by negative or less than admirable attributes". (Ibid., p. 6)

[70] Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, pp. 156–161. He claims that the book surprises its reader and frustrates our expectations, and says about this story: "Let us look at the Ehud story to see how it succeeds in exploiting the unexpected in spite of the predictable framework in which it has been placed." (p. 157)

[71] "The phraseological composition of the story reveals it to be concerned with the difficulty with which the word of God is interpreted." (Ibid., p. 157) Polzin states that four out of five utterances display this issue. It is only Ehud's word to his countrymen that is a correct interpretation of the situation.

[72] Ibid, p. 159.

[73] Ibid.

[74] "Contrary, therefore, to widespread scholarly attitudes about the overly mechanistic attitude of the Deuteronomic History with respect to the retributive aspects of Israelite religion, our compositional analysis has revealed strong evidence of a predominant point of view that critically rejects such a simplistic explanation of Israel's self-understanding vis-a-vis the LORD". (Ibid., p. 160)

[75] Ibid, p. 160f.

[76] Keil and Delitzsch do not belong to the synchronists that I discuss in this study, but they exemplify the fact that there often is a similarity between pre-critical and post-critical interpretations.

III. The Book of Judges – Text and Context

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The different interpretations of the story of Ehud are obviously closely related to each scholar's opinion about the "larger text". The task in this chapter therefore is to examine how synchronists such as Brevard S. Childs, Amit, O'Connell, Webb, Klein and Polzin describe the book of Judges and the DH, and to compare their view with a traditional historical-critical view.[1] In this comparison I will focus mainly on two central problems: What is the object of interpretation? and Where can the meaning of the text be found?

1. The Book of Judges Has Been Formed in a Process That Has Produced a Meaningful Text – Childs, Amit and O'Connell

Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture

Childs is rather critical of the historical-critical method and its influence on exegesis.[2] He claims that scholars who have been searching for an authentic text have frequently neglected the fact that the final version often has a meaningful structure. As an example he argues that the different hypotheses concerning the former prophets have failed since "neither has taken seriously the task of describing the present canonical shape of the collection."[3] Proponents of these theories thus debate whether the book of Joshua belongs to the Pentateuch or if Deuteronomy should be understood as a part of the DH. But Childs argues that the Pentateuch is a separate unit within the canon and that Deuteronomy functions as an authoritative interpretation of the earlier books. It is hence very important for the Former Prophets, since the history of Israel is presented in these books as a pattern of prophecy and fulfilment, in which the words of the law shape the fate of the nation.[4] This pattern is said to be confirmed in the long speeches that are strategically placed within these books.[5]

For Childs, the hypothesis about a DH is consequently of no value for the interpretation of the text, even though he seems to accept it as a theory for the origin of these books, since he argues that there is no such thing as a DH in the canon. He thinks that the text has a significant shape that should not be overlooked in an effort to find an authentic earlier version, especially since the "effect of the canonical reading has been to encompass Israel's history within a theological interpretation without any concern for preserving the historical stages in the complex development of the literature."[6]

Childs accepts the traditional opinion about the book of Judges in which the prologue and the final stories are claimed to be later insertions. However, as a consequence of his canonical standpoint he focuses on the function of these sections in the book. He suggests that the prologue marks the fact that a new epoch in the history of Israel started when Joshua died, and that it sets the tone for the entire period, since "each time the nation lapses, it returns to the quality of life described in ch. 1."[7] The two stories in the epilogue also describe the quality of life

during the period of the judges, but do not "serve to establish an end to the period".[8] The canonical effect of the Deuteronomistic redaction is said "to provide a theological interpretation on how this period of Israel's history was to be understood."[9] The uniform pattern tends to relativize "the historical differences in order to emphasize the repetition of Israel's disobedience".[10]

Child's approach comes close to traditional redaction criticism, although the text that he is discussing is regarded as the product of a long process. But it is that process that has made the book into a text in a more qualified sense.

Amit, The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing

Amit argues, as does Childs, that the book has been formed in an almost boundless redactional process, and that this can explain its inconsistent character as well as its coherence.

> The relation to a range of authors and to an extended process of copying and reworking, which prevents the reconstruction of the original text, shifts the center of gravity from the act of composition to that of editing. In light of this reality, it seems to me that the biblical work may be defined as a collective one, and its editors as those responsible for its shaping and fashioning throughout the generations. Accordingly, any biblical text is understood as a text reflecting, not only the message which its author was interested in transmitting to his readers, but as carrying within itself the collective significance placed upon it over the course of the years of its transmission prior to its identification as a sacred text – that is, so long as it was still possible to add to it or to remove from it.[11]

The present version of the book is hence regarded as a literary unit, a "significant statement."[12] However, in order to understand this unit it is necessary, according to Amit, to consider the compositional principles that have governed the editors and shaped the text into a meaningful unit.[13] So she examines early versions and translations of the text and the way that Chronicles treats material from Samuel and Kings, claiming, among other things, that the reworking of the material was apparently tendentious.

Amit depicts the redaction as a "multi-staged process".[14] The text can therefore display different layers, but it is also possible to find "various viewpoints placed alongside one another, without necessarily being indicative of diachronic layering."[15] The redactors have simply refrained from choosing the one or the other and so several different alternatives are reflected in the text. In spite of these reservations, however, Amit claims that the present text is readable and that it has a central message that is not lost. She bases this statement on the argument that these texts have been read and understood for centuries. That is, the material has such a coherence that it can function as a meaningful literary text. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that the redaction was performed according to certain implicit principles.[16] The central aim of the reworking was, for instance, "to educate, guide and serve as a teaching of life."[17] She claims that the application of

these texts before they were sanctified was done by repeated re-editing. Later homiletics and exegesis fulfilled this need. Amit states that the artful shape is hence considered to be a mere tool, and that these texts are to be read primarily for edification rather than pleasure.[18]

Another important feature is that the message was directed to different groups among the people simultaneously. It is therefore composed so that the naive reader can read it as "a simple dramatic narrative".

> But on the higher levels of reading it is interpreted far beyond the imitation of reality. On these levels, the episodes are likely to be perceived as motifs, the figures involved as archetypes, and the language as a highly stylized tool, filled with allusions, sound-patterns and word-plays. On these levels of reading, the reader activates his sensitivity to analogies, to niceties of changes within structures of repetition, to syntactical variations, to the use of nomenclature, and the like – that is, to all those techniques of composition whose discovery enriches the experience of reading, arouses the excitement of the reader at the manner of fashioning and, above all, deepens the message of the narrated materials.[19]

The text has such coherence that Amit suggests that it is possible to speak about an "implied editing".[20] She assumes in her analysis of the book of Judges "that its various components are relevant to and interconnected with one another" and states that she will therefore try to uncover "the central unifying principle, or the implied editing."[21] Elements that do not conform with this unifying principle are identified and explained. Her central thesis is that the "editorial guidelines" in the book of Judges are *signs* and *leadership*.[22] Through explicit and implicit signs God acts in the history of his people and reveals thereby that he governs that history. This theme is displayed by, for instance, the cyclical structure of the book and God's acts of deliverance.[23] When it comes to the second theme, leadership, Amit assumes in her reasoning that a reader is interpreting the text sequentially, and that he or she gradually realizes that the model of leadership of the judges does not work. "The rhetorical effect of this order of the book creates within the reader an anticipation and readiness for the anointing of a king".[24] The message is hence that the nation cannot survive without a continuous leadership, but at the same time there is a certain ambivalence regarding the monarchy, which therefore is presented as a necessary compromise.[25]

Amit refers accordingly to the process of redaction and the principles that have governed it when she argues that the book has such a coherence that it can be regarded as "someone's" – that is, the implied editor's – message. But she is also referring to the reader and his or her benevolence. She claims that a reader always assumes that a work is coherent even though he or she knows that it is a conglomerate that has been reworked several times.[26] The reader is further said to project a voice that connects all the concrete voices in and behind the text. The process of reading is described as a production of hypotheses that are constantly revised.[27] However, she admits that a problem is that the reader can try to find unity even when there is none.[28] But too much harmonization or, on the other

hand, too hasty explanations using terms such as aggregation and divergence, can be avoided by means of a close reading of the text in its context.[29] This is an important issue. According to this reasoning, the interpreter has to identify the central themes in the process of reworking and relate every divergent or problematic element in the text to it. It seems as if a basic presupposition is that this process has been so sophisticated that it has affected the individual textual units very little, and that it is therefore necessary to read the entire book as the text in order to find the themes or guidelines that are the message of this process.[30] The ideal reader for Amit is one who constantly corrects earlier hypotheses when he or she has access to the whole text. An important premiss is, of course, that it is the book that is regarded as the "text".

Amit considers the book to be a literary unit; this unit is not primarily narrative but thematic. An interesting feature of her view is that she tends to regard the narratives of the OT as a unique literary genre. This is explained either by the remarkable process that shaped these texts or by the ancient Hebrews' worldview.

O'Connell, The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges

Although O'Connell admits that the book might have been shaped in a long process and that it might reflect different levels of composition, he stresses that the aim of his study is "to present a coherent reading of the present form of the book."[31] He assumes that it was formed with a message and describes the book as rhetoric. This concept denotes the intent and agenda of the redactor/compiler, which O'Connell claims can be "inferred from formal structures and motivic patterns that recur throughout the narrative framework of the book as well as from patterns of plot-structure and characterization that recur amongst the plot-based narratives".[32]

An analysis of the book leads O'Connell to the conclusion that the "rhetorical purpose of the book of Judges is to enjoin its readers to endorse a divinely appointed Judahite king".[33] The message is that it is only such a divinely appointed king who can maintain the deuteronomic ideals and expel foreigners from the land.[34] A comparison with the books of Samuel shows that "it appears that the compiler/redactor's rhetorical purpose in Judges was probably to furnish a background by which to evaluate, through tribal-political and deuteronomic foreshadowing, the portrayals of Saul and David in 1 Samuel 1 – 2 Samuel 4."[35] The redactor is said to promote David and criticize Saul.[36]

O'Connell believes that the prologue can be divided into two distinct sections in which two important schemes are presented. The first section (1:1–2:5) introduces a tribal-political scheme, which shows that the tribe of Judah is superior to the other tribes. This is said to be confirmed by the fact that the story of Othniel, who represents this tribe, functions as a paradigm while the rest of the judges represent a constant degeneration. The passage 2:6–3:6 presents a historic-religious cycle that shows how Israel departs further and further from the deuteronomic ideals.[37]

The rhetorical intent of the redactor is displayed in the individual narratives through the structure of the plot and the characterization of the different characters.

> I noted the evaluative role that rhetorical devices such as satire and narrative analogy play in portraying characters – noting especially the mixed characterization of non-Judahite deliverers and tribes, the negative characterization of foreign kings and the glorification of YHWH. In the plot-based narratives, there is also a regular pattern of escalated parallelism in the characterization of the deliverers and of the people whom they deliver. The pervasiveness of this pattern among the deliverer accounts suggest that it was the Judges compiler/redactor who designed this scheme in order to demonstrate the similarity of character foibles between non-Judahite tribes and their deliverers.[38]

The decline of the people is hence reflected in their leaders. This is a device that is used to prove the necessity of a Judahite king.

In spite of the fact that O'Connell states that the book is a narrative, he analyses it primarily as a thematic unit. It is by the work of the redactor that the book has been transformed into a coherent text with a central theme and message.

2. The Book of Judges Has a Narrative Structure

Webb and Klein claim that the book is held together by its narrative structure. This assumption supports their views regarding some important issues. Firstly, they can refer to the thesis that it is a narrative with a plot when they state that the book is coherent and meaningful. Secondly, this thesis is supposed to justify their treatment of the individual narratives as episodes in a larger text. And finally, they can claim that the book is first and foremost ideological in spite of its literary form because the "author" has chosen to treat historical or ideological issues by means of a narrative.

Webb, The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading

Webb declares at the beginning of his study that he intends to analyse the book of Judges as an integrated text – that is, a unit that is separated from the books that precede and follow it.[39] This view is supported by three distinct arguments. The first is that the book has always been regarded as a separate unit in the canon. However, he admits that "it is not clear to what extent they [early authors and commentators] recognized it as a literary unit with its own unique message, that is, as a conceptual unit" and that its length might be the result of the mere fact that it conformed to the length of a scroll.[40] The second argument is found in the development within redaction-critical studies concerning the book. These scholars now trace several different layers, which, according to Webb, would make it reasonable to see the present version as a meaningful editorial unit.[41] His final argument is taken from the synchronic studies that have been presented during recent decades. Webb gives an account of these studies and presents thereafter his own project:

> All of these synchronic studies of Judges are modest in scope and are not characterized by the kind of systematic attention to detail normally expected in major studies. However, the data presented and the provisional conclusions reached do, in my judgement, constitute sufficiently strong *prima facie* evidence of overall literary design in Judges to justify a more detailed literary analysis of the book in its final form.[42]

This statement is important since Webb claims that there is a "literary design" in the book of Judges and that the final form of the book can be regarded as a compositional unit.

A basic premiss in Webb's reasoning is that the book is a narrative, a story with a plot.[43] He therefore analyses first and foremost "the narrative meaning of the text (its meaning as *story*)".[44] This is thought to be found in the structure of the plot – that is, the interaction between the characters and events. The most remarkable element in this proposition is, of course, that it is the *whole* book that is regarded as a narrative.

> The book of Judges is here studied as a narrative whole, without prejudice to which parts are earlier and which later, for two reasons: a *prima facie* case exists that the book is a literary unit susceptible of such analysis, and, only such a mode of analysis respects the connectedness of the text as story and hence makes the investigation of its narrative meaning possible.[45]

However, according to Webb it is not necessary to relate the narrative meaning to an author or his intention, since the text makes sense regardless of how it has been shaped.[46]

The surmise that the entire book is a narrative with a plot makes Israel and God its main characters:

> Such an integrated reading throws into relief the fully personal dimension of the two leading characters in the narrative, God and Israel, and shows how far the book in its finished form is from evincing a simplistic moralism or a mechanical theory of history. Israel is chosen by God but too weak to live up to its calling. This conflict between choice and weakness creates the dramatic tension of the unfolding narrative.[47]

It is important to note that Webb, in spite of these claims, deals with the narratives as relatively independent texts and tends to stress the thematic coherence of the book rather than its plot, even though he clings to beliefs such as that Chapters 3–16, for instance, constitute a single narrative.[48]

Klein, The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges

Klein also states that she interprets the book of Judges as a literary unit.[49] She describes it as a narrative because it has a plot-structure and a common structural device, namely irony. Although she does not look for an author in the book, she is interested in the different voices and perspectives in the work – especially the narrator's, whose she considers to be the only reliable voice in the book.[50] Howe-

ver, in some cases, as in her analyses of 3:13 and 14:4, she also questions the narrator.[51]

Klein divides all narratives into exposition, main narrative and resolution, and argues hence that Chapters 1–3 are the exposition, and the stories in Chapters 17–21 are the resolution. This means that a narrative can have these three elements at the same time, as it may be, for instance, an exposition in a larger narrative. The short stories that can be found in Chapters 1–3 are seen as models according to which the rest of the book should be read. The resolution, which is marked by the loss of individual protagonists and the refrain that "[in] those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes", "depicts the consequence of the main narratives of the book of Judges as anti-Yahwism in the name of Yahweh."[52]

The main narrative is said to hold three different paradigms. A first "major judge paradigm" is maintained until the story of Abimelech. It is followed by a "minor judge paradigm" that is then used in mixed or unmixed form. The final stories in Chapter 17–21 are marked by a third paradigm.[53] There are hence patterns in the book that can be used as keys to its interpretation.

A basic thesis in Klein's work is that the entire book is a narrative whose protagonist is the people of Israel while Yahweh is its antagonist.[54] The fundamental conflict between these parties is dramatized in the individual stories.[55] In a section where she discusses the varying designations of the people, she states:

> The ensuing shifting between individual and aggregate names is considered intentional; the action of any particular narrative protagonist functions literally and as a complex symbol – the protagonist symbolizes both the particular tribe and the people as a whole. Thus Israel can be recognized as the protagonist of the book, symbolized by the individual protagonists.[56]

This is said to be supported by the fact that there are twelve judges (Othniel is excepted since his story is part of the exposition) and that the book names twelve different tribes.[57] Each judge is then "symbolizing an aspect of Israel, a weakness, a particular quality which leads to the narrative consequences of that episode and contributes to the resolution of the book."[58]

An important premiss in her reasoning seems to be that the book informs the reader about the fundamental conflict during the days of the judges. But this information is not given to the characters in the individual stories, and their acts that are a result of their lack of knowledge can hence be regarded as ironic. They thereby function as symbols, in an almost allegorical way, for the apostasy of the people. The progression that Klein sees in the book, in which the people's situation worsens all the time, is displayed in the decline of the judges. This leads eventually to the anarchy of the last stories.

3. The Work Is a Dialogical Text – Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*

Amit, O'Connell and Webb claim that they can show that the book of Judges is a coherent text with a consistent theme or message. Klein, on the other hand, argues that the book holds contrasting perspectives and stresses its fundamental ironic structure. Polzin has a rather similar opinion.

Polzin says that after several years as a biblical scholar he started to read the Bible in a new way under the influence of theoreticians such as Russian formalist Boris Uspensky, Wayne Booth and his concept of "the implied author", and the hermeneutic tradition that is associated with Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer.[59]

He states that biblical studies are in a state of crisis, although this is not primarily related to the conflict between diachronic and synchronic approaches but to the influence from positivism. He then presents three basic propositions about the study of the Bible. In the first he claims a "historical critical analysis of biblical material is necessary for an *adequate* scholarly understanding of what it means."[60] The second proposition is that a "competent literary analysis of biblical material is necessary for even a *preliminary* scholarly understanding of what this ancient text means."[61] The literary analysis is therefore always to precede the historic, although interpretation can be described as a circle.[62] In the third proposition he presents in more detail his opinion about the problem with positivism.[63] With reference to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, Polzin contrasts the hermeneutic principles that can be found in the biblical texts themselves with those that guide present biblical study.[64] Although he admits that he himself does not always apply this hermeneutic, he reiterates many times that the Deuteronomist – for Polzin this denotes the implied author of the work – uses a hermeneutic similar to Heidegger's and Gadamer's and directly opposite to the study of intention such as E. H. Hirsh Jr. proposes. The current assumption among biblical scholars is said to be that it is possible by an objective study to hear the message as the first receivers heard it. However, Polzin's point is that this is methodologically contradictory since the first audience did not have an objective approach to the text.[65]

Polzin is rather critical regarding the historical-critical studies about the DH and states that "almost two centuries of research on Deuteronomy and the other books…have produced no hypothesis that can be described as historically or literarily adequate."[66] This failure is said to be explained by, for example, the inadequate criteria that have been used when the materials have been dated, and the lack of competent literary analysis.[67] As a consequence, the fundamental issues regarding the extent and number of the editions and the theme of the work are not solved. He hence declares that he will not take these studies as his starting point.

Polzin argues that the task of the interpreter is to read the present versions of the text and assume that it makes sense, regardless of how it has been formed.[68] He distinguishes between different segments in the three books (Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges) in order to examine the relationship between the "various

points of view that make up its compositional structure."[69] His aim is thereby to understand the ideological perspective in the text – that is, its implied author who speaks in and under the different points of views that can be found on the surface of the text. A basic shift is the shift between "reported speech" and "reporting speech", which coincides with the two fundamental segments in the work, Deuteronomy on the one hand and the books of Joshua – 2 Kings on the other.[70] Although there is no quantitative balance between these sections, they are, according to Polzin, "amazingly complementary from a compositional point of view."[71] The shift that is found in these books between the words of the prophets and the reporting speech of the narrator is thus found also on its macro-level.[72]

This observation generates a fundamental question regarding the relationship between these two voices and points of view: "*wherein does the ultimate semantic authority of this complex lie?*"[73] Polzin claims that the work seems to be monological – that is, with a dominant ideological perspective – and that the "reported word of God is found within the reporting word of the narrator".[74] In spite of this, he concludes that it is God who represents the dominant point of view and that the words of the narrator are subordinate to the words of God.[75] However, after this he immediately questions the monologic character of the text:

> When we inquire further into the overtly monologic structure of the history on the plane of ideology, we find that the question is not quite so simply answered. For even if we can say that the narrator clearly intends to subordinate his position to the word of God which he reports to us, we still must inquire what precisely does God say within the work, and how precisely is his word said to be fulfilled in it? For clearly even a monologue may contain a variety of ideas and viewpoints that may or may not compete with one another with equal weight or authority.[76]

Polzin accordingly is assuming that it is possible by a close reading of the text to discover a "*hidden dialogue*" in both the voice of the narrator and in the words of God.[77]

He claims that his study of Deuteronomy and Joshua shows that these books display two distinct ideological positions. The first, "authoritarian dogmatism", dominates the surface of the text. The second, "critical traditionalism", "presents us with a sustained meditation on what it means to interpret 'the book of the law.'"[78] However, in the book of Judges both positions are challenged by the mysterious acts of God. "The chaotic period of the judges is surveyed by the Deuteronomist in a sustained reflection on the limitations of any ideology to test reality or to understand the historical vicissitudes man encounters in his lifetime."[79] In an analysis of the book in relation to its shifts of point-of-view phraseologically, psychologically and spatio-temporally, he reiterates this observation many times. Scholars who claims that the book of Judges exemplifies and confirms the ideological position of Deuteronomy are hence accused of too-simplistic conclusions in order to find a consistent ideology in the work. According to Polzin, the book is instead questioning the mechanistic ideology of retribution that is proclaimed in Deutero-

nomy, and the pattern that is displayed in the book is not "disobedience/repentance" but "punishment/mercy".[80] God is not depicted as reacting in a mechanistic way to the acts of humankind but is presented as mysterious and elusive.

Text and Interpretation

A fundamental issue in the comparison between historical-critical and synchronic scholars is the identification of the factors that constitute a text. The term "text" can be used in an unqualified and a qualified sense. In an unqualified sense, the term denotes merely a certain collection of linguistic signs; in a qualified sense, it denotes a coherent and meaningful literary document. It is in the latter sense of the term that I consider it here.[81] Biblical scholars seldom deal with this subject theoretically but tend to start from conscious or unconscious assumptions regarding this issue. An important task is therefore to examine and describe these assumptions and relate them to the different strategies of interpretation that these scholars suggest.

A second important issue concerns the relationship between the text and its context. If the first issue is ultimately about the object of interpretation, then this is about where the meaning of a text can be found. The problem relates to the question of a text's autonomy. It is conceivable that a text carries its own meaning and that it is autonomous relative to the historical context. Although it would still be possible to describe it as an act of communication with a sender, a receiver, a certain purpose and so on, the text has left this first situation. This claim can be found in a moderate form in which it is only applied to literary texts. It is also possible to claim that a text is autonomous in relation to its literary context. That would mean that a text might contain allusions to other texts, but that its meaning first and foremost can be found in its own structure. It is finally possible to claim that a text is autonomous in relation to its readers and their context. If these claims were accepted it would mean that the meaning of a text is independent of its historical context, its literary context and of its readers and their context. This meaning would then be intersubjective and would be displayed by the individual text's content and form. According to other notions, the meaning of a text is to a greater or lesser degree dependent on its context. However, my concern is not primarily theoretical in this case either. I will instead examine how some biblical scholars reason about this issue.

Historical-Critical Scholars' Apprehension of the Text and Its Interpretation

The question concerning what criteria constitute a text can probably be regarded as a purely academic issue, since we can rely on publishers having made this decision for us. But in some particular cases the question is very relevant. In the book of Judges, for example, the material has been formed by a long process of reworking. What degree of coherence is called for if it is to be perceived as a text? And at what point does it cease to be a text?

Historical-critical scholars have obviously used at least two more or less explicit distinct criteria when they have discussed these problems. The need for criteria has arisen because these scholars have acknowledged that the present work or book is so inconsistent that it cannot be regarded as a meaningful and authentic text while at the same time it is too consistent to be dismissed as a mere agglomeration.

A Text Must Have "Texture" to Be Authentic

The first criterion is that a text must have "texture" – that is, a certain degree of consistency and coherence. Although it is not unusual for those who criticize the historical-critical study of the OT to claim that its adherents have made fragmentation an end in itself, John Barton and others have pointed out that this approach began with a close reading of the biblical text and the discovery that it did not have enough coherence to be regarded as a meaningful text.[82]

M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan provide the following explication of this notion regarding the status of texts: "A text has texture, and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text. It derives this texture from the fact that it functions as a unity with respect to its environment."[83] While what degree of texture is needed is not totally clear, Wendell V. Harris argues:

> As suggested by its derivation from *textere*, 'to weave,' text implied an entity in which the parts (from the words of a single sentence to a succession of arguments in a treatise or incidents in a narrative) were intended to exist as a coherent whole. One way of describing such coherence is as *texture* that is dependent on cohesion and coherence.[84]

A text thus should have such coherence that we understand it as intended or created by someone. If we apply this reasoning to the book of Judges, we have to ask whether the book has such a *texture* that it can be perceived as an intended unit.

This brings us to the second criterion that historical-critical scholars have used in order to decide whether something is a text or not. According to this criterion, a text has to be *authentic*. Harris gives the following description of authenticity: "the original wording as opposed to translations, corrupt or condensed versions, commentaries, or critical apparatus."[85] The two criteria generally coincide so that a coherent text must be authentic, and if a text lacks texture then this is regarded as a sure sign that it is not authentic. Harris says, in commenting on semantics and semiotics, that: "[it] should be noted, however, that many critics continue to make the (at least implied) assumption that a defining characteristic of a text is that it is an intentionally constructed expression of a meaning consciously intended by a particular person or group."[86] This is interesting since Harris seems to assume that he expresses some kind of common sense.

Historical-critical scholars seem to have searched for an authentic text that could be assigned to a concrete author or redactor. A basic criterion was that it had such a texture that it would be reasonable to understand it as the product of

a person. Noth and his followers were obviously of the opinion that a text needed both a homogeneous style and a unifying theme. But at the same time this demand was modified because the history was not regarded as the work of an author but of a redactor who reworked existing material.[87] In the interpretation of individual passages they hence assume that various diachronic explanations are needed in order to make the amalgamated material intelligible.[88]

In spite of the fact that Noth's hypothesis about a Deuteronomistic edition has gained a consensus, it has also been criticized on important points. Scholars such as G. von Rad and H. W. Wolff, in questioning Noth's understanding of the message of the work, have proposed that this was not as one-sided and negative as Noth thought – that is: the Jewish exile being a consequence of the people's sin.[89] Other scholars have pointed out that the style and theme of the work is not as unitary as Noth assumed. As a consequence, the theory has been modified so that it is now generally granted that the material has passed through several redactions and that parts of it might have been composed before the exile.[90] This means that the demands for unity and coherence have been sharpened so that a scholar today identifies several texts within the text.

Text and Interpretation

The question about which factors constitute a text is closely related to the issue about the meaning of a text and hence about its relation to the context. Steven L. McKenzie exemplifies this relationship when he treats the literary study of the DH represented by Polzin rather critically.[91] He justifies this attitude with the interesting argument that "purpose, composition and date" are "related issues".[92] But is not this the very premiss that the synchronic scholars challenge? A consequence of the reasoning that McKenzie typifies is the fact that scholars have tried to separate and identify the different voices that speak in the book of Judges and the DH, and to relate them to a particular historical situation. They thus assume a traditional model of communication according to which a text must have a sender and some kind of message or purpose. They thereby associate themselves with the demand for authenticity and texture, since an author cannot be imagined to produce an inconsistent text, and every text that has texture must have an author. This means that the book of Judges, which has been reworked in a long process, contains different segments that can be linked to different authors in different situations.

Synchronic Scholars' Apprehension of the Text and Its Interpretation

Synchronic scholars disassociate themselves from historical-critical studies and criticize its representatives on several issues. They claim, for instance, that its adherents lack "literary competence" and therefore have understood features in the text as contradictions when they are instead meaningful literary devices, have used anachronistic demands of coherence and, as a consequence, have not been able to understand the literary and fictional qualities of these texts.

A New Critical Apprehension of the Text

Synchronists have a view that could be described as New Critical. "Literary critics associated with New Critical principles stressed that the literary object they sought to understand was the structure of thought and language found in the text itself, without regard for announced or assumed authorial intentions, readers' personal responses, presumed literary influences, or specific historical circumstances."[93] The remarks that synchronists represent a viewpoint that is close to New Criticism are legion, as are the synchronists' protests against what is obviously felt to be an accusation. In their defence, they are generally referring to the fact that they are not as radically opposed to interpretation based on external arguments as New Critics are supposed to be.[94] But even if we take this and other reservations into consideration, the fact remains that there is a tendency in the work of these scholars that might be described as New Critical. That is, they have abandoned the demand for authenticity and are instead examining whether the present text has a structure that can be regarded as meaningful. Jobling, for example, while admitting that these texts are composed of individual units, states that: "[ultimately], however, they have not reached us as separate entities, but in a sequential arrangement – not merely as texts, but as *a text* – and the constraints of this 'narratization' must be accounted for in any adequate structural approach."[95] The task thus is not to produce different types of genetic explanations but to interpret the present text as a literary unit that holds its own meaning.

The book of Judges, according to these scholars, is a meaningful text. Since they generally assume that it has an ideological purpose, this means that it has a consistent message that is communicated through its content and form. They thus claim, in opposition to historical-critical scholars and the hypothesis about a DH, that they can describe the structure of the text in such a way that the whole book, or most of it, is included. This can be done because they have given up the demand for authenticity and focus on the "last hand" and not the Deuteronomistic edition. A premise is, of course, that the demands regarding the texture also have been modified.[96] The genre of the text, its origin or the benevolence of the reader motivates this. Childs seems to assume that it is the canon that constitutes something as a text; others, such as Webb, imply that it is the fact that it is a book that makes this material into a text. However, all of them are also trying to establish in what way the text is held together – that is, how it is structured. The implicit presupposition thus seems to be that if a reader believes that he or she can find a structure in a certain material, then this is automatically to be regarded as a text and a legitimate object of interpretation.

The synchronists approach the problems in the text – its supposed inconsistent character and the bizarre content of many of its narratives – using a different concept of "text" than historical-critical scholars. And departing from the history of interpretation, they claim that they can read the book as a meaningful and coherent text in which the individual units are connected structurally and thematically.

This approach has several interesting consequences. One is that these scholars often reach a conclusion regarding the ideology and message of these texts that diverges sharply from the understanding of traditional historical-critical scholars. Polzin and Webb claim, for instance, that the book does not exemplify deuteronomic theology of retribution but rather opposes such an ideology. Another interesting consequence, which is very relevant to this study, is that the narratives in the book are not considered as autonomous units or mere filling material. Although these scholars admit that the stories might have a pre-history and that they might have had a function in another context, they argue that they have been integrated into the "larger texts" by a process of narrativization, recontextualization or re-functionalization.

The Interpretation of a "Voice" in the Text

The distinction between historical-critical scholars and synchronists accordingly relates to the issue of the object of interpretation. Is it a reconstructed coherent and authentic text or the present text that is to be studied and analysed? However, the issue is also which voice in the text is to be interpreted. Scholars who search for an authentic text generally presuppose a communicative understanding of texts and are thus trying to interpret the intention of the original author. In the study of the book of Judges, they have speculated about several different voices, situations and purposes. Scholars who assume that the present text is to be analysed project instead a voice that is an abstraction from the text, although they point out that no one might be responsible for this text. It seems as if the assumption that the text is meaningful demands some kind of rationality, which can be called "the implied author" (Polzin), "the implied editor" (Amit), "the compiler" (O'Connell) or the "narrator" (Klein). In any case, the description implies that these scholars are analysing the intention or point-of-view that is expressed in the literary structures that they claim to have found in the text.

The Book of Judges – A Meaningful "Text"

The discussion between the two schools of interpretation thus relates to the well-known controversy between positivism and its central question: What *did he* mean?, and text-centred studies and its question: What *does this* mean? However, this description is complicated by the fact that the synchronists are rather vague regarding the voice they are interpreting. On the one hand, there are features in their arguments that could be understood as redaction criticism with an extreme stress on the "last hand".[97] This tendency indicates that these scholars are still interpreting an author's intention and asking questions such as: Why is the book structured as it is? What is the purpose with its content and form? The premiss is that there is "someone" who has had full control over the text and an ideological purpose. This amalgamation of synchronism and redaction criticism can be found in, for instance, all those interpretations that claim that the book is a contribution

to the discussion about the monarchy.[98] On the other hand, the synchronists refer to the conventions for this kind of literature and hence to the reader. They imply that these are interpretations that a competent reader can be supposed to make if he or she has been able to identify the genre of the text. The question is thus: What meaning can the competent reader find in this book?

This vagueness regarding which voice is to be interpreted is not insignificant. Firstly, it is not quite clear whether this approach should be regarded as radically new or as a new element in traditional redaction criticism. Secondly, the vagueness in this issue means that these scholars can use different kinds of justifications when they argue for their interpretations. They can refer both to conventions and to the intention of the "last hand".

Is It Possible to Evaluate These Strategies?

The debate between representatives of these approaches reminds one about the discussion in literary studies during the last centuries about, for instance, Homer or the Icelandic sagas. However, there is an important difference since the synchronists do not promote a concurring theory regarding the origin of the biblical text. They propose instead a new understanding of the task of the interpreter and the object of interpretation, an understanding that many have compared with New Criticism and the thesis that it is possible to disregard the origin of a text and instead search for its meaning in its form.[99] For instance, when H. D. F. Kitto analyses the Greek tragedies, he assumes that the author is completely rational and tries if possible to interpret every feature in the text as motivated.[100] His conclusion is that surprisingly many elements that other scholars believe can only be explained "externally" are completely intelligible in the composition. However, it is as always very difficult to establish valid criteria by which interpretations such as Kitto's can be evaluated, although it could be maintained that the value of an interpretation is related to its simplicity and its explanatory power.[101] If an interpreter can show that a text has an intelligible structure without too many concessions, it can thus be claimed that he or she has presented a plausible suggestion. An important task in this study is hence to examine whether the sychronists are forced to make concessions in order to be able to construct their interpretations. The premiss is, of course, that if they are forced to make too many concessions, their interpretations are devalued.

However, even a superficial comparison of the synchronists shows that they have different opinions on several issues, such as the extent of the "text",[102] the structure of the book,[103] its centre,[104] the consistency of its ideology,[105] its morality,[106] the congeniality of the narratives in relation to the larger text[107] and the norm of the text.[108] I will, however, limit this study to questions that relate to the relationship between the narratives and the larger text. It is hence very interesting that these scholars primarily search for the message in the "large text" and that they assume that it is a single voice that speaks in all the different parts of the

book. This means that the individual narratives are seen as examples – mainly negative examples – that dramatize the message on the macro-level.[109] Because they generally argue that the book is relating a downward spiral, they are forced to see every new judge as worse than his or her predecessor. And Samson is regarded as the worst of them all.

Notes

[1] I do not regard Childs as one of the "literary scholars" but discuss him here since his work has been very influential.

[2] Brevard S. Childs says in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, 1979): "One of the most noticeable effects of this impasse in the scholarly discussion of the Former Prophets has been the speculative nature of much of the exegesis on these books". (p. 232)

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 234.

[5] Childs refers to the following examples: Deut. 27f.; Joshua 1:2ff., 22:1ff.; Judges 2:6ff.; 1 Sam. 12; 1 Kings 8; 2 Kings 17, 24.

[6] Ibid., p. 235.

[7] Ibid., p. 259.

[8] Ibid., p. 258.

[9] Ibid., p. 260.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. xvi.

[12] Ibid., p. ix.

[13] Ibid., p. xvi.

[14] Ibid., p. 6.

[15] Amit calls this "synchronistic combination" and refers to 1 Kings 11–12 as an example. She claims that two different viewpoints can be found in these chapters since the redactors had no preference for the one over the other. (Ibid., p. 8.)

[16] Ibid., p. 9.

[17] Ibid., p. 10.

[18] Ibid., p. 11.

[19] Ibid., p. 13.

[20] "It would therefore seem that, notwithstanding the fact that biblical editing is a protracted, collective process, and that throughout the process different, and at times conflicting, editing tendencies were accumulated on top of one another, the editors of each biblical work preserved certain central editorial features, giving the majority of its components the sense of combining toward the same goal. I refer to the preservation of these central lines of editing, which run through the work and give the majority of its components a sense of unity: implied editing." (Ibid., p. 9.)

[21] Ibid., p. 23.

[22] Ibid., p. 27.

[23] Ibid., p. 36.

[24] Ibid., p. 60.

[25] "Several phenomena thereby become clearer: the compositional tendency to describe the period by means of cycles; the incorporation of the extended description of the kingdom of Abimelech and its criticism…; the inclusion of the consecutive judges, who are generally referred to as 'minor' (10:1–5; 12:8–12), as representing an attempt at ongoing rule, pointing toward its advantage; and the tendency to specifically bring out the negative aspects in the figures of the last judges, Jephthah and Samson, who delivered and judged their people, but who proved that the judges are not necessarily the desired leaders. The textual components, their shaping and

organization, gradually build up the disappointment in the judges and in the lack of continuity that characterizes their rule, together with the sober expectations from an orderly monarchic rule." (Ibid., p. 61.)

[26] Ibid., p. 14f.

[27] "The implied editing is reconstructed by the reader in a gradual manner, paying precise attention to details and subtleties and, finally, through retrospective reflection and examination of the integration of all the materials scattered throughout the work.... To summarize: the understanding of the editing responsible for the totality as implied editing emphasizes the multifaceted and multi-layered, but nevertheless single-minded, entity which stands behind any biblical work. In order to reconstruct this editing, the reader must assume that he is encountering a unified text." (Ibid., p. 17f.)

[28] The redactors may have been ready to sacrifice the consistency "in order to bring out the variety of their opinions or struggles, or for some other purposes which seemed no less important to them" (ibid., p. 18.) The most common problems are said to be "aggregation" and "divergence" (ibid., p. 18f.).

[29] Ibid., p. 19.

[30] "The process of reconstructing the editorial guidelines, which represent the central thematic principles explaining the selection of the book's components, the order in which they are presented, and the specific reworking of its units, is affected by the reader's progress in the sequence of the text. The central line representing the implied editing, is gradually built up by the combination into a single complex of the lists, scenes, stories, story cycles, images, plots, narrator's judgments, or judgments which are conveyed by the inclusion of such genres as parable or poetry. The hypothetical guideline built by the reader is strengthened and confirmed insofar as this line 'proves itself' as a contextual framework suitable to the mentioned complex revealed throughout the process of reading." (Ibid., p. 25.)

[31] "Use of the designation, 'the Judges compiler/redactor', or the like, leaves open the possibility that there may be multiple layers of composition in the book.... The main aim of this work, however, is to present a coherent reading of the present form of the book." (O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 1.)

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid. Several scholars believe that the book of Judges is about the monarchy: see, for example, Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*; Amit, *The Book of Judges*; Schneider, *Judges*; Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics"; Marvin A. Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges", *Vetus Testamentum* 47 (1997), pp. 517–29; Alexander Globe, "'Enemies Round About': Disintegrative Structure in the Book of Judges", in Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier (eds.), *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text* (Lewisburg, 1990) pp. 233–251.

[34] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 343.

[35] Ibid., p. 344.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p. 343.

[38] Ibid., s. 343f.

[39] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 13.

[40] Ibid., p. 18f.

[41] "Taken together the work of Boling and Auld suggests that the final editing of the book of Judges has in effect redefined the 'Judges period' so that its limits now correspond to those of the *book* of Judges, which in its final form is a rounded literary unit; a transitional period then begins with the birth of Samuel in 1 Samuel 1." (Ibid., p. 28.)

[42] Ibid., p. 35f.

[43] "[The] narrative contained in the book of Judges is more properly to be described as history-as-plot rather than as history-as-chronicle. That is, if the subject matter is 'what happened in the life of Israel between the death of Joshua and the birth of Samuel', this is presented not as a mere succession of events, but rather as *plot* in which events are causally related to one another." (Ibid., p. 36.)

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., p. 38.

[46] Ibid., p. 39.

[47] Ibid., p. 209.

[48] Webb gives the following conclusion of his study: "The principal findings were (a) that the fundamental issue which the book as a whole addresses is the non-fulfilment of Yahweh's oath sworn to the patriarchs (to give Israel the whole land); (b) that themes related to this fundamental issue – especially Israel's persistent apostasy, and the freedom of Yahweh's action over against Israel's presumption that it can use him – are progressively developed in the body of the book and receive their climactic treatment in the Samson episode; and (c) that the final chapters resonate with these themes, and, by picking up elements from the introduction, form the work out into a rounded literary unit." (Ibid., p. 208.)

[49] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 11.

[50] Ibid., p. 12.

[51] These will be discussed in Chapter VII (14:4) and Chapter VIII (3:13).

[52] Ibid., p. 15.

[53] "The three paradigms warrant comparison. The 'major' judge paradigm posits a Yahwist ideal for the occupation of the promised land. The 'minor' judge paradigm states bare, implicitly negative facts about a judge figure. The 'resolution' paradigm is pessimistic, and a full statement of this paradigm concludes the book." (Ibid., p. 15.)

[54] Ibid., pp. 17–20. "When Israel devalues ethic and elevates man's judgement above Yahweh's, Yahweh causes Israel to suffer. With this in mind, I propose that the antagonist to the political, non-ethical, mundane values of Israel – as characterized and symbolized by the behaviour of her judges – is Yahweh or ethical Yahwist values.… When protagonist and antagonist are in harmony, there is a 'wedding' of values and behaviour, and Israel is a 'bride' to Yahweh." (Ibid., p. 18.)

[55] "…each narrative simultaneously highlighting one aspect of the polarity and increasing the distance between the poles: Israel and Yahweh." (Ibid., p. 19.)

[56] Ibid., p. 16.

[57] Ibid., p. 17.

[58] Ibid., p. 17f.

[59] Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 214, n. 6.

[60] Ibid., p. 3. Polzin criticizes the New Critics and structuralists (the latter are called new New Critics), since they have been too quick to dismiss historical studies. He is eager to distinguish between Russian formalism and structuralism since the former holds that literary structures always relate to, and derive their meaning from, their contexts.

[61] Ibid., p. 5.

[62] "[Literary] criticism may be spoken of as having an operational priority over historical criticism." (Ibid., p. 6.)

[63] Polzin does not use the term "positivism", but speaks about "natural sciences".

[64] Ibid., p. 7.

[65] "One can even phrase the dilemma in structuralist jargon: the result of this kind of decoding of the text is the recovery of an original message that reads, 'Do not decode this in the way you have.'" (Ibid., p. 8.)

[66] Ibid., p. 13.

[67] Polzin refers to examples such as the fact that G. von Rad and J. Wellhausen among others have assumed that a shorter text always is older than a longer version, a criterion that he thinks can be questioned.

[68] "One can of course assume that wholesale editorial activity is the origin of most of the complicated shifts in perspective so obvious at many points in the biblical text. If, on the other hand, we assume that many gaps, dislocations, and reversals in the biblical text may profitably be viewed as the result of the use (authorial or editorial) of several different viewpoints within the narrative, then, whether the present text is the product either of a single mind or of a long and complicated editorial process, *we are still responsible for making sense of the present text* by assuming that the present text, in more cases than previously realized, does make sense. A particular biblical passage 'makes sense' if it repeats compositional patterns already encountered in what precedes it and foreshadows perspectives that lie ahead." (Ibid., p. 17f. The italics are mine.)

[69] Ibid., p. 18. He explains: "The term 'composition' therefore has to do with the relationship of various points of view, on a number of levels, that make up a literary work."

[70] Ibid., p. 19.

[71] Ibid., p. 18.

[72] Polzin refers to von Rad and states that the story in Joshua – 2 Kings repeatedly is interrupted by speech from prophets that relates the central theme of the work. (Ibid., p. 19f.)

[73] Ibid., p. 20. The phrase "ultimate semantic authority" denotes "the basic ideological and evaluative point of view of a work (Bakhtin, 1973), the unifying ideological stance of a work's 'implied author'". (Ibid., p. 20). Polzin reiterates the question in other words on p. 21: "Therefore, is the implied author's stance to be found in the words of the narrator or in the words of God found in the narrative? Or, as a third possibility, is it found somehow synthesized both in the narration that quantitatively predominates and in the quoted words of God that are quantitatively much less dominant in the Deuteronomic History?"

[74] Ibid., p.21.

[75] Ibid., p. 22.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., p. 208.

[79] Ibid., p. 210.

[80] Ibid., p. 155.

[81] I do not relate this distinction to the famous distinction between text and work. See Roland Barthes in "From Work to Text" (first published in French 1971) in *Image Music Text.*

[82] John Barton says in *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London, 1984), in a section about source criticism of the Pentateuch, that this study has been accused of taking its starting point in the premiss that the text must be fragmented. (p. 21f.) "Pentateuchal criticism did not arise because a number of ill-natured or blasphemous scholars said, 'Here is a beautifully unified and coherent work; how can we chop it up into little pieces?' It arose because *observable discrepancies* within the Pentateuchal narrative, very many of which had been noticed for hundred of years before, bore in upon scholars that it was very difficult to see what kind of literature such a rambling and inconsistent work could possibly be." (p. 22.) It is often claimed that the sole reason for this kind of study is to evaluate these texts as historical sources. Stern-

berg in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* separates, for instance, between "source and discourse criticism" (p. 14f.), and Yee, "Introduction: Why Judges?" in Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method*, states: "The modern study of Judges is influenced by the various kinds of questions that can be addressed to this book. Perhaps the foremost question asked in the early and middle decades of this century was, How was this book composed? The answer to this question determined the responses to other fundamental questions regarding the book: How credible was the book as a source of Israel's history, and how reliable was its author as a historian? The stories in Judges were important for the interpreter insofar as they were thought to yield accurate data that could reconstruct a more objective history of Israel's tribal period." (p. 5.) This is, according to my opinion, an all-too-simple description since historical-critical studies also have tried to establish the text in order to interpret it.

[83] M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, English Language Series 9 (London, 1976), p. 2. The authors define a text as a semantic unit.

[84] Wendell V. Harris, *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory.* Reference Sources for the Social Sciences and Humanities, Number 12 (New York, Westport, London, 1992), p. 407.

[85] Ibid., p. 407f.

[86] Ibid., p. 408.

[87] This might be regarded as an exaggeration of Noth's standpoint. Soggin says, for instance, in *Introduction to the Old Testament*: "However for M. Noth…there can be no doubt that Dtr was an author. He had his own thought and was not just a collector or a compiler of pre-existing material." (p. 179.) But Noth was speaking about the deuteronomistic text and not the present version.

[88] Auld compares the different strategies in "Gideon: Hacking at the Heart of the Old Testament". The story about Gideon is said to be characterized by several doublets. How are these to be understood? In traditional exegesis the text has been regarded as a conglomerate of different sources. But scholars such as Polzin and Webb are trying to interpret these doublets as meaningful devices in a coherent text. However, Auld presents yet another traditional explanation and claims that the mass of allusions in the narrative indicates that the text was composed later than assumed.

[89] According to McKenzie in "Deuteronomistic History" (p. 162), these scholars claim that the work also had a message of hope. von Rad refers primarily to the promises to the house of David, while Wolff refers to the cyclical pattern that is reiterated over and over again and which shows that God saves after the judgement.

[90] McKenzie refers to Nicholson and Weinfeldt and the theory about a deuteronomistic school, the so-called Göttingen school, where scholars such as Smend, Dietrich and Veijola have suggested two or three different redaction levels; and to F. M. Cross and his theory about an early (pre-exilic) version that was composed in order to support Josiah's reform. (Ibid., p. 162 f.)

[91] Ibid., p. 166.

[92] McKenzie is also pointing out that Polzin has not made clear how his methodology relates to traditional studies, which is remarkable since Polzin assumes a DH. McKenzie argues furthermore that Polzin forces his material to conform with a supposed theme: "His perspective on Judges, in particular, appears to be the result of his forcing the book to conform to the hermeneutical message he wishes to find in Deuteronomy – Judges. His desire to stress what he sees as cultic chaos recounted in Judges leads him to dismiss the rather rigid pattern of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance that the editor has imposed on the narrative." (p. 166f.)

[93] Harris, *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory*, p. 408.

[94] See, for example, Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 3f.

[95] Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, p. 15.

[96] Closely related to this issue is the question about the freedom of the author/redactor/compiler to shape his material. With regard to this question the synchronists do have slightly different opinions. Amit, for example, is prepared to accept that some elements are not sympathetic to the intent of the redactor; while Webb, for example, seems to assume that every feature is integrated in the text.

[97] A. D. H. Mayes, in a review titled "'The Book of the Judges. An Integrated Reading.' By Barry G Webb", *Journal for Theological Studies*, 39 (1988) pp. 540–44, says: "One has the impression of shift and movement in an inadequately defined area here: is this understanding of Judges to be taken as a literary reading without regard for origin and development of the material which it contains; or is it to be taken as the meaning which the final redactor intended or produced?" (p. 543.) Mayes argues that Webb wants to use both aspects at the same time (p. 544).

[98] Sweeney, in "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges", gives the following description of his study: "Judges must also be read as a literary work that presents a specific socio-political and religious understanding of Israel in the pre-monarchic period in keeping with the historiographical interest of its composers." (p. 517.) Globe, "'Enemies Round About'" states: "In its present form, Judges is a structural and thematic unity written by a single author, arguing not only for the necessity of a king, but elliptically for the Judean monarchy." (p. 234.)

[99] It is, of course, notoriously difficult to describe New Criticism since it was not a unified movement, but (as, for example, T. V. F. Brogan says in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (eds.), (Princeton, 1993) that the concept refers to such features as "close reading", the concern for textual unity and the "intentional fallacy" (p. 833f.).

[100] H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama: A Study of Six Greek Plays and of Hamlet* (London, 1968). Kitto's argument for this strategy is based on the skill of the authors, and he states after his analysis of *Orestien* that he has started with the plain hypothesis "that Aeschylus knew what he was doing, and that everything that he does in the trilogy is a logical part of a coherent plan." Kitto criticizes other scholars and their "*ad hoc* explanations, such as incompetence on the part of the dramatist, or the hampering effect of tradition, or of the theatrical conditions" (p. 87).

[101] See, for example, Brettler, who, in "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics", combines a literary and a historic approach and states that his ambition is to "offer a plausible background for the composition of the book of Judges which explains many of these oddities." However, he points out carefully that "motivations that I will posit for the editor cannot be proved; my case lies in providing a *plausible* background which makes the anomalies of the book sensible" (p. 397).

[102] Gunn, "Joshua and Judges", p. 102 and Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, p. 14 claim that the book is part of the narrative that includes Genesis to 2 Kings. Jobling is furthermore of the opinion that the relevant section is Judges 2 – 1 Sam 12. According to Polzin, the unit is the DH, while the rest of the synchronists to whom I refer stress that the book of Judges is an integrated text.

[103] Webb and Klein stress primarily its narrative structure while the other scholars tend to search for a unifying message or theme.

[104] Some of them claim that the story about Gideon and Abimelech is the centre of the book, while Schneider, for instance, argues that its climax is in the final stories.

[105] Amit, O'Connell and Webb seem to assume that the message is consistent, while Polzin and Klein state that the book displays different and contrasting points of view.

[106] Klein interprets the book as strictly moral, while Polzin believes that its aim is to question an understanding of Israel's history in terms of morality.

[107] Amit argues for a technique of composition that can be described, using a term from Sternberg, as "foolproof" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 234), which means that these texts cannot be misread, while the other scholars seem to be of a different opinion.

[108] Polzin and Klein assume that the narrator is not completely reliable.

[109] These scholars are searching in the interpretation of the individual narratives for themes and motifs that connect and unify them. This has been criticized by McKenzie (see note 92).

IV. Why Does Jephthah Sacrifice His Daughter?

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In this chapter, the different methods of interpretation will be applied to a particular problem. The story about Jephthah recounts how the protagonist, because of a vow, feels forced to sacrifice his only child – his daughter.[1] These events come across as a riddle that requires interpretation. The question now is how scholars, especially those who claim that the whole book constitutes a coherent text, handle this riddle.

Introduction

Virgil's Aeneid is one of the most famous works in the history of literature. A characteristic feature of this text is that it has two levels of meaning, since it relates to both the time of Aeneas and Virgil's own time during the days of Augustus. These levels are skilfully woven together via prophecies, visions, aetiologies etc. Moreover, characters and events are often used figuratively to portray persons and events in the history of Rome or at the time of the author. A prominent example is the episode about Dido. The events that are narrated in this episode explain aetiologically the bitter conflicts between the later Rome and Carthage, and Dido is a type for one of Rome's most feared enemies, Cleopatra. Even though the story about Aeneas' time in Carthage serves this function, and even though every initiated reader surely can see Dido's figurative meaning, Augustine says nevertheless at one point that he could never read about the fate of Dido without crying.[2] This comment reveals that he was a good reader of stories, since Dido is a tragic character who gains the reader's sympathy. Hence, even if the episode has a figurative function, the narrative meaning remains. Whatever Dido is meant to symbolize, her fate on the narrative level awakens our compassion.

I have opened this chapter with a reference to Virgil because he is often regarded as a typical example of an author who has written with a programme. But, although this programme is evident and relatively easy to analyse, there are also certain tensions in the work. A possible explanation of this fact is that the author plays two roles – that is, he writes with a set task at hand, but is at the same time a storyteller. Hence, the stories have not only a pedagogical function but also a narrative meaning, and the reader discovers – as in the case of Dido – that sometimes the latter meaning is difficult to combine with the political project.

This example is relevant for this study since the synchronists believe that the stories in the book of Judges have been integrated into a larger text that has an ideology and a set purpose. Hence, the narratives are interpreted first and foremost with regard to their function within this project. But how coherent is this project? And to what extent do the individual stories serve this programme? These are two of the questions that will be discussed in conjunction with the story about Jephthah.

The Story about Jephthah

Introduction, 10:6–16

The introduction differs on some points from the pattern that can be found in several of the stories.[3] Among the unique elements, the most interesting is the dialogue between the people and Yahweh.[4] Israel prays: "We have sinned against you, because we have abandoned our God and have worshiped the Baals." (v. 10.) To this God gives a sharp, ironic reply:

> "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, oppressed you; and you cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet you have abandoned me and worshiped other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress." (vv. 11–14)

Israel answers with a confession and renewed prayer: "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you; but deliver us this day!" (v. 15.) The narrator then reports that they remove their idols and worship Yahweh.

It is obvious that the redactor has varied the introductions to the stories. The quoted dialogue signals that the conflict between Israel and Yahweh is continually worsening and that the pattern of sin, prayer and deliverance cannot continue forever. However, a more interesting issue is the question whether the variations have any significance in the particular story. Historical-critical scholars generally seem to regard the introductions as separate entities, but Webb claims that they are skilfully integrated into the story.[5] For example, he states that this dialogue is parallel to the one between the elders of Gilead and Jephthah in the following episode, and thus that it connects to the theme of the story and provides keys to the interpretation of the protagonist and his acts.

The last verse in the introduction is very interesting since the omniscient narrator presents a motive for God's actions: "So they put away the foreign gods from among them and worshipped the LORD; and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer." (v. 16.) The verse is difficult to translate, however. Soggin suggests: "His heart…felt sorry for" but he points out that a literal translation would be: "his spirit was impatient".[6] Polzin is of the opinion that the verse should be translated as: "and he [the Lord] grew annoyed [or impatient] with the troubled efforts of Israel."[7] Webb performs an extensive analysis of various parallel sections. He concludes that God must have grown tired of Israel's suffering, but says that the interpretation is uncertain and that it is very difficult to reach a final solution to the translation problem.[8] The point of both Polzin's and Webb's arguments is that it is not Israel's conversion that motivates God's interference, but rather God's compassion or exhaustion. This is important since, as we have seen, they claim that the deuteronomic theology of reward and punishment cannot be found in these stories.[9]

Jephthah, 10:17–11:17

In 10:17 the narrative starts to unfold: "Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead; and the Israelites came together, and they encamped in Mizpah." This verse introduces the fundamental conflict, which is not resolved until the fourth episode. However, as in the other stories, the focus of interest is primarily on complications and not on the conflict between the nations. An initial impediment is that Israel has no leader, a situation that produces one of the many promises in this story. The leaders of Gilead say: "Who will begin the fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." (v. 18.)

When the question of leadership is introduced, the story leaves the battlefield and Jephthah is introduced through an analepsis:

> Now Jephthah the Gileadite, the son of a prostitute, was a mighty warrior. Gilead was the father of Jephthah.[10] Gilead's wife also bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah away, saying to him, "You shall not inherit anything in our father's house; for you are the son of another woman." Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob.[11] Outlaws collected around Jephthah and went raiding with him. (11:1–3)

Jephthah is the only character in the narrative who has a name, and from this point on it is his story. He is on the one hand the desired leader and on the other hand the son of a prostitute. This conflict between personal qualities and reputation is a common motif in the OT, and the reader of the Bible can therefore understand it as a signal that Jephthah is God's choice. However, this notion is complicated by the fact that Abimelech, in the previous story, is Gideon's son by a concubine. He assumes authority by force and causes great problems in Israel (see Judges 9). Following the introduction of Jephthah, the war is again brought to the centre of attention[12] and we are told that the elders of Gilead, pressed by the situation, ask Jephthah to return and lead the people to battle. There is a dialogue between these two parties reminiscent of the one between Israel and Yahweh. Although Jephthah has been driven away by the people, now that they are in trouble they ask him to return, and promise him loyalty and leadership.

Negotiations with the Ammonites, 11:12–28

After Jephthah's return with the elders of Gilead and his acceptance of the role of political head and military commander, a section follows where he negotiates with the king of the Ammonites. Along with the episode about the sacrifice, this is probably the part of the story that puzzles modern readers the most. The stories in the book are very short and the narrative pace is fast throughout, but here a long section is incorporated for the negotiations between Jephthah and the king of the enemy. Its extent and placement make it the centre of the story, even without the occurrence of any important event related to the main plot. The section consists of Jephthah's first message, the reply from Ammon's king, a new message from Jepht-

hah and the narrator's report of the king's reply. Jephthah claims that he has not taken any land from Ammon or Moab and that he is therefore in the right. He then places the situation in God's hands. The gist of his speech is that Ammon's action is inappropriate, both historically and theologically.

Even if one accepts the view that all the episodes in the story describe a conflict and that words and promises are at the centre of them, this is hardly sufficient to warrant the length of the section. A more probable explanation is that during the time of the Bible, greater importance was ascribed to speech and the ability to speak than in later periods. Hence, it would be possible to argue that the episode displays Jephthah's strength and his leadership qualities through his rhetorical skills. At the same time, the author has an opportunity to manifest his own skill and to expound history.

Soggin does not even comment on the function of this episode in the narrative, describing it as an interpolation.[13] He claims that the text is contradictory and theologically anachronistic and that only a few verses could have belonged to the original version.[14] He concludes: "In any case, we can be certain that the text as it is now cannot have made up the content of the message sent by Jephthah to the king of Ammon!"[15] Interpolations like these interrupt the history, at the expense of its credibility, for the sake of a theological or political purpose.

Webb, who claims that the primary purpose of the episode is to characterize Jephthah, analyses the dialogue. He claims that Jephthah is not seeking reconciliation and that his final words can be seen as a straightforward declaration of war.[16] Jephthah's purpose is to show that he is without blame, and he addresses both the king of Ammon and Yahweh, the latter as judge. Jephthah is depicted as a master of words and "Jephthah's word" is a theme in the story.[17] However, the reader is also said to be conscious throughout of the fact that Jephthah is driven by his own personal ambitions.

The Vow and the Sacrifice, 11:29–40

> 29 Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through
> Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of
> Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the
> LORD, and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then who-
> ever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious
> from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt
> offering." 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them;
> and the LORD gave them into his hand. 33 He inflicted a massive defeat on them
> from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty towns, and as far as Abel-
> keramim. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel. 34 Then
> Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out
> to meet him with timbrels and with dancing.[18] She was his only child; he had no
> son or daughter except her. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said,
> "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause

> of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow." 36 She said to him, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites." 37 And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I."[19] 38 "Go," he said and sent her away for two months. So she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. 39 At the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made. She had never slept with a man. So there arose an Israelite custom that 40 for four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

In this episode it is recounted almost in passing that the spirit of God comes upon Jephthah and that he defeats his enemies.[20] When the conflict between Israel and Ammon reaches its climax after a series of digressions, it is thus overshadowed by a new and suspenseful incident that begins before the decisive battle when Jephthah makes a remarkable vow to God that eventually leads to the sacrifice of his daughter.

Verse 29 can be seen as a presentation of a series of events that provide the background to what is to follow, or as an abstract. In any case, Jephthah's vow (vv. 30–31) breaks the expected pattern. David Marcus, who has conducted a careful investigation of the various arguments for and against the proposition that Jephthah really did sacrifice his daughter, lists a series of difficulties with the vow:

> Several exegetical and grammatical questions arise from this verse: (1) What was the original intention of Jephthah when he made the vow: did he mean to vow an animal or a human being? (2) How does the structure of this vow compare with other vows found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible? (3) How are the grammatical questions, alluded to above, to be explained?[21]

The first question is interesting since Marcus asks what actually happened, not how the literary motif is used. From the latter perspective, the story is, as a matter of fact, completely clear on one point: regardless of what Jephthah had in mind, he was totally surprised when it became apparent that his own daughter would be sacrificed. This motif demands that the vow be phrased in such a way that the daughter could be the victim without Jephthah himself realizing this possibility. Marcus claims, as an answer to the second question, that this vow is unique in the OT since there is no obvious relationship between what is requested and what is promised.[22] However, does Jephthah not give a straightforward and desperate business proposal? He asks God for victory and protection, and in return he lets fate or God set the price.[23] This can then be regarded as an enormous risk or as an extraordinary faith in God.

Vows are a well-know motif in tales where they depict someone's wish being granted word-for-word to produce happiness or sorrow.[24] Since in this case the vow carries a dark and fatal possibility, the reader immediately suspects a tragic

outcome. Hence, regardless of what Jephthah "really" meant and whether or not he "really" sacrificed his daughter, the literary motif creates a tragic feeling. What is portrayed is a man who swears a disastrous oath and is bound by his word. The author intensifies this effect by switching over to a scenic form of presentation with direct speech and a slower narrative pace when Jephthah meets his daughter after the battle.[25] Through the use of *hinnēh* there is also a switch in perspective that emphasizes his discovery and insight.

The focus is on Jephthah and his fate, and the comment of the narrator in verse 34, in conjunction with the repetition of the statement that the daughter is a virgin, shows that through this sacrifice the protagonist becomes childless and heirless.[26]

The episode acquires an aetiological character at the end, since these events are described as the reason for a celebration in Israel. Usually, commentators are content to state that an aetiology exists and thus that they have found the reason for the preservation of the episode. The aetiologies, however, can also have other narrative functions.[27] For example, they can be used, together with prophecies, to connect the two time levels of the story – the time of the events that are being recounted and the time of the narration. They can also signal that the events spoken of take place in the "real" world. Finally, they can function as the "coda" that Labov has described. He claims that a storyteller can finish a "thread" in a story by relating it to the present. This would mean that the episode could be viewed as a digression that has no significance for the rest of the story, but which constitutes an independently noteworthy event.[28]

Jephthah and the Ephraimites, 12:1–6

After the episode about the sacrifice, the story continues with an account of how the Ephraimites cross the Jordan and threaten Jephthah: "Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down over you!" (v. 12:2.) The motif about conflicts between Israelites on the two sides of the Jordan is well known. A similar situation is described in the story about Gideon, but he solves the conflict through negotiation and flattery.[29]

Jephthah's answer is peculiar and could be understood as his reflection on the foregoing events:

> My people and I were engaged in conflict with the Ammonites who oppressed us severely. But when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. When I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hand, and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day, to fight against me?

The ensuing battle results in a massacre – the famous Shibboleth episode – in which 42,000 Ephraimites are killed.[30]

This is thus yet another conflict that contains a crucial dialogue where the right use of words is a matter of life and death. Scholars who relate the individual stories to a "larger text" claim that the war against Ephraim can be seen as a stage in the general deterioration that the book describes. The conflict between the tribes intensifies between the various narratives, and in the book's last story we are told about a devastating civil war that almost exterminates the tribe of Benjamin.

The episode is problematic and seems to be inconsistent. For example, there are several contrasting motives for the war. Soggin refers to Richter, who believes that there are different sources behind the text. The first source would then cover verses 1–4a, the second 5–6abA, while 4b and 6bB is a later addition.[31]

The Conclusion, 12:7

The story ends with the words: "Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died, and was buried in his town in Gilead." (v. 7.) Commentators usually note that this conclusion does not follow the pattern of the "major judges" but rather connects with the "minor". Boling believes that the adaptation to this pattern has the function of contrasting the "good" judge Jephthah with the failure Samson.[32] This interpretation differs completely from the opinions of Webb and Klein, for example, who view Jephthah as a failed judge.

A Difficult Story

The story about Jephthah, and in particular the episode about the vow and the sacrifice, has posed great difficulty for interpreters for at least four different reasons. Although these reasons overlap to some extent, I propose to discuss each one separately.

An Episodic Narrative

The first difficulty that the story about Jephthah poses is the fact that some of the narratives in the book have an inconsistent and episodic structure. The story about Ehud, which was discussed in an earlier chapter, is a coherent narrative in which almost every element in the plot is compositionally motivated. The story about Jephthah is of a different character and is held together by two connecting motifs – Jephthah, and the war against Ammon. It could hence be described as a frame narrative with embedded narratives that depict "noteworthy" events concerning the protagonist and the war.[33] However, this description is complicated by the fact that the episodes have a similar structure and perhaps also a common theme. With the possible exception of the episode about the vow and the sacrifice, they all involve an encounter between two parties, and a tension-filled dialogue.[34] A recurring motif, which could be described as a theme, is the use of words and promises. Time and again the characters, in dramatic moments, try to handle a threatening conflict with words. But, even if the different features relate to the two unifying motifs and to a possible theme, they are not part of a shared plot. The episode

under consideration therefore appears to be a separate story within the main story, and does not seem to have a function within the main plot. The inconsistent character of the story also makes it difficult to identify the genre of the narrative.[35] It begins as a traditional story about a hero, but when Jephthah gives his vow it acquires an almost tragic character. However, after the sacrifice, Jephthah is again depicted as a victor in the episode concerning the civil war.[36] In addition, the story portrays various levels of conflict. It is indeed about human characters, but is at the same time an episode in the story about God and Israel. There is also a tension between Jephthah's official role as the leader of the people and as God's chosen instrument on one hand, and his private life on the other.[37] He is a leader and a saviour who negotiates and wages war, but he is also the son of a prostitute who sacrifices his daughter.[38]

A "Porous" Story

The second problem is related to the laconic style and the brevity of the story. The text is full of gaps and we are given very few explanations or evaluations of the content. Consequently, there seems to be no ideological perspective at all, and the story acquires an almost amoral character. In her analysis of the story, Trible returns time and again to the fact that Jephthah's vow and sacrifice are the result of unfaithfulness and lack of trust.[39] But she also states that the narrator speaks "without passing judgement".[40] She is thus forced to admit with sorrow and anger that the story continues in 12:1–7 with the daughter's being forgotten and Jephthah's continuing to be viewed as a hero. What Trible has observed, of course, is that there is material in the story that the author could have used to condemn Jephthah. Although one can sympathize with her frustration, it seems that the story does not evaluate the actions of Jephthah and does not use the material in this way.[41] In my analysis of the Ehud story, I pointed out that many scholars do not accept this lack of morality, which they import from the "larger text" instead.

The laconic style of the narrator can be explained in different ways. For example, one could argue that the stories reflect a long process of composition and that they are amalgamations that have not been thoroughly reworked into coherent units. Another possible explanation is that these texts only recount short versions of the stories, which were considerably longer and more elaborate when presented orally. A third explanation is that the "porous" style is an important characteristic of the art of Hebrew storytelling. In his analysis of Genesis 22, Auerbach claims that in the Bible, as opposed to Homer, only decisive events are highlighted.[42] The form of the stories, together with their authoritative claims, therefore calls for interpretation.[43] Other scholars, notably Sternberg, approach the problem in a similar way.[44]

Sternberg does not accept the explanation that this style is a primitive form of narration or a result of an awkward process of redaction. He argues instead that the gaps and ambiguities are literary devices used in a way that otherwise can only

be found in modern novels,[45] and that "God knows and controls all, and humans must learn their limitations, including the impossibility of fully comprehending God's way with the world."[46] This view of God and humankind is congenially expressed in terms of a "system of gaps that must be filled in."[47]

The proposition that Biblical narrators use a laconic style that could perhaps be described as an "iceberg-technique" generates several interesting questions.[48] The most fundamental of these is, of course, how readers fill in gaps in a fictional text.

It could be claimed, although this could be seen as an over-simplification, that there are two competing views regarding this well-known problem. The first of these would be to claim that we interpret fictional narratives in the same way as we interpret persons and events in the "real world". It would hence be possible to have opinions about these events and characters in the same way as we have opinions about people in our own environment. And our queries would not have to be directed to the text: Why did Jephthah give this vow? What was he thinking? Why did he think it necessary to sacrifice his daughter? How did he and his daughter experience the situation? The basis for this reasoning would then be that the world of fiction and the "real" world are analogous, and that the object of interpretation is not the story but the world, characters and events that the story introduces. This seems to be Sternberg's view, even though he is a bit vague on this point.[49] He bases his opinion about the significance of gaps and ambiguities on the assumption that the reader constructs the world of "situations and dramas" in a process in which he or she constantly pauses and formulates hypotheses about the outcome of the story.[50] Although he says that not every gap has the same significance and warns against arbitrary interpretations, his analysis of the story about David and Bathsheba, and his repeated attempts to psychologize suggest that he does not distinguish between the interpretation of fictional narratives and the interpretation of historical events and persons.[51]

According to the second alternative, it is not the "world" with its characters and events that is being interpreted, but the story. The storyteller does indeed use the reader's or listener's knowledge of life and of different texts, but the individual elements are used as motifs in a structural whole. The storyteller is the master of the diegetic world and the reader has access to this world only through the story.[52] According to this type of reasoning, Jephthah's sacrifice is a motif, and only the story can answer or give clues about why the protagonist sacrifices his daughter and why God does not interfere. The interpreter hence does not ask what "really happened" but why the episode is in the story and what significance the different features, including the gaps, have in the text.[53] The latter formulation is possibly a problem in this case, since there are different views about what the text is – the episode, the story, the book, the work, the OT or the whole Christian canon.

I have stated in the introduction to this study that I judge the latter of the two models that I have described to be the most plausible. Based on this approach, a key question is how the synchronic scholars' methods of analysing the texts from

a literary perspective – that is, analogously to the interpretation of fictional prose – affects their interpretation of the story of Jephthah.

Tensions between the Micro- and Macro-Levels of the Text

A third problem with the story – and with the present episode in particular – is that it does not seem to conform to the deuteronomic theology that is assumed to be dramatized in the book. Soggin has described this ideology as a theology of retribution.[54] But the idea that God governs history so that the welfare of the people depends on their faithfulness to the law and the covenant is difficult to find in the story about Jephthah. Instead, a tragic vision of life seems to be displayed in which God or fate acts in an arbitrary way, and in which even a good person can fall victim to misfortune. Marcus says: "But if, as is generally agreed, the stories of Jephthah fit into the editorial framework of the Deuteronomist, then one would expect unlawful acts to be somehow condemned, either overtly or obliquely, in accordance with the dialectic outlook of the Deuteronomistic school."[55] Hence, there is a tension between the short and long compositions – that is, between the micro- and macro-levels – of the Book.

A Strange Motif

The fourth problem, which is of a slightly different kind, is that Jephthah gives his vow and sacrifices his daughter in spite of the fact that human sacrifices are strictly forbidden in the OT.[56] In the famous episode in Genesis 22, when Abraham is told to sacrifice his son, the narrator is eager to clarify to the reader that this is a test and at the end an animal takes the place of the son.[57] But even though the sacrifice of children is forbidden, there are texts that imply that it still occurred. However, it is presented as an alien practice in Israel that occurs only among foreigners or apostate Israelites. A dramatic example can be found in 2 Kings 3:26f., where the king of Moab, under pressure from the Israelite army, sacrifices his son:

> When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his first-born son who was to succeed him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

Stories about child sacrifice in desperate situations can also be found in other texts from antiquity.[58] However, Boling is probably right when he states that "human sacrifice in Jephthah's story is secondary to the theme of the irrevocability of the vow."[59] A parallel would then be 1 Samuel 14. Here we are told how Saul's son Jonathan is able to turn the fortunes of the war against the Philistines on his own. When Saul realizes that the enemy is fleeing, he swears: "Cursed be anyone who eats food before it is evening and I have been avenged on my enemies!" (v. 24)

Jonathan does not hear the vow and eats honey. That night, Saul casts lots to find out who has ignored his words and the "crime" is revealed. The king is now caught in a situation where he cannot take back his decree and is forced to kill his son. However, Jonathan is saved by the soldiers, who do not accept that he should be killed (vv. 38–45).

The motif of vows that cannot be broken appears several times in the book of Judges. An almost tragicomic example can be found in the final story. Here, the civil war that almost obliterates Benjamin's whole tribe is described. Before the battle, the Israelites have sworn that they will never give their daughters to a Benjamite. When they find that after the war there are only 400 men left in the tribe, they realize the consequences of their vow. However, they find a sophistical solution. They have promised never to "give away" their daughters, so they let the Benjamites abduct them.[60]

Some Interpretations

Before I examine some of the interpretations that synchronists have suggested regarding Jephthah and his daughter, I shall present some examples of how interpreters who can be described as "pre-critical" or "critical" have reasoned.[61] Pre-critical scholars seem to understand the text as history and hence tend to "fill out" the story with the help of their knowledge of the "world" at that particular point in time.[62] They also appear to treat the whole OT as a single "text". Furthermore, they seem to assume that the texts have an ideological message, and therefore struggle with the purpose and application of this narrative. In their interpretations, the tendency is to harmonize the text with the rest of the OT and to moderate its offensive content.

As early as Targum Jonathan, the translation of the OT into Aramaic, the translators have tried to solve the problem concerning Jephthah's sacrifice. After verse 39, there is a detailed addition that is marked with italics:

> And at the end of two months she returned unto her father, and he did to her his vow that he vowed. And she did not know man. And it was made a rule in Israel *in order that a man not offer up his son and his daughter for a holocaust as Jephthah the Gileadite did. And he was not inquiring of Phinehas the priest; and if he inquired of Phinehas the priest, he would have redeemed her with blood.* From time to time the daughters of Israel were going to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.[63]

In this version, the feast – in fact, the whole episode – is given a new meaning. Jephthah's action is thus portrayed as erroneous, and the reader is warned against repeating his mistake. By stressing that the sacrifice could, and should, have been prevented, the story is harmonized with the "long composition".

Cohen provides several examples of how the rabbis have reasoned regarding this story. One of the questions that have been discussed concerns the form of the vow. It is carelessly formulated and Jephthah risks being forced to sacrifice an

unclean animal, which is also why he is punished.[64] According to Marcus, the rabbis believed that Abraham's servant, Caleb and Saul all made similar mistakes. The servant promised that the woman who acted in a certain way would become the wife of Isaac, Caleb promised that the man who conquered a certain city would be given his daughter and Saul promised that the one who defeated Goliath would marry his daughter.[65] However, on these occasions "God intervened and saw to it that only desirable people fulfilled the conditions",[66] something that does not occur in the story about Jephthah. Some rabbis believed that Jephthah realized that the victim could be a human being but that he presumed that it would be a slave. Another issue that has been discussed is whether the oath could have been retracted or not.[67]

Cohen claims that although the majority of the rabbis assumed that the daughter really was sacrificed, there are examples of the belief that she was not sacrificed but had to live in celibacy instead.[68] According to Keil and Delitzsch, this view, to which they give some support, became common during the Middle Ages.[69] Goslinga serves as a modern example:

> We can only guess why the author wrote so briefly in verse 39. Some see this as evidence that Jephthah's daughter was literally slaughtered like a sacrificial animal; the author supposedly did not wish to dwell on this appalling event, so he reported it in as few words as possible. There are two objections to this, however. First, the Book of Judges elsewhere recounts the most shocking and revolting events in great detail (e.g., 3:22; 4:21; 9:5; 15:6; 19:22–29; 21:10, 23). Second, it would be strange that neither the people nor the elders – nor even a priest or prophet – tried to prevent Jephthah's abominable act.[70]

Marcus' conclusion is that the text contains intentional ambiguities and that the problem therefore cannot be solved.[71] However, he seems inclined to believe that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter.[72]

As I have shown in previous chapters, interpreters in the historical-critical tradition believe that the material in the OT cannot be viewed as coherent literary texts. Georg Fohrer's description of the story about Jephthah serves as an example:

> The ancient Jephthah tradition, introduced in 10:17–18, contains a long narrative concerning Jephthah's war against the Ammonites (11:1–29, 32*b*–33*a*) together with a concluding ruler notice (12:7) which corresponds to the introduction. To this basic stratum three pieces have been added: first, the narrative of efforts to pass through the territory of Moab (11:12–28), the nucleus of which is dependent on Numbers 20–21 (this section is a later addition); second, the etiological legend explaining a cultic practice on the basis of the lament for Jephthah's daughter (11:30–31 [32*a*], 34–40); third, a combination like that found in 7:25–8:3 of a note concerning the enmity between Ephraimites and Gileadites and the shibboleth episode between Ephraimites and Gileadites (12:1–6).[73]

Hence, the above-mentioned problems could be explained, at least to some extent, by the fact that the story is a conglomerate of material that has not been reworked into a coherent literary unit. Thus, the task of the interpreter is to isolate the different segments in the text, to find out their original context and relate them to it, and then – in the case of the episode about the vow and the sacrifice – to ask why the redactor chose to insert and preserve it even though it did not fit his ideology and was not necessary for the story.

Soggin answers the first of these questions and claims that the episode is "the 'historization' of a myth, a practice, which, as is well known, is widespread in the Old Testament."[74] The text's pre-history explains the difficulties in the story, such as Jephthah's lack of compassion and his daughter's willingness to be sacrificed. The second question is considerably more difficult to answer:

> However, if parallels of this kind serve to shed gleams of light on the background of an episode like this, they still do not explain how the Old Testament came to hand it on, making it the aetiology for the celebration of a rite of dubious, indeed improbable orthodoxy, practised in a peripheral area which was unimportant for Israelite worship generally. As it is impossible to arrive at any explanation in the present state of research, we must be content with taking note of the phenomenon.[75]

James D. Martin is not so hesitant as Soggin regarding this issue and states boldly that the episode has been preserved because of its aetiological function.[76]

The Synchronists and the Story About Jephthah

Scholars whom I label as synchronists and who might be described as post-critical claim that they have solved the problems associated with the vow and the sacrifice. They argue that the story has a coherent and meaningful structure in spite of its episodic character, that it has an ideological perspective that is displayed through explicit and implicit devices in spite of the laconic style of the narrator, and that the relationship between the micro- and macro-levels of the text can be explained. Regarding the last statement, they claim that the ideology and morality of the story are consistent with those of the larger text, and/or that the story dramatizes a theme in the larger text. These propositions can be clarified and summarized in three statements: (a) the story about Jephthah has a narrative structure in which each element is integrated in an artistic way, (b) the text clearly marks how we should view the protagonist and his acts, and (c) the story and the episode have an important role in the larger text.

Hence they claim that the present text is a well-composed story and try to interpret each element as motivated in it, although they tend to stress the thematic links rather than the plot. Even sections that are usually understood to be additions by the redactor – for example, the introduction – are treated as integral parts of the composition. For example, Polzin divides the story into five parallel scenes and claims that they all display the same theme.[77] O'Connell criticizes this scenic

division and stresses that narratives often have a thematic structure.[78] However, the common denominator is that they presuppose several conflicts that have a common protagonist but that are first and foremost connected thematically.

Even though the episode about the vow and the sacrifice is not primarily related to the plot, it is hence integrated into the story. The competent reader is prepared for these events since the narrator has provided different hints concerning Jephthah's character and, through explicit and implicit devices, a certain perspective on his actions.

Gunn, Webb and Polzin

Gunn, Webb and Polzin have similar opinions about the theme of the story and claim that it exemplifies the vain struggle for safety. Gunn says: "[the] vow encapsulates one of the great themes in the book…namely the tension between human craving for security and the insecurity risked by allegiance and obedience to an imageless and unfathomable divinity."[79] Polzin believes that the text describes the search for security through the use of tests. However, these can become traps and can even backfire on the person who has formulated the test.[80] Webb describes the text's thematic focus as: "the tendency to accommodate religion to political norms."[81]

The three scholars hence agree that Jephthah makes a mistake when he gives his vow and sacrifices his daughter. He is seeking a security that does not exist. However, they have different opinions about how this is portrayed in the text. Polzin mainly bases it on the analogy between the first and second episodes. In these parallel sections it is described how Israel first negotiates with God and then with Jephthah and puts them to a test. The analogy leads the reader to compare the actions of God and Jephthah. God avoids the test, but Jephthah is trapped.[82] Later in the story, he himself tries to attain security through a new test, when he gives his vow. Here, more than ever, the test becomes a trap.[83] Webb, who analyses the narrative thoroughly, also argues from the analogy between the introductory episodes. But if Polzin has found first and foremost a thematic and structural pattern, Webb stresses instead the psychological character sketch. Jephthah appears to be an egoistic man who acts in his own interest.[84] This flaw is developed throughout the story so that the reader is well prepared when Jephthah makes his vow. "The vow is not impulsive; it is shrewd and calculating – entirely in keeping with Jephthah's character as we have come to know it."[85] Gunn, whose comment is very brief, refers only in passing to Jephthah's past of being rejected, implying that it could motivate his actions. The three scholars hence view the story as ironic. Jephthah tries to gain security by negotiating with God in the same way as he negotiates with people. According to Gunn and Webb, because of this mistake and his self-interest he loses the sympathy of the reader.[86] The story thus becomes a negative example.

Klein

Klein believes that Jephthah initially is portrayed as an ideal judge. This applies to the second episode as well, where he is being compared to Gilead's leader and not to God, as Polzin and Webb claim.[87] But in the speech to Ammon's king – this long episode must, according to Klein, have an important function in the story – he reveals his lack of knowledge of the history of the people and their religion.[88] This lack is in turn caused by his fatherlessness:

> Jephthah has almost every desirable quality for a judge, lacking only that one element which must be transmitted by man from one generation to another in order that the covenant be renewed and the past made present. That element is the instruction passed on from father to son, and Jephthah has no father. A condemnation of irresponsible promiscuity is implicit in Jephthah's lack of knowledge of his people's tradition. Ignorant of Israel's past, Jephthah cannot remember it, cannot participate in it, and cannot renew it.[89]

Following this episode, the reader realises that Jephthah is an object of irony.[90] The sacrifice also reveals that he is a self-centred man without compassion for his daughter.[91]

Klein interprets the story in accordance with her thesis about the ironic structure of the book. Because of the larger text, the reader is more informed than the characters and can therefore see the irony in their actions. Unlike Polzin and Webb, she does not argue that the narrative displays a theme in the book but treats it as an episode in the story about Israel and God, in which Jephthah personifies an important trait of the people. This interpretation can hence be described as allegoric and figurative, while the previous interpreters mainly argued for an instrumental interpretation in which the story was considered to dramatize a point or a theme within the larger text.

O'Connell

According to O'Connell, the book describes an increasing deterioration, and Jephthah must hence be an example of a failed leader.[92] This is confirmed by an analysis of the pattern that has been provided by the editor/compiler. Like several other scholars, O'Connell claims, for example, that Jephthah receives his position as judge in the wrong way.[93]

Since the reader knows that the Lord is going to give Jephthah victory, he or she realizes that the vow is unnecessary and heathen.[94] The episode depicts Jephthah as a brutal and egoistic man:

> Ironically, the performance of Jephthah's vow in 11:34–36, 39a, in the aftermath of the resolution of Plot A, only dissolves the situational stability that would have resulted had Jephthah not made his vow. The vow turns Jephthah from a deliverer of Israel into but another oppressor. Jephthah is further negatively characterized through the introduction of another subplot (Plot D, 12:1–6), which further dissolves the situational stability brought about by the resolution of Plot A.[95]

Jephthah, Gilead's leader and Ephraim prevent "characters of the story from enjoying an ideal situation of equilibrium."[96] They all make the same mistake of trying to manipulate God. Gilead's leader and Jephthah also have a common flaw in that they are more interested in their own positions than in their people or their families. The story depicts a retributive pattern, and both the protagonist and the people are punished according to their own actions[97] – the latter by being given the leader that they deserve.[98] The whole situation hence becomes ironic.

A Search for Coherence

These examples show that these scholars agree that the protagonist deviates from the norm when he gives his vow and sacrifices his daughter. The reader is prepared for these events by the description of Jephthah's character, through the analogy between the first and the second episode or through the depiction of his striking lack of knowledge. In addition, the book as a whole provides structural patterns and themes that confirm this interpretation. Jephthah therefore represents the deterioration of Israel, the people's lack of knowledge and the erroneous search for security – the reader views him ironically and without sympathy. The story either works instrumentally, so that it illustrates a theme from the larger text, or figuratively, since Jephthah is a symbol of the people.

In spite of the common denominators, there are also differences between these suggested interpretations. Gunn, Polzin and Webb claim that the story depicts the vain search for security. However, there is a certain ambiguity in this reasoning since on the one hand they stress God's unpredictability and on the other hand the notion that Jephthah more-or-less deserves his fate. Klein and O'Connell represent a different view. They believe that the story depicts in a figurative way the deterioration of Israel and its leadership. Jephthah's lack of knowledge leads him to syncretistic views and actions. Here God does indeed seem to be predictable. There is hence no opposition between the micro- and macro-levels, and the same norm is expressed at both levels.

These scholars also have different opinions about the organization of the text and which devices that provide perspectives on the protagonist and his actions. That in the latter case they refer to different passages and devices can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, it would be possible to claim that the lack of agreement shows that the evaluation of Jephthah and his sacrifice is not as evident as they claim. On the other hand, one could claim that the different stylistic means are complementary and that they hence strengthen the picture of Jephthah.[99]

Although the divergences between these scholars could be regarded as a minor problem, it seems as if the stylistic means that they refer to when they claim that Jephthah deviates from the norm of the story are too far-fetched. As in the example of Ehud, it actually seems as if their interpretation is based on their understanding of the larger text. An alternative is therefore to admit that the story has an inconsistent and enigmatic character and that the motif under consideration is

not explained. According to this view, there is no reason to view Jephthah as the villain or as a negative example. Instead, he comes across as a hero who has the sympathy of the narrator and the reader – even though he makes a devastating mistake.[100] However, this interpretation has its price, since it creates problems with the coherence of the "larger text", especially with the character of God.

This understanding is confirmed by the history of interpretation, since the vow and sacrifice have always troubled readers. For example, there are tensions in the evaluation of the protagonist and his actions. On the one hand, it is stressed that he is a hero and a man of God:

> The judges too, each when he was called, all men whose hearts where never disloyal, who never turned their backs on the Lord – may their memory be blessed! May their bones flower again from the tomb, and may the names of those illustrious men live again in their sons.[101]

The judges are not regarded as failed or deteriorated leaders, but as heroes in hard times. In Hebrews 11, Jephthah is even used as an example of notable faith in God.[102] On the other hand, there are texts, such as the Targum, where it is stated that Jephthah makes a mistake when he sacrifices his daughter and that he cannot serve as a good example. If the interpretations of the synchronists are correct, then must not the problems that readers have struggled with throughout the history of interpretation be regarded as the result of misreading the text and the devices that show how it should be interpreted?

Bal criticizes the historical-critical scholars for their persistent search for coherence and claims that their studies reflect their understanding of history and the writing of history.[103] She therefore looks for a "countercoherence" in the book of Judges and pays special attention to elements in the texts that earlier scholars treated only briefly and in passing since they did not meet their criteria of what was historically relevant. One of these areas is the violence against women in the book of Judges. Bal presents the hypothesis that this violence reflects the change in matrimonial traditions that took place during this time. According to the older system, the woman stayed with her father even after the wedding, while the new system meant that the woman moved in with her husband.

There is no room in this thesis for a closer study of Bal's hypothesis, but I want to apply a similar criticism to the scholars that are presented in this chapter. Bal's criticism of the search for coherence and consistency – Carroll in his book, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*, speaks about the "taming" of the texts[104] – can to some extent be directed at all three groups of scholars that I have presented.

One could probably object that Polzin assumes that the text has a dialogical structure and that others speak of a shifting perspective. But Exum has suggested that even if some scholars speak of dialogicity and shifting perspectives, there is a tendency to search for a consistent theology – that is, to defend God.[105] This problem is further accentuated when the whole book or DH is seen as a coherent text. Exum claims in her analysis of the story about Jephthah that it resembles a Greek

tragedy, with God's role in the biblical story being that of unfavourable fate in a Greek tragedy.

The problem can thus be described as follows: The OT scholar with an ideological interest searches for a message in the texts, but since the stories seldom provide the author's "message" to the reader directly, the scholar has to rely on what can be described as implicit comments and evaluations. However, it seems as if these scholars base their views on the premiss that Jephthah has a negative function in the book and they therefore look for elements that confirm this view. A better alternative, if the text does not provide evaluations, is to reconsider one's view of the story and its message.[106]

The Story about Jephthah – A Tragedy?

Exum believes that there are texts in the Bible that have a special dark dimension.[107] She distinguishes between tragedy as a literary form and the tragic vision according to which the world is irrational. "The tragic hero is the victim of forces she or he cannot control and cannot comprehend, encountering on all sides unresolved questions, doubts and ambiguities."[108] It is a world in which the problems of evil cannot be diminished or solved.

Jephthah has the sympathy of the reader since he "acts against his will in taking the life of his own child, yet he is unwittingly responsible for the terrible situation in which he finds himself.[109] However, an extensive comparison with the story about Saul shows that the story lacks important features. For instance, there is no explanation why the protagonist must experience the tragedy. Another difference is that the consequences for Jephthah are not mentioned. The comparison shows that the tragic element in this case is in the events themselves and in the divine silence.[110] Nevertheless, Exum performs a close reading in which she investigates how the motif of the vow and the sacrifice is presented. She concludes that there is a tension in Jephthah's character, and that the text forewarns what will happen – for example, by the name, which means "he opens".[111] She also tries to find out why he gives his vow, but establishes that no answer is provided.[112]

"The irony, the tragic irony, rests in the exact correspondence between the ill-chosen terms of Jephthah's vow and the subsequent events."[113] It is only in the scene of recognition – when Jephthah exclaims his despair and tears his clothes – that his feelings are presented. According to Exum, he therefore fulfils important criteria for a tragic hero – realizing that the situation is hopeless and that there is no way out.[114] Even though Jephthah fulfils some of the criteria for a tragic hero, Exum still has problems with the character. She believes that he is depicted as a negotiator, but that there is something excessive about him and that the vow hence does not surprise the reader.[115]

Her somewhat surprising conclusion is that Jephthah lacks tragic proportions.[116] She bases this view on the fact that he, in contrast with Saul, does not try to fight his fate.[117] He thereby shows that he is a little man who lacks hubris.

The tragedy of Jephthah is his guilt, not evilness. The vow is not a sign of his lack of faith, but an expression of his piety and his faith in Yahweh. It is this piety that creates the tragic irony, since this trait, through his inclination to excess, is transferred into *hamartia*. However, Exum admits that the "absence of censure not only makes us uncertain how to understand Jephthah's guilt, it also leaves us in doubt about the role of the deity."[118]

Conclusion

Exum's analysis shows that there are tragic features in the text, although these have not been executed in a consistent way.[119] However, the main point of relevance for my study is that, in spite of her "literary approach", she concludes that the story creates problems with the view of God, who almost acts as the inexorable fate in a Greek drama.

Even though she claims after a thorough study that there are traits in Jephthah's personality that motivate and forewarn of the tragedy, she still believes that this does not explain his fate. Instead, the text's – and hence God's – mystery remains.

My opinion, closely aligned with that of Exum, is that the episode about the vow and the sacrifice is so loosely integrated with the text that it cannot be explained by the type of implicit devices that the synchronists suggest. The laconic narrator does not evaluate Jephthah's action at all. He blames neither God nor Jephthah. According to this interpretation, the story's mystery and its tension in relation to the larger text remain. However, it is not possible to ascertain whether these tensions are the result of the pre-history of the text or of the "author's" creation of a story with these gaps and tensions.

Hence, it seems as if the interpretations that the synchronists have suggested can be explained only with reference to some shared tacit presuppositions. Firstly, they seem to assume that the story of Jephthah has an ideological message – that is, it has not only a theme but also a thesis.[120] Secondly, they assume that it is composed with an "iceberg technique" – that is, it only seems to be laconic and amoral. And finally, they assume that the story has been integrated into the larger text and can be understood in relation to it.

Notes

[1] The motif has always inspired artists. For examples see Israel Mehlman, "Jephthah's Daughter" in *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 25 (1997), p. 73 and David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* (Lubbock, 1986), p. 7.

[2] Augustinus, *The Confessions*. Introduction, Translation and Notes: Maria Boulding (London, 1999). It is in Book 1, Chapter 13 that Augustine complains of crying over Dido and not over his own sins.

[3] The introduction ties the story to the previous events. Boling marks this in *Judges* by giving the section the headline: "What's past is prologue" (p. 190).

[4] According to Boling, similar confrontations can be found in 2:1–5 and 6:7–10 (ibid., p. 192).

[5] "Among other things the following analysis will attempt to show that, in terms of both literary structure and theme, the material which precedes the introduction of Jephthah himself in 11.1 is closely integrated into the main body of the narrative." (Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 41f.)

[6] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 202.

[7] Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 177.

[8] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, pp. 44-48.

[9] This opinion is presented in more detail in chapters III and VIII.

[10] It is difficult to believe that Gilead (the word denotes a clan or an area) is the father. Scholars infer that the expression is comparable to "anyone", see Soggin, *Judges*, p. 204. Boling in *Judges* agrees with Burney, who believes that "the *district* is personified as father of Jephthah" (p. 197).

[11] Ironically, the name of the country is "good".

[12] This is described by Berlin in *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* as "resumptive repetition" (p. 126).

[13] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 211.

[14] Soggin points out as an example that it seems as if it is Moab and not Ammon that is referred to.

[15] Ibid., p. 212.

[16] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, pp. 54-57.

[17] Ibid., p. 59. Brettler claims, on the other hand, that Jephthah is depicted as "a terrible diplomat; he cannot even get the name of the Ammonite national god (Milkom) right, confusing him with Chemosh". ("The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics", p. 406.)

[18] "The story involves a calculated inversion of the traditional role of singing women on the evening after victory" (Boling, *Judges*, p. 208).

[19] The narrator introduces this as a new speech. He thereby creates a pause (a delay) between the speeches since the later line starts a new chain. "To him" is replaced with "her father". See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 43.

[20] Phyllis Trible in "The Daughter of Jephthah: An Inhuman Sacrifice", *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 13 (Philadelphia, 1984) has made a structural suggestion with an almost Chiastic character: (a) "Narrated discourse: Jephthah confines his daughter." (b) "Direct discourse: The father speaks." (c) "Direct discourse: The daughter speaks." (c') "Direct discourse: The daughter speaks." (b') "Direct discourse: The father speaks." (a') "Narrated discourse: Jephthah confines his daughter unto death." (p. 98f.)

[21] Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow*, p. 13.

[22] Ibid., p. 18f.

[23] This way of giving oneself over into the hands of God is a recurring motif in the OT. Only in this story we have met the motif several times. In the introduction, Israel says that God can do with them as he pleases. The leader of the people promises that whoever leads them shall be their chief. Jephthah hands the conflict with Ammon over to God as its judge, and so on.

[24] A similar irony can be found in 19:11–15a, where we are told how the situation that the Levite wants to avoid, actually happens to him (Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 70).

[25] Mehlman says in "Jephthah's daughter" that "[the] sudden transition from joy to sorrow is most moving."(p. 76.) Both the father and the daughter are quickly transported from the victory and the happiness of the reunion to an insight into the tragedy.

[26] The girl has no name. She is characterized by her speech as devout and bound by the words of her father.

[27] Trible calls the section a narrative postscript. She claims that the narrator turns the perspective around and shows that the daughter was the one who was remembered (*Texts of Terror*, p. 106).

[28] Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, p. 365f. Ska makes the same reflection as I do; see "*Our Fathers Have Told Us*", pp. 29–31.

[29] Judges 8:1–3.

[30] "Then the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. Whenever one of the fugitives of Ephraim said, 'Let me go over,' the men of Gilead would say to him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' When he said, 'No,' they said to him, 'Then say Shibboleth,' and he said, 'Sibboleth,' for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites fell at that time." (Judges 12:5–6.)

[31] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 221.

[32] Boling, *Judges*. According to Boling, the narrator does not blame God or God's spirit for what has happened, he is also sympathetic toward his protagonist, who is presented as the exemplary judge. (p. 210). Boling continues by saying: "All in all the pragmatic compiler leaves us with the impression that within his anxious limitations (11:30–40) Jephthah was a good judge, the best since Othniel. With his death, however, the judgeship returned to the west bank." (p. 214.) He also states: "It leaves no room to doubt that Jephthah's victory against the Ammonites was considered to be Yahweh's saving act on behalf of Israel." (p. 207.)

[33] See Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, "embedded narrative" (p. 25) and "frame narrative" (p. 33).

[34] I share Mehlman's view in "Jephthah's Daughter" that the episode about the vow and the sacrifice differs from the pattern. "Whereas the three links of the story are actually rhetorical dialogues which include negotiations, sharp retorts and arguments, the conversations in the story of Jephthah's daughter are outcries emanating from the depth of the soul. Here is a deep human drama as opposed to the rhetorical and political character of the previous dialogues." (p. 78.)

[35] I use the notion of genre in accordance with Culler's definition in *Structuralist Poetics*: "A genre, one might say, is a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text." (p. 136.)

[36] The question of genre in episodic storytelling relates to, among other things, the quality of the life that is being told. This is not uncomplicated either. Jephthah (and Aeneas) complete their assignments and succeed in their public roles. But at the same time, both are to some extent tragic characters since they have to make significant personal sacrifices along the way. This is characteristic of many characters in the Bible.

[37] Trible has pointed out this tension: "The introduction to the Jephthah cycle juxtaposes a public and a private crisis." (*Texts of Terror*, p. 93)

[38] A similar tension is found in the *Aeneid*; see Susan Ford Wiltshire, *Public and Private in Vergil's Aeneid* (Amherst, 1989).

[39] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, pp. 96, 97, 100, 101, 102, 104 etc.

[40] Ibid., p. 105.

[41] The same applies for example to Ehud and Jael's assassination, Gideon's hesitation and Samson's affairs. In all cases, there are features that could have been used as morally damning, but the author declines this option.

[42] Auerbach describes in *Mimesis* Genesis 22 as follows: "On the other hand, the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal (and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and 'fraught with background.'" (p. 11f.)

[43] Ibid., p. 15.

[44] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; especially the chapters: "Gaps, Ambiguity and the Reading Process" (pp. 186–229), and "Between the Truth and the Whole Truth" (pp. 230–263). Sternberg distances himself from Auerbach's description, however (ibid., p. 232).

[45] Ibid., p. 230.

[46] Ibid., p. 233.

[47] Ibid., p. 186.

[48] The designation has been used to describe Hemingway's narrative style and the Icelandic sagas. In the case of the Icelandic sagas, there is reason to be a bit sceptical, however. See the chapter "Isberg på drift" [Drifting Icebergs] in Lars Lönnroth, *Skaldemjödet i berget: Essayer om fornisländsk ordkonst och dess återanvändning i nutiden* [The Skaldic Mead: Essays on Old Norse Poetics and Its Reuse in Present Times] (Stockholm, 1996), pp. 35–59.

[49] See Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; for example, pp. 187, 191.

[50] Ibid., 186f. "For the effect produced on the reader by a literary text does not rest only on the final conclusion he reaches on turning the last page; it embraces all the impressions, true or false, generated in the course of his reading." (Ibid., p. 199.) Hence the reader cannot wait, but throughout formulates early hypotheses: "Rather, the reader fills in the gaps himself to the best of his (limited) ability, forming and revising and if possible deciding between alternative closures as he goes along, till the end either resolves or fixes the play of ambiguity." (Ibid., p. 239.)

[51] Sternberg believes that the "filling" has to be verifiable by the text. "Illegitimate gap-filling is one launched and sustained by the reader's subjective concerns (or dictated by more general preconceptions) rather than by the text's own norms and directives." (Ibid., p. 188.) He lists the factors that should guide this process: "a. the different materials – actional, thematic, normative structuring – explicitly communicated by the text; b. the work's language and poetics; c. the perceptual set established by the work's generic features; d. the special nature and laws and regularities of the world it projects, as impressed on the reader starting from the first page; e. basic assumptions or general canons of probability derived from 'everyday life' and prevalent cultural conventions." (Ibid., p. 189.) In his analysis of 2 Sam 11ff. he claims, for example, that the questions whether Uriah knows what David has done with his wife Bathsheba, and what David believes that Uriah knows, are of great importance to the reader (pp. 190–222). Sternberg has been criticized by Bal in *Lethal Love*, p. 15ff.

[52] Prince describes "diegesis" as "[the] (fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur". (*A Dictionary of Narrative*, p. 20.)

[53] See Skalin, *Karaktär och Perspektiv* [*Character and Perspective*]; for example, p. 26. Sternberg in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* reasons in an interesting way about Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. His thesis is that the ambiguities are the main point and that readers who choose to view the story either as a ghost story or as a psychological study make the same mistake: "Only a reading that simultaneously activates both hypotheses (and takes their interplay into account) qualifies as a valid reading." (p. 226) But is this really a narrative reading?

[54] Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 206.

[55] Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow*, p. 48, n. 92: "Oblique" for Marcus signifies the retributional pattern that, according to him, can be found in the stories about Jacob and Samson (p. 92).

[56] For example, Lev. 18:21, 20:2f.; Deut. 12:31, 18:10.

[57] "After these things God tested Abraham." (Genesis 22:1) It is unusual for the narrator in the OT to state how we should understand and interpret the story that is being told.

[58] For example, Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia. Trible provides examples in *Texts of Terror*, p. 114, n. 48.

[59] Boling, *Judges*, p. 209. Marcus reaches a similar conclusion in *Jephthah and His Vow*, p. 54f.

[60] Other examples are Samson's nazirite promises or God's and the people's promises to one another. One can even claim that an important theme in the DH is how words shape history.

[61] "Pre-critical" here is used for both interpreters before the critical era and later scholars with a conservative view.

[62] They seem to assume both that the texts were written soon after the events and that it was the authors' intention to write history.

[63] Daniel J. Harrington and Anthony J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 10 (Edinburgh, 1987), p. 83.

[64] "Not the vow, but the form it took, was culpable. According to the Talmud (Taan. 4a), Jephthah was one of three men who framed a vow carelessly. He did not foresee the possibility that it might be an unclean animal and unfit for sacrifice that would be the first to meet him, and so he was punished by the tragedy of his daughter." (A. Cohen (ed.), *Joshua and Judges*, p. 256.)

[65] Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow*, pp. 54–55. One can add that the elders in Israel give a similar vow when they promise the power to whoever can lead the people into battle against the children of Ammon (Judges 10:18).

[66] Ibid., p. 55.

[67] "Kimchi remarks that legally the vow is invalid and could have been annulled. The Midrash Rabbah (Leviticus, end) relates that he should have gone to Phinehas or the High Priest should have gone to him and had the vow annulled. Each stood on his dignity and waited for the other to take action, and between the obstinacy of the two the maiden suffered. Both were punished: the Divine Presence departed from Phinehas and leprosy struck Jephthah." (Cohen, *Joshua and Judges*, p. 258.)

[68] "A veil is drawn over the final scene. Jephthah is said to have built a house for her in which she lived a solitary life until she died (Kimchi)." (Ibid., p. 259.) For more examples, see Mehlman, "Jephthah's Daughter", p. 74f.

[69] Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 389.

[70] C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student Commentary (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 391f.

[71] Marcus in *Jephthah and His Vow* does not view the ambiguities in the text as the result of a conglomeration of different sources or the laconic style of the narrator. He claims instead that they are consciously used literary devices. He refers to Greenstein's analyses of Genesis 37 and Numbers 16. Ambiguities such as whether it was Ishmaelites or Midianites that took Joseph to Egypt (Gen. 37) or the overlapping of the two stories in Numbers 16 are used to blur some factors and hence to direct the attention of the reader to others. Marcus applies this reasoning to the story about Jephthah: "[The] ambiguities surrounding Jephthah's daughter serve to blur her fate, but throw something else in sharper relief. This, in my opinion, is Jephthah's rash vow." (p. 54.)

[72] Marcus makes a list of seven problems in the text concerning the oath and the sacrifice: "(1) Whether the original intent of the vow was the sacrifice of a human being or an animal. (2) The structure of the vow shows lack of congruence between the condition and the promise. (3) The wording of the vow is anomalous, and leads one to believe that some textual dislocation has taken place. (4) What the meaning is of the daughter's request to go to the hills for two months with her friends to bewail her virginity. (5) Whether the phrase *wehî' lō' yãde 'ãh îš* 'she did not know a man' is to be taken as circumstantial or consequential. (6) Whether the phrase *watehî ḥōq beyisrâ' el* means 'it became a custom in Israel' or 'she became an example in Israel' (7) What the nature is of the annual festival: one of mourning or of celebration." (Ibid., p. 52.)

[73] Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 210f.

[74] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 217.

[75] Ibid., p. 218.

[76] James D. Martin says in *The Book of Judges*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, 1975): "This is the point at which this section of the Jephthah narrative, with its emphasis on the fate of the daughter, has been aiming. It is the attempt to explain, by means of a legend about the sacrifice of a virgin, an annual four-day festival in Israel." (p. 146.)

[77] Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 177.

[78] O'Connell refers in *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* to Boogaart and suggests that plot should be defined as: "the 'organization of incident to achieve a single purpose'". (p. 4.) He provides an exhaustive description of the various levels of plots (p. 171ff.) O'Connell's plots can generally be described as an enumeration of the various conflicts in the story. The story contains, in this case, four overlapping plots: A. "YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Ammon through Jephthah"; B. "Consequences of Gilead's failure to uphold covenant loyalty without ulterior tribe-centred motives and to refrain from covenant (social) injustices – the oath to Jephthah"; C. "Consequences of the failure of Jephthah to uphold covenant loyalty without ulterior motives and of his adoption of foreign cultic practice – the vow to YHWH"; D. "Consequences of Ephraim's failure to uphold covenant loyalty without ulterior motives and to refrain from covenant (social) injustice".

[79] Gunn, "Joshua and Judges", p. 116f. He continues: "The larger story holds out blueprints of security – a nation (and a system of tribal affiliation), a land, institutions of leadership (judge, king, priest, prophet, and patriarchy) or cult (ark, ephod, and temple) – only to undermine and fracture them by recounting their fragility, corruption, or irrelevance. Even the law and commandments are subject to critical review, as the forbearance and compassion of YHWH erode their claim to absoluteness. Here in the Jephthah story it is perhaps the insecurity of the rejected 'son of Gilead' (see 11:1–3) that goads him to play hostage to fortune in order to secure the victory and headship over the rejecters." (p. 117.)

[80] The test motif, which is said to recur time and time again in the book, is given the following description: "A test is meant to give some kind of assurance, proof, or certitude to him who administers it." (Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 193.)

[81] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 74.

[82] "The elders of Gilead now repeat their offer of the prize by which they hope to insure their own success: they promise the lordship of Gilead to Jephtah. Unlike Yahweh with respect to Israel, however, Jephthah is influenced positively by the Gileadites' offer: *the test has now become a trap*." (Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 179.)

[83] Ibid., p. 180.

[84] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p.53f.

[85] Ibid., p. 64.

[86] Gunn, "Joshua and Judges", p. 117; Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 67.

[87] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 87.

[88] Ibid., p. 89. Schneider makes the opposite interpretation: "Jephthah detailed the history of the conflict, which is ironic since he has been depicted as an outsider, exiled from his home, and yet was well versed in the history and tradition of Israel. This makes Jephthah the only leader in Judges who exhibited any knowledge of Israelite history or their conflicts." (*Judges*, p. 172.) She suggests that the speech is directed first and foremost towards the Israelites, to legitimate Jephthah's leadership position. (p. 173.)

[89] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 90.

[90] Ibid., p. 98.

[91] Ibid., p. 95.

[92] O'Connell in *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* can ascertain as early as the commentary on 10:11–14 that: "YHWH's rebuke thus foreshadows and sets the rhetorical agenda for the Jephthah account, which displays the ironic consequences for Jephthah and the nation of trying mechanistically to manipulate the divine will to serve some private end." (p. 179.)

[93] Ibid., p. 192. Boling says: "What was irregular, for the period, was the manner of its bestowal, which indicates that Yahweh had now been relegated to the position of confirming the elders' own selection of the highest leadership." (*Judges*, p. 198.) Soggin analyses the episode concerning the choice of Jephthah by comparing it with other stories in the book of Judges. (*Judges*, p. 206ff.) He claims that this story differs from the other stories with regard to several points.

[94] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 182f.

[95] Ibid., p. 181. O'Connell also claims that Gilead's promise in 10:18 gives them a leader that is not chosen by Yahweh: "Ironically, through YHWH allowing Jephthah to triumph, Gilead is granted a leader of their own choosing and character – one whose leadership puts private interests ahead of covenant loyalty to YHWH or concern for the welfare of others." (p. 182.)

[96] Ibid., p. 5.

[97] Ibid., p. 186f.

[98] "Just as Jephthah's vow results in the injustice of the sacrifice of his daughter and his concomitant loss of an heir, so the Israelite league is brought to suffer the consequences of the behaviour of Gilead's leaders in the slaughter of the Ephraimites. Jephthah's slaughter of his daughter (11:39–40) parallels microcosmically Gilead's slaughter of its tribal 'brother' Ephraim (12:1–6)." (Ibid., p. 189.)

[99] In some cases it is impossible to view the interpretations in this way. For example, there is tension between Polzin and Webb's interpretation of the second episode on the one hand, and Klein's on the other, that is hard to overcome.

[100] Boling says: "The narrator does not blame either Yahweh or the Yahwist spirit for Jephthah's tragedy. He was rather, as in nearly all the old narrative segments of the book, profoundly sympathetic with his protagonists, but all the while retained a critical perspective on the problems of public and private life." (*Judges*, p. 210.)

[101] Ecclesiasticus 46:11–12 (The Jerusalem Bible) quoted in Boling, *Judges*, p. 3.

[102] In the chapter, the author lists a long row of heroes from the OT who serve as examples of faith with the purpose of encouraging readers. Jephthah is mentioned in vv. 32–34: "And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight."

[103] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*.

[104] Robert P. Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold: The Bible as a Problem for Christianity* (London, 1991), p. 136f.

[105] Exum mentions her critique in "The Centre Cannot Hold ", although she is not very explicit – for example, see p. 430, n. 38; and p. 431. The criticism in the text is therefore my application of her statement. In the article she presents a holistic literary reading (p. 410). She claims that even God (who is treated as a character) and his actions are problematic in the book of Judges. In the case of Jephthah, she asks whether it is possible that it is the spirit that makes Jephthah take his detrimental vow (p. 422).

[106] Susan Niditch in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*. Semeia Studies (Atlanta, 1990) formulates the following question: "And yet, as readers of biblical traditional-style literature, we often delight in biblical 'silences' and find deep reasons for delayed revelations of narrative content. Are we justified in these reader responses or are we sometimes too desperate to find aesthetic order and skill whereas narrative decisions really have been made on grounds other than aesthetics?" (p. 3.)

[107] J. Cheryl Exum, "The Tragic Vision and Biblical Narrative: The Case of Jephthah" in J. C. Exum (ed.), *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus,* Semeia Studies (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 59–85. "Rather I am interested in exploring a particular dimension of biblical narrative, a dimension which reveals the dark side of existence, which knows anguish and despair, and which acknowledges the precarious lot of humanity in a world now and then bewildering and unaccommodating." (p. 60.) Her prime example is the story about Saul. In her study of the story about Jephthah, her intention is to work as a deconstructionist and to focus on what she views as suppressed and unconscious dimensions in the text (p. 61).

[108] Ibid., p. 60.

[109] Ibid., p. 62.

[110] For example, Exum says that the narrator does not discuss the question of guilt: "No negative judgement attends either the making of the vow or its performance…and this absence of censure not only makes us uncertain how to understand Jephthah's guilt, it also leaves us in doubt about the role of the deity." (Ibid., p. 78.)

[111] Exum believes that the significance of "he opens" probably refers to God opening the uterus, "but, knowing what is in store for him, we cannot help connecting it to the fatal moment when he opens his mouth and out comes the vow that seals his tragic fate." (Ibid., p. 64).

[112] "Our speculations about what lies behind Jephthah's vow are efforts to resolve its un-reason, its sinister and seemingly unnecessary quality, its ultimately tragic dimension." (Ibid., p. 66.)

[113] Ibid., p. 67.

[114] Exum here compares the story with *King Oedipus* who did not mean to kill his father and marry his mother. He committed these actions because he did not know his true identity. Jephthah is described in a similar way, according to Exum: "The experience of being trapped in an intolerable situation for which one is unintentionally, yet still somehow responsible, gives rise to tragic awareness." (Ibid., p. 69.)

[115] Ibid., p. 73.

[116] Ibid., p. 76.

[117] "[There] is no inner struggle, no wrestling against his fate." (Ibid., p. 76.)

[118] Ibid., p. 78.

[119] This is probably also the gist of W. Lee Humphreys's critique of Exum, even though he limits the discussion to the tragic view of life, in "The Story of Jephthah and the Tragic Vision: A Response to J. Cheryl Exum" in J. C. Exum (ed.), *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*. Semeia Studies (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 86–95.

[120] See Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 405ff.

V. Are Narratives Resistant to Reworking?

V. Are Narratives Resistant to Reworking?

In Chapters II–IV different strategies of interpretation regarding the book of Judges and its narratives have been presented. The demand for interpretation and the search for tenable strategies have arisen because the book seems to have a rather loose structure and thus could be described as a mere anthology of narratives from roughly the same area and time. However, a closer look reveals that these narratives have been reworked and that they have been integrated into a "larger text". This fact generates questions such as: How extensive is this "text"? How is it composed? Has it been edited on one or several occasions? Is there a central theme, message or perspective that unifies it? But the demand for interpretation is not only related to issues that involve the supposed "larger text". There are also problems concerning the individual narratives, such as their bizarre content, their episodic or inconsistent character and the laconic style of the narrator. Another group of issues regards the relationship between the narratives and the larger text: How have the narratives been reworked? In what way do they connect to the "larger text" and to each other? The latter group of questions can be summarized collectively as: Have the narratives received a new meaning and function in their new context?

For the sake of simplicity, the different strategies were organized into two major groups – namely, historical-critical and synchronic schools. However, the focus has been on the latter group, and especially on the assumption that a literary analysis presupposes a synchronic approach to the text. A comparison between the two strategies reveals that they represent contrary notions about the "text" and the voice that is to be interpreted. This leads to, for instance, different opinions about the message or ideology of the book or the DH.

A closer examination of some of the synchronists and their interpretations of the narratives about Ehud and Jephthah made it apparent that they assume that the book is a coherent literary unit, regardless of its origin. Their argument for this claim is that its plot, or one or several central themes, unifies the book or the DH and hence that it has a meaningful structure. This fact is in its turn explained by the canonization process, the redaction process, the "last hand" etc. The individual narratives are thus thought to be integrated into the book in an artistic and significant way. Hence these scholars do not accept the view that the redactors inserted older material only to fill out the chronology of the history.[1] Instead they argue that the narratives dramatize the message of the "narrator", "the implied author", "the editor" etc. This implies that they assume that it is the same voice (or voices) that speaks in the entire book or history.

The fundamental issue regarding the hypotheses that synchronic scholars have suggested concerning the structure of the book and the interpretation of its narratives is: Have scholars who claim that the book of Judges can be read as a coherent and meaningful literary unit done justice to the character of the book and its component texts? This question concerns all three of the issues that their hypothe-

ses address – that is, the structure and composition of the "larger text", the interpretation of the individual narratives and the relationship between the micro- and macro-levels of the book. In the foregoing chapters I have discussed all these issues. Firstly, it would be possible to criticize their suggestions regarding the structure of the book since they are forced to make important concessions and to adjust the material to fit their theories. Furthermore, no hypothesis has been able to gain some sort of consensus. Concerning their interpretations of the individual narratives, they are all too often compelled to refer to devices that seem very far-fetched. However, their understanding of the narratives and the "larger text" is the critical point. It will, therefore, be the main subject of subsequent chapters.

A "Natural" Reading of Narratives

A critical examination of these scholars is essentially motivated by the fact that their interpretations of the narratives in certain cases seem to contrast with a more natural understanding. In order to illustrate this conflict, I have chosen examples from the book of Judges in which the protagonists and their actions have always been a problem for both general readers and professional scholars. The stories of judges such as Ehud, Jephthah and Samson provide examples of the tension between the morality presented in the "larger text" (or the ideology/morality of the interpreter) and the norm of the stories. Ehud can defeat his enemy by fraud and assassination, Jephthah sacrifices his daughter but is nevertheless the hero who saves his people and Samson fulfils his mission even though (or because) he is continually attracted to Philistine women.

According to Jonathan Culler's description of "literary competence", a reader is able to understand a text because he or she has a knowledge, often unconscious, of the conventions that are valid for this kind of literature.[2] This ability can be compared to linguistic competence, and is analogous to the kind of competence that we exercise in using our first language. To hold such a view is to imply that if someone suggests an interpretation that challenges a conventional understanding, then a feeling of disturbance will be created and the divergent interpretation will demand some kind of explanation.

I have claimed that some of the interpretations that the synchronists have presented can be described as disturbing according to the above-mentioned definition – for example, the suggestion that Ehud is an impostor who does not trust his Lord and even abuses God's name. Although he manages to win a decisive victory, he is an ironic figure who can be seen as exemplifying failure, apostasy and distrust. This also applies to the interpretation that Jephthah is a man who has not accepted that life is precarious and risky, and that one cannot negotiate with Yahweh in the same way as one manipulates and negotiates with one's neighbour or the gods of the heathens. He consequently gives a promise that leads to a situation in which he is forced to sacrifice his only child. Jephthah is hence to be regarded as another negative example. When we come across interpretations like

these our question is accordingly: How have these scholars reached this conclusion? The answer that we expect to receive relates to literary convention unless these scholars refer to features outside the text or to a totally subjective view. That is, we assume that a certain interpretation of a text can be discussed, and that it is possible to argue for and against it.

Although the scholars under consideration refer to different devices in the text, they share the methodological principle of interpreting the narratives in relation to their respective understanding of the "larger text". In the following chapters I will consequently examine how this reasoning relates to a conventional reading of narratives. Is not the narrative form resistant to reworking, since it is a closed structure? Can the primary meaning of a narrative be overthrown by the "larger text"? If the intuition that these questions reflect were correct, then it would be possible to explain several of the problems that readers have had with the book of Judges by its form – that is, a book that contains independent texts. The tensions in the book could thus be explained without reference to diachronic analysis or advanced stylistic devices.

The Hermeneutic Circle and Perspective

The difference between the models of interpretation can be further described with the help of two well-known concepts: the hermeneutic circle and perspective. In this context, the hermeneutic circle means simply that all interpretation is a process whereby we understand the whole text in relation to its parts, and vice versa. It would mean that a motif such as, for instance, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter can only be explained if we relate it to the larger unit of which it is a part. But what is this unit? For pre-critical scholars it seems as if the fundamental unit is the entire OT or the Christian Bible. A tendency among these scholars is to stress the whole text at the expense of the parts, and consequently their interpretations tend to be harmonizations. Historical-critical scholars have claimed that the present text is not coherent, and have therefore tried to interpret details or sections of the text in relation to an "original" context. Synchronic scholars claim that the present text is coherent in spite of its complicated pre-history, and consequently they interpret the details of the text in relation to that larger unit, which they regard as the most meaningful and significant. Their interpretations are accordingly often quite similar to those suggested by pre-critical scholars and tend likewise to be harmonizations. However, the question we have to consider is whether the stories of Ehud and Jephthah actually are independent and hence whether the narrative is the unit in relation to which the individual elements should be analysed.

This description can be further developed using the concept of perspective. The concept is used here to denote a point of view or an attitude to the things described – that is, events, characters and setting. But where can this perspective be found? Pre-critical scholars seem to have approached the material from a theological perspective. When the historical-critical method entered the scene, its adhe-

rents' intention was to do justice to the perspective of the text itself. But this approach often led to the conclusion that these texts contained different and sometimes even contrasting perspectives. The segments of the text could hence be understood as different voices or sub-texts within the larger text. The synchronic scholars assume that the material has been shaped by a process that has resulted in the original perspective being subordinated to, or replaced by, a "larger text" so that segments, episodes and narratives have received new or extended meanings. The local voices have hence given way to a single global voice, even though this voice may contain tensions and could be described as dialogical. This description implies that an important task is to find the "largest text" – that is, the one that can be described as the "final perspective". However, the question is whether this is easier than understanding the book of Judges as a collection of independent narratives. According to the latter alternative, the book contains different voices. However, this is not explained by a diachronic segmentation of the text but by the fact that narratives have been inserted into a larger unit. The result is hence that there are several texts in the book or the work.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

The tenth chapter of the gospel of Luke relates how a lawyer "stood up to test Jesus" with the question: "[What] must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replies with a counter-question: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" So the lawyer quotes the most important commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." To this Jesus replies: "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." At this moment it seems that the potential conflict is over and that the discussion has ended, but the lawyer is not content with this development, and in order "to justify himself" he asks yet another question: "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus now answers with the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan. When he has finished his story, he asks the lawyer: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" In spite of the fact that his answer means that he loses the confrontation, the lawyer admits that it is the Samaritan who is the hero of the story, although he does not even want to let this word pass his lips but says: "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus is then able to put an end to the discussion with the exhortation: "Go and do likewise."

The course of this narrative is not understood as irrational, even though the lawyer, by his interpretation of the parable, gives Jesus the upper hand and loses the confrontation. We tend to accept this course of events because we realize that the conversation has turned out in a way that compels the lawyer to make this admission. But why? Why does he give this answer and not another? Why does the man not protest in response to the provocative elements of the story? What is it about the words of Jesus that closes all exits and forces the lawyer to accept defeat?

It is obvious that something happens when Jesus ceases to argue and starts to narrate. He "takes the stage", so to speak, and the lawyer is "seated" before the storyteller.[3] The lawyer is thus silenced by the presentation of a performance, and like an audience member he expects that the story will be a consistent unit with some kind of point. It is probable that he could have protested against several elements ("No one travels on that road alone!" "There have not been any robbers in that area for years!" "I have never heard of a priest who behaves like that!" Which inn are we talking about?" "I am an expert on Samaritans and their morals, and they never act like this!"), but the story does not accommodate objections like these since it is a unit, a single utterance, within which such issues are irrelevant or meaningless.

The answer to our questions about the precarious situation of the lawyer therefore seems to be related to the fact that Jesus uses a narrative. That is, because the lawyer faces a narrative, he cannot protest against the provocative elements and is forced to admit that it is the Samaritan who is the hero.

This example presupposes and illustrates an important characteristic of narratives. A narrative, like a painting or a piece of music, is a self-contained and independent unit in spite of the fact that it is composed of elements that could be isolated by analysis. According to this reasoning, a narrative is a coherent literary structure and is perceived as a unity. This characteristic explains why the "language game" is changed and the opponents are given new roles when Jesus starts narrating instead of arguing. Jesus uses the narrative to create an imaginary space in which a particular situation exists. In this space, a plot is enacted in which the characters have different roles and functions.[4] The lawyer does not have direct access to this space and thus must either accept Jesus' story or simply stop listening. In spite of the fact that he can acknowledge and identify – and certainly have opinions about – the separate elements that make up the story, he accepts that they are reduced to motifs in a plot. Jesus is also confined, in a way, by the narrative, since the rhetorical effect that he wants to establish demands that he choose a story that serves his purpose. A wrongly chosen story can counteract the aim of the speaker or create tension and ambiguity.

The evangelist, who recounts the confrontation between Jesus and the lawyer, can assume that Jesus and the lawyer in the story, and his readers outside it, intuitively accept this characteristic of narratives. Hence he can assume that there is no real scope for alternative interpretations from either the lawyer or the reader. Only the Samaritan can be the hero of this parable. If someone were to suggest that it is actually the priest or the Levite who acts in accordance with the norm of the narrative – and hence is its hero – we would probably dismiss this as an incompetent reading or be disturbed by this interpretation.

The Interpretation of Narratives

The statement that the parable is easy to understand and that there is no scope for alternative perceptions of its hero, while it may seem to be evident, may also seem to be in conflict with the popular opinion that a literary text can have any meaning whatsoever. This implies that the concept of interpretation is used to denote different activities. Although this issue is very interesting, I will treat it rather superficially since it is a digression from the main topic of this thesis – that is, the relationship between the narratives and the larger text.

The parable about the Good Samaritan can be described as an intradiegetic narrative – that is, a character in the narrative tells it. In this case it means that the narrator – Jesus – recounts a parable in a particular situation. Its effective constituents are, as we have seen, semantic units, elements that function as motifs in an artefact. The listener's attention is aroused since he or she expects to be entertained, and expects the story to have a point. He or she does not interpret the individual elements or the form (the discourse) but the story that is told. The fundamental question that is asked in order to understand could therefore be formulated as something like: "Where does the storyteller want to lead me with these words? What effect is the storyteller trying to achieve?" And the listener is prepared to accept the leading that he or she believes is being offered. This attitude is a part of the game.

A Conventional Interpretation of the Narratives in Judges

When I suggest that some interpreters of the book of Judges might have interpreted the book "wrongly", I mean that their readings do not conform to a conventional interpretation – what I have called a "natural" or "intuitive" interpretation – since they do not read the narratives as independent units. Now, of course it would be possible to object that it is impossible to prove that these conventions were valid for the original authors (redactors) and readers, or for each and every reader today. This objection is reasonable, but, as I stated in the introduction, the rules that are valid for narratives seem to be surprisingly constant. This is confirmed by the fact that the early translators and commentators wrestled with the same problems in the text as do modern readers.

However, scholars such as Alter, Amit and Sternberg seem to have a different opinion regarding this issue since they intimate that the narratives of the OT belong to a unique and distinctive genre. The conventions that are valid for this genre can thus be deduced only from the texts themselves.[5] But would it not be reasonable to claim that if our intent is to understand why the book has always troubled its readers, then the important conventions are not the hypothetical unique rules that might have shaped the texts, but the rules that are valid for narratives in general?

To Fill In Gaps in a Text

Beginning with the statement that narratives are perceived as units in which the elements have been transformed into motifs in an artefact, I will now take a closer look at some of the issues that were raised in the discussion regarding the narratives about Ehud and Jephthah.

An important observation was that several scholars seem to assume that these narratives were composed using a technique that could be described as an "iceberg-technique", and that the task of the interpreter is to fill in the gaps in the text. Sternberg and Amit, for example, describe the reading of the OT as a process in which the reader constantly stops, formulates hypotheses and tries to fill in gaps. But can this reasoning be applied to our example of the parable of Jesus? There are certainly a lot of "gaps" in this text, but it is difficult to imagine a situation in which the lawyer would interrupt Jesus with questions such as: "Who was the traveller?"; "Why was he alone?"; "How did he experience the assault?"; "Who were the robbers?"; "Why had they become criminals?"; "Why did the priest and the Levite pass by?"; "What were their motives?"; "Why was the Samaritan on the road this day?"; "Did he know that the other two had passed by?" and so on. Although the parable is rather short and the narrator might be described as being laconic and having an external perspective, and although these questions might be considered to be interesting, the filling in of these gaps must be understood as a different kind of activity than what can be described as a realization of a plot. This is so because the gaps do not have a function in the composition – that is, although it would probably be possible to claim that an answer to these questions gives our reading a higher value or a greater degree of sophistication, they are not significant in Jesus' story.

This example could be regarded as too obvious since we immediately realize that the parable is a story in which someone dramatizes a message by using a simple situation and a plot. The above-mentioned questions would therefore signal that the questioner had not understood the genre, purpose or function of the text. Furthermore, the story is obviously fictional. Although it is quite possible that Jesus could have used authentic material, this cannot be perceived as a report: it is a story. This means that the priest and the Levite have no motives, the robbers have no background, and so on, since they simply do not exist anywhere outside this narrative.[6] If a reader speculates about motives, background, psychology and so on, then he or she is not actually interpreting the parable of Jesus, and furthermore is not treating it as a fictional narrative.

If we apply this reasoning to the stories about Ehud and Jephthah, the question is then what kind of narration we perceive. Are they edifying accounts of God's saving acts in history, or are they moral and ideological texts in which the leaders symbolize the apostasy of the people or display important points in the larger text? In the latter case, the problem is how the realization of the story – the "naive level", according to Amit – relates to the more sophisticated levels of meaning.

Another important issue is whether these stories are literary productions or historical reports. The answer that we give to these questions will probably decide how we fill out the text and what kind of interpretation we perform.

Is It Up to the Reader to Decide Where a Narrative Starts and Ends?

The view of Gunn and Fewell that it is up to the reader to decide where a narrative starts and ends – a view that they apply to the story about Jephthah – can also be questioned from the standpoint of the conventional reading of narratives as I have described it above.[7] Applied to our example, this theory would mean that the reader could decide to read the parable as a story about the robbers, the priest, the Levite, the inn-keeper, the donkey and so on, as easily as he or she could decide to read it as a story about the traveller and the Samaritan. It would hence be a matter for the reader to choose who and what in the narrative should be focused on. This is obviously contrary to the view that when we listen to a narrative, we interpret the storyteller's performance assuming that someone has arranged the material around a certain focus to serve a certain purpose. That is, to interpret the parable about the Good Samaritan is to attend to Jesus' performance with its content, shape and focus. We, as listeners, have no access to the diegetic world outside the narrative.[8] If we choose to bypass the storyteller, then we are pursuing a different kind of activity than what I have called a "natural" interpretation or reading. This new activity can be compared with the production of a play. That is, we are not listening to a storyteller's performance; rather we ourselves are creating such a performance as we produce a new version of the story.

In the analysis of the story about Jephthah, we were able to establish that some scholars consciously or intuitively make this distinction between different kinds of interpretation. For example, the translators of the Targum have realized that the only way to "save" the narrative is to create a new version, since the present version does not condemn Jephthah's behaviour. However, in their version the protagonist is transformed by the addition of a few words into a negative example. Similarly, Trible is forced to admit that, although there is material in the story that could have been used to condemn Jephthah, the narrator has forgone this alternative.[9]

The Morality of the Narratives in the Book of Judges

One problem with the narratives in the book of Judges is that they, like all narratives, assume certain "compositional values".[10] In contrast to the "real world", the world of fiction can have absolute values. These values are not part of the thesis or message that the author proclaims, and the reader is expected to accept them in order for the narrative to be communicable. Remarkable agreements in this area can be found in popular literature and film especially. For instance, the reader accepts that in hospital dramas it is usually the tall, dark surgeon with a mysterious past who is the hero and the blond nurse who is the heroine while the

dark or red-headed nurse is a schemer; and that in action films the hero is a wretched cop who plays by his own rules and the bad guys are shot before the end of the movie. However, these values are not as harmless as is sometimes claimed, although they cannot be related to an author and his or her message. That they cannot be seen as harmless is attested by the fact that we often feel discomforted when we read an old book or watch an old movie, since we are not ready to accept the value-system that these "texts" assume – for instance, the heroic ethics of Homer, or the accounts about so-called "coloured" or "lower class" people in old novels. Modern readers often react against the nationalism and the role of women in the OT.

However, a fundamental issue is how these problems should be handled. Of course, one alternative is to "rescue the Bible" in the name of relativism or a reader-oriented approach by creating new versions in which the "other peoples" or women are given new roles, or in which God no longer participates in the actions that are described. Another alternative would be to ascertain which values really are assumed by the text and which values have been superimposed or reinforced by later readers. If it could be established that certain values really were immanent in these texts, then we could ask critical questions of the society and the authors who formed the values. Hence, in the case of Jephthah the task is not to create a new version in which the protagonist is condemned and the daughter becomes the hero, or in which God acts according to his behaviour and character in other texts – or in the theology of the interpreter. Instead, our task is to examine the values that this narrative assumes and then to consider how we should relate to a story in which it is better to sacrifice one's daughter than to break one's word, and in which even a man of God can be the victim of horrible misfortunes.

Conclusion

This rather brief presentation of some important distinctions relating to the interpretation of narratives implies that it is not entirely clear what is meant by a "literary study" of the OT and what purposes this kind of study actually serves. I have claimed throughout that interpretation of fictional (literary) narratives must be performed with reference to the conventions that are valid for such texts in general. However, my aim is not to be normative; I have instead tried to explain why some of the interpretations that synchronists have suggested can be perceived as "disturbing". The fundamental objection that the synchronists would be able to present to this reasoning and to my analyses of the stories about Ehud and Jephthah is probably that although these stories might originally have had the meaning that I suggest, they have now been integrated into a new context which is therefore the text or performance that we should interpret.

How Should Narratives That Have Been Inserted in a Larger Text Be Interpreted?

My fundamental statement that narratives are independent faces different directions.[11] In Chapter II, I presented a discussion of whether the story about Ehud is fictional, and I established that one aspect of independence is that a fictional text does not need a referent. Although each word has a meaning before it is inserted into a narrative (for example, all three potential protagonists in the parable about the Good Samaritan – the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan – are loaded with meaning and a particular effect is created because Jesus lets the one with mainly negative connotations serve as a hero), each motif acquires special significance in relation to its meaning in the context. A second aspect is that a narrative is independent in relation to its context – at least if it is a narrative in a qualified sense. Even though the parable of the Good Samaritan is a contribution to a discussion, it is a literary structure that carries its own meaning. Finally, the narrative is free in relation to the literary context. That is, although it might have been inserted in a larger text and given new functions, it still retains its meaning as a story.

This basic description is closely related to the feature that Gérard Genette speaks about as the paradoxical logic of fiction.[12] According to this logic, readers interpret narratives as single unified utterances. This relates to structuralist narratology and its claim that a narrative can be viewed as a sentence.[13] This means, among other things, that a reader expects the individual elements to be explained in relation to the conclusion of the story.[14]

Louis O. Mink

In this thesis, my main concern relates to the third of the above-mentioned aspects of narrative independence, since it is very important for our understanding of the relationship between the narratives and the "larger text" in the book of Judges. Louis O. Mink has discussed this aspect in an essay about the role of narratives in history.

> History and fiction are alike stories or narratives of events and actions. But for history both the structure of the narrative and its details are representations of past actuality; and the claim to be a true representation is understood by both writer and reader. For fiction, there is no claim to be a true representation in any particular respect.[15]

Mink claims that there are conventional distinctions between history and fiction but that these become problematic when one considers the form of these texts.

The narrative form generates difficult problems for the writing of history but it cannot be dismissed since it is a "primary cognitive instrument".[16] One problem "arises if we ask how narratives can be related to each other: can two narratives be combined…to form a single more complex narrative?"[17] Mink's answer is that it ought to be possible to combine historical narratives, while fictional narratives, "though they may be more or less coherent, do not displace each other; each, so to

speak, *creates the unique space* which it alone occupies rather than competing with others for the same space as historical narratives may."[18] He refers to the famous example of Sophocles' trilogy and the character of Creon in *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. The assumption in Mink's reasoning seems to be that Creon is a fictive character – that is, he is a motif with the same name but with different functions and hence different traits in the different plays. Although this disturbs the reader, he or she accepts it since each narrative has its own space, so to speak. However, if Sophocles' trilogy were regarded as history, then this would be more complicated because Creon would then be not a fictional character but a real person, and the three plays would take place in the same space. And, according to convention, a real person is supposed to have a certain degree of consistency within a space. The different descriptions of Creon would hence be competing.

But Mink states: "while historical narratives ought to aggregate into more comprehensive narratives, or give way to rival narratives which will so aggregate, in fact they do not".[19] This is explained by the fact that narratives are units with their own beginning, middle and end. That is, even in the writing of history the narrative creates its own space. "The more comprehensive narrative may be given its own formal unity, but this is a new unity, which replaces the independent coherence of each of its parts rather than uniting them. Sophocles' trilogy is not itself a play; if it were, its constituents would not be plays but acts."[20] According to this reasoning, a narrative contains (for instance) initial, middle and final motifs. These are not neutral building blocks that can be put together with new stories, but are tied to, and determined by, their function in their context. Mink is explicit about this matter when he states:

> The point we have reached, therefore, is that narrative histories should be aggregative, insofar as they are histories, but cannot be, insofar as they are narratives. Narrative history borrows from fictional narrative the convention by which a story generates its own *imaginative space*, within which it neither depends on nor can displace other stories; but it presupposes that past actuality is a single and determinate realm, a presupposition which, once it is made explicit, is at odds with the incomparability of imaginative stories.[21]

Hence Mink assumes that narrative can be used with different purposes in different genres, but that there are certain features that this form always has. One of these is that a narrative is a closed unit – a single coherent utterance – and a space. If one accepts these propositions, then it would be possible to claim that the narrative is always the primary level of significance even when it is inserted into a larger text – for example, a history – and that it functions as a text within the larger text unless it is "transformed" and becomes part of a new and different story.

Conclusion

According to the reasoning that has been presented in this chapter, a narrative is resistant to reworking since it is a unified utterance in which the individual elements function as motifs. An element cannot therefore be isolated from its function and meaning in the story and become like a building block in a new structure of meaning unless the old one is pulled down. This can be described with the help of a metaphor. During the Middle Ages, church builders used ancient temples as quarries. The question now is whether it can be said that the temples thereby became churches.[22] It is this characteristic of narratives – that they are independent units – that the translators of the Targum realized intuitively and that compelled them to create a new version of the story about Jephthah in order to harmonize the narrative with the "larger text".

The issue is hence whether the macro-level in the book of Judges has "pulled down" the old narratives and created new structures of meaning, or whether the narratives are to be viewed as texts within the larger text. In the latter case, a reader will understand them as closed units and will try primarily to realize the plot of each narrative. Different cruxes in the text will hence be interpreted in relation to the story, since this is the primary level of meaning. If we apply this to the story about Ehud, then it means that that there is a place in the story that is the protagonist's and another that is the antagonist's. The character who fills the first place is Ehud. If this causes problems with the ideology, the morality or the role of God as these are displayed on other levels in the text, then it does not change the function and significance of the motifs in this story. Rather, it causes consistency problems on other levels. On the other hand, the story about Jephthah is more complicated, since it has an episodic structure. It simply is difficult to establish whether the individual episodes, such as the one about the vow and the sacrifice, are narratives within the larger narrative or not.

The book therefore could be described as a collection of independent narratives. However, this understanding does not exclude the possibility that there are also other levels of meaning in the book, but it is doubtful that these can be understood in a hierarchical manner so that the basic levels of meaning are modified or changed in order to be harmonized with the meaning in the "larger text". If there are tensions and ambiguities among the different stories or between a story and the larger text, then this is viewed as a problem regarding the coherence and consistency of the book. For instance, there are problems with the portrayal of God in the book that resembles the problems concerning Creon in Sophocles' trilogy. This is further complicated by the fact that God, as a motif, is used in different ways in the narratives. Sometimes God appears as a character, sometimes as a compositional motivation and sometimes as the spirit of the narrative.[23]

If we were to describe the book of Judges as a collection of narratives, then it would mean that the narratives are given priority and that their "collective meaning" is quite plain. They display a set time in the history of Israel and the life of

the nation during that time. They also display a historical and theological pattern. The tensions and ambiguities in the book would then not have to be harmonized. They are instead regarded as natural consequences of the form of the book, a text that contains several independent texts. The disturbing interpretations that synchronic scholars have presented concerning Ehud and Jephthah are then explained by the fact that the narratives or elements in them are given a significance that they do not have on a fundamental level.

Notes

[1] The contrast between these two groups can be understood as a difference of opinion regarding the activity of "the last hand". Was he only a compiler or did he work as an author? Alter argues for the latter view in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* when he speaks about "composite artistry" (pp. 131–154). Berlin in *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* has a similar point of departure when she criticizes the traditional description of the work of the redactor: "[it] remained axiomatic that the final editor, the Redactor, was not free to edit his sources. He could arrange the material as he saw fit, either placing sources one after another or intertwining them but he could not remove inconsistencies or contradictions. Thus the present text, the work of the redactor, is little more than an anthology of prefabricated sources." (p. 113.)

[2] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 113ff.

[3] The expression "seated" or from "the perspective of the bench" is taken from Skalin, *Karaktär och Perspektiv* [*Character and Perspective*] for example, p. 14.

[4] See ibid., pp. 24ff.

[5] See, for example, Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 132f.

[6] If an artist made a portrait of a friend in which only the upper part of the body was painted, and someone asked whether x had legs or not, then it would be possible to answer this question in two different ways. We could say, Yes, since we have met x and we know that he has legs, but we could also answer, No, since the artist has only painted the upper part of the body. In the first case we are speaking about a "real" person but in the second case we are speaking about an artistic motif. This distinction is traditional in literary studies and can be exemplified by such issues as: Did Hamlet have a subconscious or not?

[7] Gunn and Fewell, Chapter 5, "Designs on the Plot" in *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 101–128. Using the story of Jephthah as an example, they fill in gaps and interpret different versions that they claim can be found in the text.

[8] In spite of the fact that I use the concept "world", I am critical of the application of the notion of "possible worlds" to fiction as in Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington, 1991) or Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore, 1998). For an extensive criticism, see Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*. Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford, 1994), p. 89ff. A fundamental issue in their criticism is that "possible worlds" says too much, since the theory assumes a complete world while the world of fiction is open and incomplete.

[9] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 105.

[10] The concept is taken from Skalin, unpublished lecture.

[11] For the autonomy of literary texts see for example Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View,* p. 21.

[12] Gérard Genette, "Vraisemblable et motivation", *Communication*, 11 (1968) p. 18.

[13] Barthes in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" describes a discourse as a sentence (p. 83) and states: "Structurally, narrative shares the characteristics of the sentence without ever being reducible to the sum of its sentences." (p. 84.) All elements can hence be viewed as functions (p. 89).

[14] Gerald Prince discusses the logic of narratives in *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, 1982) p. 150ff. The claim that narrative meaning is tied to its end is well known – see, for example, Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York, 1967) and Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York, 1984).

[15] Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument" in Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (eds.), *The Writings of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (London, 1978), p. 130. Mink discusses not the distinctions between fiction and history – for example the demand for evidence that is used in the modern study of history – but a common-sense distinction.

[16] Ibid., p. 131.

[17] Ibid., p. 142.

[18] Ibid. (The italics are mine.)

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 143.

[21] Ibid. (The italics are mine.)

[22] I have taken this example from Skalin.

[23] Thomas Mann uses the expression "*Der Geist der Erzählung*" when he answers the question: "Wer läutet die Glocken" in the beginning of *Der Erwählte*. Stockholmer Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Thomas Mann (Oldenburg, 1967 [1951]), p. 9f. Wolfgang Kayser refers to Mann in *Die Vortragsreise: Studien zur Literatur* (Bern, 1958) in a context where he queries: "Wer ist aber denn nun der Erzähler des Romans, ob er sich die Maske eines persönlichen Erzählers vorhält oder ein Schemen bleibt? Die Analogie zum Erzähler des täglichen Lebens mußten wir zerstören. Dafür hat sich eine andere aufgedrängt: die zum allwissenden und allgegenwärtigen Gott oder den Göttern. Der Erzähler des Romans – das ist nicht der Autor, das ist aber auch nicht die gedichtete Gestalt, die uns oft so vertraut entgegentritt. Hinter dieser Maske steht der Roman, der sich selber erzählt, steht der Geist dieses Romans, der allwissende, überall gegenwärtige und schaffende Geist dieser Welt." (p. 98)

VI. The Relationship between the Narratives and the Book of Judges

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> As a composition, the Old Testament is incomparably less unified than the Homeric poems, it is more obviously pieced together – but the various components all belong to one concept of universal history and its interpretation. If certain elements survived which did not immediately fit in, interpretation took care of them; and so the reader is at every moment aware of the universal religio-historical perspective which gives the individual stories their general meaning and purpose. The greater the separateness and horizontal disconnection of the stories and groups of stories in relation to one another, compared with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the stronger is their general vertical connection, which holds them all together and which is entirely lacking in Homer.[1]

A major part of the OT can obviously be described as an agglomeration of self-contained narratives. Still, many readers seem to perceive a remarkable unity in the collection. But how shall this unity be described and explained? And how does it affect the assumption that narratives are autonomous units?

Auerbach suggests that the Bible is a universal history with a "universal religio-historical perspective". This description implies that the history of the world is a single continuous narrative, into which individual stories are inserted and assimilated as time goes by. It would hence be possible to describe the origin of the Bible as a process of "narrativization", and a typical example would be the absorption of the OT by the Christian church.[2] Although it is precisely the idea of a universal history that Mink discusses when he claims that every narrative creates its own space, this – in conjunction with explanations that stress the redactional reworking of the material – is still a reasonable explanation for the remarkable unity of the heterogeneous material.

Regardless of which explanation one chooses, it seems as if both historical-critical and synchronic scholars assume that the narratives are more than individual stories and that the "larger text" is more than a mere agglomeration or anthology of separate texts. The basic argument for this view, besides the "uniform" character of the book or the DH, is that the narratives have been reworked. Hence, an extreme emphasis on the individual narratives would mean ignoring the fact that these stories are used within a "larger text" to dramatize a message. Therefore, the reader ought not to be content with an analysis that portrays Ehud as a hero who delivers his people from their oppressors, and that characterizes the story as exemplifying God's saving acts in history, since the story in its present context contains a theme and a message and/or propels the plot forward towards its end on the macro-level. A plain interpretation such as the one that I presented in Chapter II may hence be regarded as a "misreading" or an "under-reading".

Consequently, the task in this chapter is to examine and describe the relationship between the stories and the "larger text" in such a way that justice is done both to the autonomy of the narratives and to the fact that they are inserted into a

larger text. A fundamental issue is thus whether the "larger text" actually should be described as a novel or a narrative as several of the synchronists suggest. For example, Polzin justifies his study of the dialogicity in the DH in a footnote where he refers to Hayden White and Roland Barthes and the argument that there is a fundamental similarity between novels and history.[3] Amit claims that the book is composed as an episodic narrative in a way that is analogous with the story about Samson, for example.[4] However, the most prominent proponents of this view are Webb and Klein, and I shall therefore refer mainly to their work. They claim that the book of Judges has a meaningful and significant narrative structure and that it should be described as a narrative with a plot. The latter concept is not unambiguous, but I shall confine myself to the rather broad definition that these scholars adopt, in which "plot" is used to designate causality.[5]

The description of the book as a narrative could be regarded as a reply to the objections that I have applied in the preceding chapters to the synchronic interpretations, based on the notion of the autonomy of narratives and their resistance against reworking, since it would be possible to claim (alluding to Mink) that the individual plays have become acts in a new drama.

Before I analyse this argument more closely, I shall present Alter's thesis about "composite narrativity", since this approach has made a great impact on the literary study of the OT.

Literary Studies and Redaction Criticism

I have already pointed out that synchronic or literary scholars often argue in a way that is reminiscent of traditional redaction criticism. They oscillate between references to the reader and the conventions that are valid for this kind of literature on the one hand, and references to the "last hand" on the other. In the latter case, the issue is changed from "What does this mean?" to "What did he mean?" But if the fundamental question of interpretation concerns the intention or message of the redactor, then we have to query whether there is any "paradigm shift" relative to more traditional historical-critical studies at all.

By this reasoning, my criticism of their interpretations of Ehud and Jephthah could be said to miss the mark, since I have evaluated them in terms of the conventional reading of narratives when the purpose actually might have been to investigate how the redactor used these narratives and commented upon them by inserting them into a new context.

Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative

Alter describes the OT as "composite literature" or "composite narrative" and denotes thereby that it has been shaped by "montage" of existing material. Several scholars who discuss the poetics of OT narratives seem to share this opinion. However, that there is no consensus is demonstrated by Alter's criticism of Sternberg and Perry: "They tend to write about biblical narrative as though it were a

unitary production just like a modern novel that is entirely conceived and executed by a single independent writer who supervises his original work from first drafts to page proofs."[6]

According to Alter, the modern reader has problems with the OT, not least when it comes to "those components of the biblical corpus commonly called 'books'":

> The usual object of literary investigation is a book, or, as many prefer to say now under the influence of recent French intellectual fashions, a text. But the biblical text often proves under scrutiny to be at once multiple and fragmentary. Quite frequently, we cannot be sure what the boundaries of a given text are, how it is continued in surrounding texts, why it may be ignored, echoed, cited, or even actually duplicated elsewhere in the biblical corpus. A still graver challenge to the integrity of many biblical texts which we might want to look at as literary wholes is the elaborately layered nature of the material articulated in ancient tradition.[7]

Analytical critics have also argued powerfully that "where we might naively imagine that we are reading a text, what we actually have is a constant stitching together of earlier texts drawn from divergent literary and sometimes oral traditions, with minor or major interventions by later editors in the form of glosses, connecting passages, conflations of sources, and so forth".[8]

The ambiguities, doublets, contradictions, etc. that scholars have been able to identify are often regarded as proving that the editors did not have the ability, courage or freedom to mould the material into a coherent and consistent text. However, Alter's fundamental thesis is that one can instead choose to assume that these redactors actually worked as authors. This means that features in the text that have been regarded as unskilled adaptations of older material can instead be viewed as significant literary devices, according to the distinct conventions of another time and a unique literary genre.[9] As an example, Alter points out that these "authors" seem to have had a different understanding of literary unity from that of modern readers.[10] The fact that these texts have been shaped in a long process therefore cannot be used as an argument against the kind of literary study that Alter suggests, since "the editorial combination of different literary sources might usefully be conceived as the final stage in the process of artistic creation which produced biblical narrative".[11]

Some Critical Reflections

I have already criticized this reasoning and argued that if the task is to examine a text and its history of interpretation, then the relevant conventions are those that are valid for literature in general, since it is these conventions that have influenced the interpretation of the texts in question. Another critical issue is that Alter and others seem to beg the question – that is, they assume the very thing that they intend to prove. If one presumes that the redactors are authors who have created excellent literature according to unique conventions, then is there not a risk that

every deficiency in the text could be described as a significant literary device? However, in the first place, this criticism does not concern Alter and his analyses, since he is a good reader and he applies this reasoning in a moderate form; furthermore, these issues are not my main concern here as I intend to stress another critical point instead. Alter mainly discusses individual narratives such as Numbers 16 and Genesis 42,[12] but he also applies his thesis to larger units such as two or more narratives – for instance, the two versions of the creation. In this connection, he makes a comparison with the montage technique that is used in films.[13] The redactor has hence perspectivized, contrasted or relativized a story, or motifs in a story, by means of montage within or between different narratives. This technique creates a distinctive kind of literature:

> Indeed, an essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by the ancient Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially in regard to motive, moral character, and psychology.… Meaning, perhaps for the first time in narrative literature, was conceived as a *process*, requiring continual revision – both in the ordinary sense and in the etymological sense of seeing-again – continual suspension of judgement, weighing of multiple possibilities, brooding over gaps in the information provided.[14]

This innovative production of literary meaning is in turn explained by the biblical view of the world, history, God and man as complex phenomena. As an example of this technique, Alter analyses Genesis 38 and its significance within the story about Joseph. In this connection, he refers, as often, to the Rabbis and their excellent close readings of the text. However, Alter makes a very important exception when he states that the Rabbis had an understanding of the text that differs from his, since "they had little sense of it as a real narrative continuum, as a coherent unfolding story in which the meaning of earlier data is progressively, even systematically, revealed or enriched by the addition of subsequent data".[15] The Rabbis hence did not realize that the story about Judah and Tamar had been fused together with the story about Joseph through the use of montage, an understanding that Alter and other so-called literary scholars have acquired.[16]

But is it not possible both to explain and to justify the "mistake" of the Rabbis? Have they not, as readers always have, realized that the individual stories might indeed comment on each other and still be distinct stories? We therefore have to ask whether the compositional structures that Alter and others have pointed out – and that can be viewed as redactional, even if these scholars tend to view the redactors as authors – really are narrative or if they work on another level.

What Is a Narrative?

In the analysis of the story about Ehud, the question was raised whether a reader intuitively distinguishes between different kinds of narratives. In that discussion, Alter's suggestion that the narrative should be viewed as fiction was mentioned. One of his basic arguments for this proposition was that the story has a satirical

tendency. This tendency is hence regarded as a fiction-marker. This is a common way to handle this problem, although it is generally assumed that the most decisive fiction-marker is the fact that in a non-fictional text, a narrator cannot have access to other people's subjectivity – that is, their thoughts, motives, etc.[17] However, in comparing the story about Ehud with the story about Othniel, I suggested that a more accurate distinction would be one between "narration-narratives" and "report-narratives", since these notions describe the difference between these texts better than the notions of "fiction" and "fact". The story about Ehud thus appears to be fictional because it is a self-contained unit whose prime purpose is not to refer but to entertain. This description does not exclude the possibility that the author also intended to write history, but it points out that the readers or listeners do not perceive this narrative as a collection of information but as a compositional unit. Another way to approach this issue would be to claim that the story about Ehud is better than the story about Othniel – that is, that it has a higher degree of narrative quality. The difference between the two narratives would hence not be one of kind (like two distinct language games) but one of degree.

In this chapter, we face a similar problem. The scholars under consideration claim that the book of Judges is a narrative with a plot, and they do not distinguish between this narrative and the individual stories in the book. However, the thesis about the narrative structure of the book has to be proved. Would it not be reasonable to object that the book is not a narrative at all, or that if it should be described as a narrative, then it is a narrative of a different kind from that of the individual stories, such as those about Ehud or Jephthah?

Different Opinions about Narrativity

The question of which texts can be regarded as narratives might be considered to be uncomplicated and to have an obvious answer. But it is currently a much debated issue in narratology, not least because during recent decades this theory have been applied to new kinds of material, in what Gerald Prince speaks about as "the so-called narrativist turn".[18] Consequently, several theorists have tried to give a fundamental description of narrativity. According to Prince, the concept signifies "[the] set of properties characterizing narrative and distinguishing it from nonnarrative".[19]

However, I do not intend to give an exhaustive presentation of the different descriptions of the characteristics of narratives, but only to point out some issues in the discussion, to illustrate some of the problems that are created by the claim that the book of Judges is a narrative.

Is There a Common Denominator in Each and Every Narrative?

A simple solution would be to claim that there are no properties that are common to, and that characterize, all narratives. Our opinions about narrativity and about which texts can be regarded as narratives would hence be culture-dependent and

relative, and although it would still be possible to discuss whether or not the book of Judges is a narrative, it would not be possible to settle the issue. However, several theoreticians dispute this solution. For instance, Ryan states that it is a misconception and that in fact there exists a universal narrativity:[20]

> There are universal laws of narrativity and they can be formulated. These laws regulate the construction of semantic structures that are used across cultures as models of coherence and intelligibility for time-bound phenomena. The narratives of foreign cultures differ in the content of the structure, the themes and motifs; they may build different shapes with the universal narrative construction kit, but they use the same building blocks, and they hook these blocks together according to the same rules. As for postmodern texts, they are basically antinarrative, and definitions of narrativity are not fully responsible for them. They should acknowledge the 'anti' for what it is, rather than recuperate this 'anti' as a norm.[21]

Each narrative in the world would hence be built with the same "building blocks", which in their turn are held together "according to the same rules." But what are these building blocks? What are the elements that characterize narratives, and only narratives? And how should this universality be explained?

Theoreticians like Edward M. Forster and Prince refer first and foremost to the plot when they define narrativity. Forster provides "[the] king died and then the queen died" as a minimal example of a "story", and states that a "plot" demands causality "[the] king died, and then the queen died of grief".[22] Prince endorses Forster's description of a narrative as at least one event, a changed condition. However, he claims that "[the] king died" is sufficient.[23] According to this view, a narrative can be described as "[the] representation of real or fictive events and situations in time sequence."[24] Others – for instance, Franz K. Stanzel – refer above all to the narrator.[25] A narrative is then characterized by the mediating voice. Generally, however, these criteria are held together so that each text that recounts events and is communicated by a narrator is thought to be narrative. Ska exemplifies a common opinion when he states: "The two chief elements of a narrative are the narrator (voice) and the plot. The narrator is the 'mediator' between the world of the narrative and the world of the audience."[26] This would mean that history is narrative and hence in some sense fictional.[27] However, Monica Fludernik contests this and proposes another definition of narrativity.[28] She takes her starting point not in "minimal narratives" as does, for example, Prince, but in "natural narratives", since she thinks that they reflect the origin and nucleus of all narratives.[29] In her opinion, the basic characteristic is thus not the plot or the narrator but the "experiencer".[30]

The distinction between these definitions could perhaps be regarded as a hair-splitting one, but it has an important function in the discussion that has been prompted by the application of narratology to new areas and objects. Theoreticians who stress the plot can thus exclude poetry and the postmodern novel from the field of narratology, while those who emphasis the narrator can exclude dra-

ma and film. Fludernik, who stresses the experiencer, can include poetry and the postmodern novel but exclude history.

Different Kinds of Narratives

The question of narrativity is thus related to the demarcation of the field of narratology. Another aspect of the issue is the fact that readers seem to distinguish between different kinds of narratives, which calls for explanation. However, this is a different issue and I shall therefore not begin by considering the lowest common denominator that characterizes narratives, or a hypothesis regarding its origin. Instead, I intend to argue from what can be described as a typical narrative. Prince, who is compelled to speak about different degrees of narrativity in order to do justice to the intuitive understanding of general readers, illustrates the problem with the former starting-point when he admits that what he defines as minimal narratives *per se* do exist but have such a low degree of narrativity that no one regards them as narratives.[31]

Ryan claims that there are three features that can be found in each and every narrative. She further claims that there is a consensus regarding this description:

> (1) A narrative text must create a world and populate it with characters and objects. Logically speaking, this condition means that the narrative text is based on statements asserting the existence of individuals and on statements ascribing properties to these individuals.
>
> (2) The narrative world must undergo changes of state that are caused by physical events: either accidents or deliberate human action. These changes create a temporal dimension and place the narrative world in the flux of history.
>
> (3) The text must allow the reconstruction of an interpretative network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations around the narrated events. This implicit network gives coherence and intelligibility to the physical events and turns them into a plot.[32]

A narrative is thus characterized by features such as characters, setting, events and plot. However, it would be possible to object to Ryan's account by claiming that a narrative does not lead the reader to "a created world" or to certain "events" that he or she then interprets, and that "the interpretative network" is not directed towards the events, but that instead the reader is interpreting the storytelling – that is, narrative significances and motifs – so that the prime question is: What is being narrated to me now?

According to Skalin, a fundamental problem with the so-called "standard theory" in narratology is that its adherents have not distinguished between fictive and non-fictive narratives but treat the former as a variant of the latter.[33] There are hence no fictive narratives at all; instead, there is a fictitious situation in which someone in the fiction relates something as if it were true – that is, true in the fictitious world. An interesting consequence of this deficiency is that it would thus

be possible to claim that we interpret events and characters in a fictive narrative in the same way as we understand persons and events in the real world. A better approach, then, would be to acknowledge that a fictive narrative represents a different kind of language game from that of a factual report presented in narrative form, thus making a distinction that readers make intuitively. The fictive narrative is told in order to entertain and hold the listener's attention.

Three Parameters

According to the understanding of narratives that I shall adopt here, a narrative can be described in terms of three parameters, although this is, of course, a simplification.[34] Firstly, there is what might be called a narrative paradigm. This can be described as a particular arrangement of events, and corresponds closely to the so-called "story". In the typical example, the events are related temporally, causally and thematically in a plot with a beginning, a middle and an end. The plot gives the story a certain significance and genre. Furthermore, there is probably also an "experiencer". According to some scholars, this paradigm is a fundamental cognitive instrument that, together with others like the theory or the metaphor, humans use to understand and order the universe.[35] If we were to restrict ourselves to this first parameter, then a tremendous amount of human activity could be described as narrative and the fictive part of all this would be very small.

The second parameter is the discourse, which closely corresponds to the text in this case.[36] It is primarily this parameter that has been analysed in "discourse narratology",[37] in an attempt to describe the variables that an author has at his or her disposal when he or she constructs a narrative.

A third parameter is the situation – the language game – and hence the intention of the storyteller. The fictive narrative has a storyteller who exists on the same ontological level as the reader. (I am not referring here to the narrator and narratee who are often assumed in narratology and both placed in text.) The former performs a story before which the latter is "seated".

If we were to assume the existence of a correspondence between these parameters, then it would be possible to distinguish between different kinds of narratives. A listener or reader would thus be able to infer the genre and purpose of a story, and hence his or her own role as listener. In this context, purpose or intention signifies the effect that the storyteller wants to create – or rather the language game in which the reader or listener is invited to participate.

Now, if we were to assume that the fictive narrative is the typical form, then it would be possible to speculate about two or three other kinds that are commonly designated by the term "narrative". The first of these could be described as a report, being always an answer to an explicit or implicit question. Hence, the situation is different, and the corresponding discourse differs from that of the fictive narrative. However, in this form, there is a narrative paradigm, at least to some extent, since it has events and time although it does not need causality or an

experiencer. A second form would then be history or myth. In this case, there is plot and causality, although the plot often has no end, and its purpose is to provide information, albeit of a different kind from that provided by the report.

The report provides information and hence demands a referent. The individual elements are not primarily motifs in a story but point "out" of the story to the "real world". The listener can interrupt and criticize or question the information, and there is no "epic silence". History or myth does not allow the same kind of interruption, since it has a plot and every objection threatens the overall impression that the storyteller wishes to convey. However, this kind of narrative is still less self-contained and independent than the fictive narrative, since its purpose is to provide information.

Now, a possible objection to this reasoning is that a more natural separation would be to distinguish between report and history on the one hand, since these kinds of narrative are about the real world, and fictive narrative on the other, since this is about an imaginary world. Although this distinction may seem reasonable, it is untenable since the same events can be used in telling different kinds of stories. For instance, if someone arrested the attention of the guests at a party with a story about a remarkable car crash, saying: "At that moment, the fat lady in the red car yelled like a maniac", and a listener interrupted the story with the question: "Are you absolutely positive that it was the red car and not the blue?", then the listener would ruin the story, since by this question he or she would abandon the role in the game that he or she had been assigned. But if the same storyteller were summoned to a trial as a witness and there decided to tell the same story in the same form, then the question about the colour of the car would be understood as completely relevant. The witness would also probably be requested to use a form that was more appropriate to the situation. This example illustrates that we generally accept the fictive narrative's demand for independence, and that the elements in the story are reduced to motifs in the closed "diegetical bubble". It also illustrates that the "situation" parameter cannot be ignored.

This reasoning could be applied to the proposition that the book of Judges is a narrative of the same kind as the stories about the individual judges, and that this form makes the book coherent and distinguishes it as an integrated unit in the DH. Although it would be possible to claim that the book is composed according to a narrative paradigm, even though a very superficial one, it is still a narrative of a different kind from that of the individual narratives, since the discourse and the situation distinguishes it from the stories within the book. A reader realizes this intuitively and regards the book as something "other" than the stories about Ehud or Jephthah, for instance, and consequently assimilates the book in a way different from that in which he or she assimilates the narratives, just as we established that readers have always understood that the story about Othniel is of a different kind from that of the story about Ehud.

The Book of Judges – A Narrative with a Plot

Webb and Klein seem to assume that narratives are constituted by the narrative paradigm alone, and they do not distinguish between different kinds of narrative or degrees of narrativity. It would hence be possible to claim that the book is not a "narration-narrative" – as is the story about Ehud, for instance – but that there is still a narrative structure, and a plot that is strong enough to transform the individual narratives into episodes.

According to this broad definition, the book of Judges, the DH, or Genesis – Kings could be described as narratives. They could then be understood as stories – about characters such as Israel and Yahweh – that recount the history of the people during the days of the judges, or the days from the conquest to the exile, or from the promise of the land to the expulsion from it. Since the authors have used the narrative form instead of the chronicle, for instance,[38] they have been able to introduce causality and plot into history.[39] They have not been content with an account of temporally connected events, but have also interpreted them since they have used them as motifs in a story. This can be described – according to the structure of the plot and the quality of the main character's life – as a tragedy. A later story, such as Chronicles, transforms the history into another genre, since this version has a different ending.

Some Critical Reflections

Even if one chooses to start from a broad definition of narrativity, there are still reasons to qualify the proposition that the book of Judges is a narrative. I have already noted Prince's claim that to do justice to the intuition of readers, we have to speak about different degrees of narrativity. When he describes the features that define this quality he refers to events, wholeness and point.[40]

A narrative is characterized by the fact that it recounts events. These should "make sense in terms of a human project and/or humanized universe."[41] A larger number of specific events constitutes a higher degree of narrativity.[42] These events should also be presented as facts. Since wholeness characterizes narratives with a high degree of narrativity, these events should "constitute…a whole, a complete structure with a beginning, a middle and an end."[43] Prince points out that a narrative is not simply a "concatenation of events in time but a hierarchical one."[44] Events thus are combined into larger events. He states furthermore that the changes that are described should be fundamental.[45] "What comes after in a narrative is therefore conditioned…by what comes before and the end is conditioned by the beginning".[46] Narratives are hence often "teleologically determined", and the meaning of an event is determined by its consequences.[47] This orientation gives the reader a feeling that every element is, or might be, meaningful. Beside events and plot, Prince refers to the point of the story and claims that if there is no point, then the narrativity decreases. "The narrative should be non-obvious and worth

telling. It should represent, or illustrate, or explain, something which is unusual or problematic".[48]

According to this reasoning, the story about Othniel, or the whole book of Judges, does not belong to a different category from that of the story about Ehud; rather, the latter is seen as a better story with a higher degree of narrativity. Although I prefer to speak about these as different language games, I shall apply Prince's reasoning – especially the demand for wholeness – to the book of Judges, since Webb and Klein seem to share a similar opinion about narrativity.

It would be possible, according to the description of wholeness and the paradoxical logic of narratives, to claim that Genesis – Kings and the DH have a higher degree of narrativity than the book of Judges. Genesis – Kings begins with God's promise to Abraham about a land, ends with the loss of that very land, and has decisive turning points such as the exodus and the conquest. A work such as the DH demands that we reconstruct the text, since it starts with the first chapters of Deuteronomy and recounts the story from the days before the conquest until the expulsion from the land. The role of the book of Judges in these "narratives" is then to recount the beginning of the apostasy that eventually leads to the downfall of Israel and Judah. In the book of Judges, on the other hand, there is certainly a beginning but hardly a middle or an end (the period of the judges ends with the inauguration of the monarchy in 1 Samuel 8–12), although several of the synchronists claim that the state of anarchy in the final stories serves as an end.[49] It is also apparent that scholars who view the whole book as a narrative have great difficulty in describing the function of the different elements in relation to this wholeness. The events are hence not transformed into a larger and different event.

However, it must be admitted that a similar problem exists regarding Genesis – Kings and the DH. Although these "texts" have an end that gives the different events a certain meaning, and although the events lead to this end in a causal way, it would be an exaggeration to claim that every "event" in these stories is motivated in the plot. That is, in spite of the fact that there is a plot on the macro-level, the individual events are not transformed into a new and larger event.

Even if one were to accept a broad definition of "narrativity", it would be possible to criticize Webb and Klein since, quite simply, it is doubtful whether the book could be described as a narrative at all. If a plot really exists, in spite of the fact that the book does not have a middle or an end, it is so vague that it is almost impossible to identify it and to interpret the different events or stories in relation to it. Hence, it seems better not to describe the book as a novel or a narrative. In a novel, even if it is episodic, there is commonly a larger plot and/or a persistent protagonist. The important difference between this genre and a collection of independent stories is that in the former case, the reader tries to identify a plot and to interpret the individual features in relation to it. A reader of the book of Judges would thus try to discover the function of the story about Ehud or Jephthah within the larger "event". It would hence be possible to reconsider a section such as

the episode about Jephthah's vow and sacrifice, and to give it a new meaning relative to the end of the book. If a reader approaches the book as a collection of narratives instead, then he or she will try to comprehend each story as a separate unit and then try to understand how the account about Jephthah, for instance, questions or illuminates the portrait of the time, the environment or the theme that connects the individual stories.

Webb's and Klein's claim that a plot is formed by a causal connection between the stories of the book is not convincing. As Webb confirms in his own interpretation, the stories are instead connected by similar motifs and a common time and place. Klein's application of the terms "exposition", "main narrative" and "resolution" is too far-fetched to settle the matter, even though she actually claims that the book has an end – that is, the anarchy and the demand for a king that can be found in the concluding chapters. However, it is difficult to accept that the individual narratives, and the order of them, should lead to, and be understood in relation to, this end.

The Place of Narratives in a Larger Text

Against the hypothesis that the book of Judges can be understood as a coherent and consistent text, I have argued that a reader spontaneously tends to focus on the individual stories and to realize their meaning. This tendency is easy to explain. Certain sections of text are, quite simply, "felt" to be meaningful in themselves as narratives usually are. Within these sections, there are smaller elements that receive a meaning in relation to the narrative unit of which they are a part. The problem with the consistency and coherence of the book could thus be explained by the fact that the larger text has not been able to destroy the independence of the narratives, which instead are paratactically related to each other and the larger text. My intuition that there is a tension between the form of the book and a synchronic approach hence seems to be well founded.

However, the fact that the narratives are independent and self-contained units need not imply that they cannot be part of a larger text or have some significance within it. But the challenge is to describe the relationship between the micro- and macro-levels without violating the character of the narratives. I shall therefore discuss a set of parameters that Ryan presents and describes as "plot-typologies". I shall then discuss Dunn and Morris' theory about composite novels, and a second set of Ryan's parameters, and try to describe the kind of emergent collective meaning that a collection of individual narratives can have.

Different Kinds of Narratives

Ryan discusses modes of narrativity, which she distinguishes from modes of narration: "Whereas the modes of narration are the different ways of telling the same story, the modes of narrativity are the various textual realizations of plots, the various ways in which a text relies on a narrative structure (or plot, or story) and

suggests this structure as a model of coherence."[50] Her purpose is first and foremost to discuss the following questions: "(a) What is the role of the narrative structure in the textual economy? (b) What kinds of mental operations make it discernible?"[51] I shall describe her reasoning and the modes that she suggests, since her approach is very relevant to this study.

A first set of parameters is used to describe the relationship between the micro- and macro-levels of a text. The first of these is "simple narrativity" and is used as a "dummy". It denotes traditional narratives – such as the fairy tale or the anecdote, for example: "the semantic content of the text is a plot and little else".[52] "Multiple narrativity" denotes texts that have more than one narrative. However, there is no real structure on the macro-level, and the individual stories are held together by only a framing narrative: "Here the text consists of not just one but many self-sufficient narratives bearing no referential relation to each other: each narrative creates its own semantic universe and concerns different characters."[53] The *Decameron* and the *Arabian Nights* are examples of this category. A third parameter is "complex narrativity". Narratives in this category also contain individual narratives, but these are related in a macro-plot, which generally bears the focus of interest. Ryan's examples include novels by Dickens and Flaubert:

> Although far from clear-cut, the distinction accounts for our intuition that a narrative may consist of both a main plot line, usually bearing the focus of interest and reflected in summaries, and a number of semiautonomous 'little stories' grafted upon this line. In the complex mode, narrative structures appear on both the macro and the micro levels, and a relative balance is achieved between the two levels. The micro narratives do not create their own universe, but expand the universe of the main plot.[54]

The micro-narratives might hence be easy to isolate, but they are not detachable as they are in multiple narrativity.[55] Through "semantic relations, the interest of the reader remains focused on the macro level though the micro level narratives are in themselves able to create interest."[56]

A closely related mode is "proliferating narrativity". In this, too, there are narratives on both the micro- and the macro-levels, but the focus of interest is mainly on the micro-level: "While complex narrativity maintains a balance between the macro and the micro level, in this mode the narratives of the micro level become so invasive that they monopolize the focus of attention."[57] The picaresque serves as an example. "In these works, the main plot functions mostly as support for the telling of adventures and anecdotes."[58] The mode is characterized by "the discrepancy between the profusion of stories told and the poverty of the global summary."[59] A fifth mode is "braided narrativity", which can be found in the soap opera, for instance. "The text presents no global plot, but a number of parallel and successive subplots developing along the destiny line of characters. A subplot is a series of events in which several destiny lines are tied together."[60] It has hence no macro-structure, no connecting plot and no end.

Ryan regards these modes as plot-typologies and says that they correspond to structural properties that can be defined in syntactical terms: "the presence of embedding for multiple, hypotactic construction with subordinated narrative clauses for complex, paratactic construction with juxtaposition of episodes for proliferating, parallel construction for braided, and the lack of these features for simple."[61] However, the demarcation line between them is not clear-cut, and the final criterion is the interest of the reader:

> Simple narrativity means, by default, focus on the macro level for lack of narrativity on a micro level, while braided narrativity means dispersed focus on the strands of the micro level for lack of a macro level. Complex and proliferating narrativity both present a contrast between macro and micro level, but they resolve this contrast in opposite directions: one mode subordinating the micro level to the macro level, the other mode using the macro level as a connecting thread. Multiple narrativity also presents a contrast between two levels, but the lack of semantic connections between them, as well as between the units of the micro level leads to a split interest, which must be reinvested with every new unit.[62]

The Book of Judges – Multiple Narrativity?

The different modes can be related to the act of storytelling and to the distinctions between different language games, and can be described as techniques that a storyteller can use in order to hold the attention of an audience and to prolong a narrative. These techniques can be grouped into two main types. The storyteller could firstly prolong a performance through the construction of a plot and the effect of suspense. This plot in turn could contain many events or episodes. The other alternative is the mere agglomeration of stories, which can be done in two different ways. In a traditional episodic narrative, self-contained stories are connected by a life or a journey. Although it would be possible to describe the life or the journey as an "event", this must be qualified since a life or a journey does not have the same kind of wholeness as an "event" or a "plot". For example, in *Don Quixote* the different episodes are not united into a larger "event" and are not regarded as motivated in a plot. Readers hence are reading not for a connecting plot but for a theme.[63] That is, the individual episodes are understood not as necessary elements within the plot but as variations of a theme such as "the folly of the knight". And we have a feeling that this kind of storytelling could go on forever. The temporal aspect is also more-or-less forgotten, and the chronological connection between the episodes is weakened. Instead, different episodes are combined like writings on a palimpsest. A comparison with the *Odyssey* reveals that this is constructed in a different way. Even though this work also could be described as an agglomeration of stories, these are connected within a plot, and the storyteller allows the reader to forget this macro-level only temporarily.

Only the plot and the event – not the collection – fulfil the demand for wholeness that Prince – and, of course, Aristotle – has formulated. And it is only to these stories that the paradoxical logic of narratives can be applied. In the plot, there

are temporal and causal connections between the different events, which transform them into a larger event, while the episodic narrative (the life or the journey) only unifies the episodes temporally. The individual narratives do not answer questions such as: And then what happened? How did it end? They answer only the question: Do you have any more stories to tell?

The second way, besides the episodic narrative, to prolong a performance by agglomeration is for one or several storytellers to recount a large number of stories that relate to each other and to some kind of theme, either with or without a common frame. Each new story is introduced by phrases such a "By the way..."

According to this reasoning, complex narrativity should require a macro-level that has a plot. Proliferating narrativity, on the other hand, is about a life or a journey. In this mode, many individual events are loosely connected only temporarily and thematically, and there may even be some kind of causal relation between the stories, but the focus of interest is on the micro-level. Multiple narrativity is more like an unsystematic agglomeration of narratives in which the connection between the stories can vary. There may be trivial associations or a common setting, environment, characters, etc.

The relationship between the micro- and the macro-level can hence function in different ways even if we assume that narratives are autonomous and resistant to reworking. If we apply this reasoning to the book of Judges, then the story about Ehud can be described as having simple narrativity, in which every feature relates to the plot. The story about Jephthah has rather proliferating narrativity, since the life of the protagonist and the war against Ammon can be regarded as a frame that connects the individual stories. The whole book then, if it may be described as a narrative at all, has multiple narrativity. Even though it has a macro-structure, and even though the redactor has located the stories in the "same world", it has no narrative plot and the structure is rather iterative and circular. Furthermore, both the novel and the picaresque often have a common set of characters who serve as connecting motifs. This device is well known in the OT, but it is not used in the book of Judges, although some scholars claim that the larger text has some kind of "collective protagonist".

These observations explain why the focus of the reader has always been primarily on the micro-level. The narratives are too self-contained in relation to the macro-level, and the latter is therefore not focused – or rather, the macro level has no real narrative interest.

Are the Stories Connected via a Montage-Technique?

The foregoing description of the relationship between the narratives, and that between the narratives and the larger text, can be related to Alter's thesis about a montage-technique.[64] A story, then, is not motivated by its causal connection to the larger plot (complex narrativity) or by its relation to a life or a journey (proliferating narrativity), but by any association whatever. For example, Alter points out that the authors seem to have been very fond of *Leitwörter*.

Webb, who has a similar opinion to Alter, tries to describe the narrative web that he claims to have found in Judges 3:7–16:21. He believes that the stories are connected temporally and that they are also episodes in a larger narrative in which the deterioration of Israel is recounted,[65] but he is not content with the superficial unity that is often ascribed to the redactor:

> My analysis in this chapter has attempted to demonstrate coherence not only at the level of overall structure, but also at the level of narrative texture. A dense network of interlocking motifs has been uncovered which unifies the material of 3.7 – 16.31 at a deeper level than that of the repeating surface patterns. In particular, motifs have been found which serve as links between adjacent episodes.[66]

His examples include the "thrust/strike" motif that can be found in both the story about Ehud and the story about Deborah, the expressions "a woman, a prophetess" and "a man, a prophet" used in both the story about Deborah and the story about Gideon, and the "worthless fellows" who follow both Abimelech and Jephthah. Hence, it seems as if the stories are related as pairs. In a similar way, the "minor judges" are related to the "major judges" that they are interspersed with – for example, the story about Jephthah is followed by the short note about Ibzan and his many daughters.[67]

It would hence be possible to imagine a situation in which someone listens to the story about Ehud and then says: "Speaking of thrust/strike, have you heard the story about Deborah?" In the same way, the "eleven hundred pieces of silver" motif in the story about Samson has inspired someone to tell of the eleven hundred pieces of silver that Micah steals from his mother (Judges 17), etc.

Scholars such as Alter and Webb hence claim that they have found artistic connections within and between the different narratives, and although these cannot confute the historical-critical hypothesis, in their opinion they nevertheless justify a literary study of larger units. Bar-Efrat reasons in a similar way, believing that the narratives combine with one another to become extensive blocks, and that "[the] individual narrative usually acquires additional significance when it serves as a constituent element of the wider whole."[68] Like the other scholars, he lists different linking devices and discusses the common meaning of the narratives.[69]

However, although the arguments of these scholars are convincing, the critical point remains, since they have not made a distinction between different kinds of narrative – a distinction that readers make intuitively. Hence, when they observe that the story about Jephthah is held together by the protagonist, or when they find common motifs or *leitwörter* within the stories in the book, they often understand this as signifying that these stories are transformed into a single text.[70] But the fact that Ehud's and Jael's killings of enemies are described using the same term does not mean that they are part of the same plot or take place in the same "space".[71] The text does not associate these events temporally or causally – that is, there is no internal reference.[72] The meaning and function of the motif in the story about Ehud are not changed by the fact that the same motif or key word can be

found in another story. Schneider, who reads the whole book as a single narrative, provides an example. She believes that the motif with the eleven hundred pieces of silver signifies that the father of Micah in Judges 17 is Samson and that his mother is Delilah. She is also surprised that scholars interpret the motif of a leader who is the son of a concubine differently in the cases of Abimelech and Jephthah: "Ironically the situations parallel each other, but in Jephthah's case the modern scholars' sympathies are with the ousted brother whereas in the earlier case scholars are sympathetic towards Abimelech's brothers."[73] She seems to imply that these scholars make a mistake. But they are, of course, right. The story about Abimelech is about a villain who takes power by force and who murders all his brothers, while the story about Jephthah is about a hero who has been driven away but who is rehabilitated in a situation of crisis. Schneider's mistake is thus that she does not interpret the motif in relation to the individual story.

The Book of Judges – A Short Story Cycle

The easiest way to describe the relationship between the different levels in the book of Judges is hence as multiple narrativity – that is, independent narratives that are connected by a common frame. Each narrative has its own space or "diegesis", and they do not refer to each other. But it is also obvious that the redactor has related these stories chronologically and located them in a similar setting. They are also connected by phrases such as "[the] Israelites again did…", the introductions and the recurring motifs. The issue about the relationship between the micro- and macro-levels thus changes from the question of whether or not the stories have been transformed into a single text, to a question about the significance that a reader might attribute to the links that connect the narratives.

Scholars such as Alter and Bar-Efrat claim that the narratives serve as analogies, contrasts or parallels:[74]

> In biblical narrative, this kind of purposeful ambiguity of a single statement may occur, as I have suggested in discussing characterization, in the selective reticences of the narrator's reports and in the sudden breaking off of dialogue as well. In regard to larger blocks of narrative material, the characteristic biblical method for incorporating multiple perspectives appears to have been not a fusion of views in a single utterance but a montage of viewpoints arranged in sequence.[75]

The meaning of these stories could hence be broadened by the fact that the redactor has placed them together with other stories as a montage.

The description of the book of Judges as having multiple narrativity, in which the narratives in spite of their independence have an emergent overall meaning, is reminiscent of theories about so-called "composite novels" or "short-story cycles".[76] Dunn and Morris believe that these kinds of collections of short stories can be seen as novels: "The composite novel is a literary work composed of shorter texts that – though individually complete and autonomous – are interrelated in

a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles."[77] Independent texts, such as narratives, could hence be connected into a single coherent text:[78]

> The emphasis, then, is not upon the parts but rather upon a whole text rendered coherent through a dynamic interaction with and among its parts. Analogically, the composite novel is a gestalt, an 'organized whole,' a 'configuration of elements [and/or] themes' whose sum is more than its parts.[79]

Dunn and Morris try to describe how a reader might assimilate these works. They point out that besides a linear and plot-oriented reading, there is also a spatial reading in which the text is understood in a metaphorical way - that is, poetically.[80] A basis for their reasoning is the openness of the novel: "Although a novel is usually structured by plot, a linear narration involving causation, it can be structured alternatively, or by association – that is, by juxtaposing events, images, themes, and/or characters in some sort of coherent pattern."[81] "The composite novel" would thus make use of a reader's need "to seek order, to arrange, to make connections", even thought it also frustrates it.[82] And the dynamic tension between the narratives and the larger unit remains.[83]

The authors claim that the short stories in a composite novel are connected through "organizing principles" such as setting, characters (a common protagonist that might be an individual or a collective), patterns and storytelling.[84] However, they admit that it is difficult to decide what combinations create coherence, and that it is a question of degree.[85]

Although I think that Dunn and Morris place too much stress on the short stories' becoming a single text, their proposition that several independent stories that are located in a single volume might provide perspectives for each other is very interesting.[86] In the case of the book of Judges, this seems to correspond with the intention of the redactor as expressed in the introduction (Judges 1–3). The redactor claims that the period is characterized by a pattern that can be applied to each story and can explain the events that are depicted therein. The stories would then be connected by "organizing principles" such as a frame, recurring motifs, patterns, a collective protagonist and perhaps, at least to some extent, a common narrator. If we apply the reasoning of Dunn and Morris, then this would mean that besides a linear meaning, the book also has a metaphorical meaning, and that the reader is not only reading for the plot but also for the "world". The author has then portrayed this "world" through a series of stories that are placed on each other like the writings on a palimpsest and thus have an emergent overall meaning. The book would then be placed somewhere between multiple and proliferating narrativity, or "embedding" and "paratax". The compilation would hence not be arbitrary. The stories are then first and foremost autonomous structures in which the different elements are motifs in a closed diegesis. But together they also portray a space (the period of the judges) and a collective protagonist (Israel during this period), and deal with certain common motifs and themes such as leadership and apostasy.

Figural and Instrumental Narrativity

The stories might also have other functions within the larger text even though they are connected very loosely. Ryan suggests a set of modes, beside the ones presented above, that describe "the mental operations necessary to retrieve and/or properly evaluate the narrative structure."[87]

I am mainly interested in two of the parameters that she presents within this category, although I shall modify one of them considerably. The first of these is "figural narrativity". Ryan uses this mode to denote the process of narrativization of poetry and the creation of characters out of collective entities or abstract concepts in history and philosophy.[88] However, I shall use the parameter to denote, for example, allegorical texts where the task of the reader is to decode personified abstract phenomena. This means that I use it in a way that is the complete opposite of the one that Ryan suggests. However, precisely in this contrast there is also a similarity.

The second parameter is "instrumental narrativity". It denotes narratives that illustrate a point in the larger text or speech. The task of the reader is hence to infer this point and relate it to the larger context.[89]

Figural Narrativity

The mode of figural narrativity is relevant to this study, since, for example, Klein claims that the actual protagonist is the people of Israel and that the individual judges symbolize characteristics of the people. Thus, Jephthah represents their good intentions accompanied by deficient knowledge, while Samson has a mission that he does not understand and instead yearns for Philistine women.

Brettler's "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics" is also an example of a figural interpretation. He thinks that the structure of the book is odd and that its protagonists are antiheroes.[90] These observations generate the fundamental question that I quoted in the introduction to this study: "Is there any plausible historical or ideological background that would help explain why the author/editor chose/wrote these particular stories and arranged them in this order?"[91] Brettler, who claims to study the book with a combination of literary and historical methods,[92] solves this problem through an allegorical reading of the book.[93] The prologue is said to establish the superiority of the tribe of Judah, the main part of the book shows that the ideal leadership can be found in the south while the monarchy of the northern kingdom has failed, Chapters 17–18 form a polemic against the sanctuary in Dan and Chapters 19–21 present a repudiation of Saul.[94] Brettler's analysis of the story about Othniel serves as an example of his argument. The short report can never have been understood as historical since the names are obviously symbolic and the whole situation is incredible.[95] Instead, it displays figuratively "the Judean victory over wickedness". It also serves as a paradigm for the rest of the stories about the judges.

According to this view, the redactor has used the stories about Ehud and Jephthah to criticize the monarchy of the Northern Kingdom.[96] However, Brettler does not propose any internal arguments for his allegorical interpretations but argues from his opinion about the larger text and its message.[97] This implies that a reader who reads the story about Ehud in another context does not regard it as allegorical, but since it is now part of the Bible it has to have a deeper meaning that explains its content and form.[98] The key to a correct interpretation is hence the reader's realizing that the stories are allegorical and then being able to decode them.

Instrumental Narrativity

The majority of the synchronic scholars seem to regard the narratives as having instrumental narrativity, and hence to assume that they are used to illustrate an abstract point in the larger text. The redactor thus has a message that the different stories dramatize. These scholars do not refer to internal arguments either, but they seem to assume that recurring motifs, themes, type scenes, etc. make it apparent that there is a common "voice" that speaks both in the larger text and in the individual narratives, and that it is this voice the reader should interpret. In this case, too, it seems as if the key to interpretation is to recognize the genre of the narratives and to identify the points in the larger text that they illustrate.

My critical point is not that the narratives cannot have these meanings, but that the secondary significance and function – as in the example of the Good Samaritan – has to be compatible with the primary level of meaning. If not, then the allegorical or thematic message will be obscured instead of illustrated, and the work will appear to be incoherent or a failure.

Conclusion – The Narratives and the Larger Text

I have taken the thesis about the autonomy of fictional narratives as my starting point, and have therefore described the book of Judges as a book that contains a collection of independent and self-contained texts, and have tried to explain how readers might react to this kind of book. This structure would then explain the polyphonic character of the book and its deficient ideological coherence. This argument could be challenged if it could be established that the larger text has such a narrative structure that the individual stories are transformed from autonomous units into episodes within a larger event. However, I have showed that regardless of which definition of "narrativity" is applied, it is doubtful that the book is a narrative at all, and that in any case it has such a vague structure that it might best be described as having multiple narrativity. This means that a reader will first try to identify the plot in the individual stories, and then perhaps try to discover whether the narrative also has some significance as an element of a larger text. That there is a larger text seems obvious, although it is difficult to establish whether or not the book of Judges is an integrated unit within this text. The larger

text can be described as history with a narrative paradigm. The stories are used to fill out this history and to dramatize the pattern that, according to the redactor, characterizes the period under consideration. They hence provide perspectives for each other and have a shared meaning, since they are associated within a book, exhibit recurring motifs and have a frame. They therefore portray together the period of the judges and the vicissitudes of Israel during this period. Furthermore, it is possible that recurring motifs can be understood as a common theme or that the stories have a figural or instrumental function in the larger text. But these secondary levels of meaning cannot dominate the primary level.

The book is hence characterized by two different projects. The first of these is to recount the history of God and Israel in such a way that the history of the people is explained. The narratives, on the other hand, have been shaped in order to arrest, entertain and edify. Gros Louis points out that these narratives – as well as the individual characters – always surprise readers in spite of the use of forewarnings and a common pattern.[99] There is thus a tension between levity and seriousness, between different kinds of logic and morality.[100] If these tensions cannot be harmonized, then this might in turn be explained either by the fact that the authors had a standard of unity different from that of their modern readers, by reverence (after all, the historical-critical scholars might be right), by the fact that the author/redactor distinguished between the terms of the people on the one hand and the terms of individuals on the other, or, finally, it is also possible that they quite simply have failed to produce a coherent text.

Notes

[1] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 17.

[2] Jobling describes such a process in *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II* when he discusses the so-called "primary narrative" that is thought to include Genesis – 2 Kings, and calls it "narratization": "Ultimately, however, they have not reached us as separate entities, but in a sequential arrangement – not merely as texts, but as *a text* – and the constraints of this 'narratization' must be accounted for in any adequate structural approach." (p. 15.)

[3] "For those who question the validity of putting the genres of novel and history together in the same semantic boat in regard to the concept of monologic/dialogic structure, it should be noted here that, apart from the ambiguities of calling the Deuteronomic History 'history', this study proceeds in wholehearted agreement with the views of Hayden White (1973) and Roland Barthes (1970) on the nature of historical discourse and its relation to literary interpretation. Both authors underline, from different perspectives, the similarities between the interpretative elements and imaginative constructions found in historiographic works and those found in other genres such as the novel." (Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 215, n. 13.)

[4] "The relation between the cycle and its component parts reflect the relations between the book of Judges and its components. Like the individual cycle, the book as a whole is composed of a series of units, and may be seen as an extended mode of the cycle. Just as the discovery of the principles and methods according to which the individual cycle was composed assists in understanding its component parts, and the analysis of the parts contributes to understanding the cycle as a whole, so do the two cycles that we have seen contribute to understanding the significance of the book of Judges as a whole." (Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 308f.)

[5] Prince presents four aspects of the concept "plot" in *A Dictionary of Narratology*: "1. The main incidents … the outline of situations and events.", "2. The arrangement of incidents … the situations and events as presented to the receiver.", "3. The global dynamic (goal-oriented and forward-moving) organization of narrative constituents which is responsible for the thematic interest (indeed, the very intelligibility) of a narrative and for its emotional effect.", "4. A narrative of events with an emphasis on causality, as opposed to story, which is a narrative of events with an emphasis on chronology." (p. 71f.) Brooks, emphasizing the third of the aspects that Prince lists, says in *Reading for the Plot*: "Plot as we need and want the term is hence an embracing concept for the design and intention of narrative, a structure for those meanings that are developed through temporal succession, or perhaps better: a structuring operation elicited by, and made necessary by, those meanings that develop through succession and time." (p. 12.)

[6] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 19. I share this critical view but I think that the greatest problem in Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* is his use of the expression "the narrator" as if this referred to one and the same narrator in all texts.

[7] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 131f.

[8] Ibid., p. 132.

[9] Ibid., p. 131.

[10] "…the fullness of statement they aspired to achieve as writers in fact led them at times to violate what a later age and culture would be disposed to think of as canons of unity and logical coherence." (Ibid., p. 133)

[11] Ibid., p. 133.

[12] Ibid., p. 137f. He calls them "composite narratives". The redactor has compiled two or more sources but has done this in an artistic and significant way. That the brothers of Joseph discover the money twice in Gen. 42 can hence be understood as a use of the similar content twice for different purposes.

[13] Berlin in *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives* also compares the storytelling of the OT with film. The individual stories are "like the frames from which films are made. Each one exists separately, and they are combined in a certain order to make the greater narrative" (p. 125).

[14] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 12.

[15] Ibid., p. 11.

[16] For example, Bar-Efrat says in *Narrative Art in the Bible*: "Several narratives, each one a complete unit in its own right, combine with one another in the Bible to create an extensive block, and thus the single narrative becomes one component of a greater narrative whole. The unity of the greater narrative whole is determined by the ways in which the individual ones are connected and by the nature of the relations between them. The individual narrative usually acquires additional significance when it serves as a constituent element of the wider whole." (p. 94.) He continues: "The extensive blocks combine to form books, and the books to constitute comprehensive compositions, bringing before us the vast canvas of history.… Within these large compositions, which partially overlap with one another, the individual narratives are embedded in more or less chronological order and in accordance with an overall historical and religio-ethical view. It is this view which grants these vast compositions their unity even though they are composed of many different elements." (Ibid.)

[17] Gérard Genette, *Fiction & Diction*, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, 1993). Genette discusses two different alternatives. According to the first of these, there are no fictional markers at all, since the fictional narrative is an imaginary factual storytelling; according to the other, such markers do exist. His conclusion is that these markers can be found in the mode of narration. Sternberg also contests this marker (that is, the access to subjectivity) in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*: "Omniscience in modern narrative attends and signals fictionality, while in the ancient tradition it not only accommodates but also guarantees authenticity." (p. 34) He claims that the biblical author speaks as an inspired prophet. "Herein lies one of the Bible's unique rules: under the aegis of ideology, convention transmutes even invention into the stuff of history, or rather obliterates the line dividing fact from fancy in communication. So every word is God's word. The product is neither fiction nor historicized fiction nor fictionalized history, but historiography pure and uncompromising." (p. 34f.)

[18] Gerald Prince, "Remarks on Narrativity" in Claes Wahlin (ed.), *Perspectives on Narratology: Papers from the Stockholm Symposium on Narratology* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), p. 97. See also, for example, Ryan, "The Modes of Narrativity", p. 368f.

[19] Prince, "narrativity" in *A Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 64.

[20] Ryan thinks that there exists a common implicit misconception, which she makes explicit and criticizes: "Narrativity is not a fixed and universal type of meaning but a culture-dependent, constantly evolving phenomenon.… This position precludes any stable definition of narrativity. It is consequently impossible to decide how, and to what extent, a narrative structure is realized in a text." ("The Modes of Narrativity", p. 370.) Another misconception is that narrativity is "[a] holistic phenomenon, a label describing the entire text." (p. 370). The distinction between story and discourse would hence be meaningless and it would be impossible to isolate and study the narrative elements in a text. Ryan replies: "Narrativity is an aspect of meaning among others, a dimension of the semantic domain projected by some texts. The elements that convey this dimension can be isolated, classified, and quantified." (p. 370.) She claims hence that the distinction between story and discourse is valid and that "not every discourse contributes … to the building of the story." (p. 371)

[21] Ibid.

[22] Edward Morgan Forster, *Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings* (London, 1974 [1927]), p. 60.

[23] Prince, "Remarks on Narrativity", p. 95.

[24] Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative*, p. 1.

[25] Franz K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (Cambridge, 1984).

[26] Ska, "*Our Fathers Have Told Us*", p. 2. Prince describes "narrative" in *A Dictionary of Narratology* as "The recounting…of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two, or several…narrators". (p. 58.) Ryan says: "[narrativity] is not an intrinsic property of events, but a semantic network built around events by a reflecting consciousness." ("The Modes of Narrativity", p. 376.) But in *Narratology: An Introduction* (Harlow, 1996), Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa distinguish between a broad sense – "A narrative is the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way." (p. 3) – and a narrower sense according to which a "[narrative] is an exclusive linguistic phenomenon, a speech act, defined by the presence of a narrator or teller and a verbal text" (p. 4).

[27] For example, see Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987).

[28] Monica Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London, 1996).

[29] Fludernik uses the expression "natural narratives" to denote spontaneous oral narrative and thereby excludes professional oral storytelling as well as the type of storytelling that Labov has analysed.

[30] "I here argue that *narrativity is a function of narrative texts and centres on experientiality of an anthropomorphic nature.*" (Ibid., p. 26.) A narration is hence a representation of "experientiality" (pp. 28–30).

[31] Prince distinguishes between "narrativity" and "narrativehood". The latter denotes "what makes a text narrative, what all and only narratives have in common", the former "what in a text underlines its possibly narrative nature, what emphasizes the presence and semiotic role of narrative structures in a textual economy." ("Remarks on Narrativity", p. 96). The purpose of this distinction seems to be to enable the identification of different degrees of narrativity, see *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative*, p. 147f.

[32] Ryan, "The Modes of Narrativity", p. 371.

[33] Skalin, *Karaktär och perspektiv* [*Character and Perspective*].

[34] A similar division into three is common: for example, Gérard Genette speaks in *Narrative Discourse*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford, 1980), about "story", "narrative" (discourse) and "narrating". See also Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Narratologists tend to focus on the text (discourse) since this is the only available object of study. Skalin's focus on narratives as language games implies that he has side-stepped the text-centredness of structuralism in order to be able to do justice to the aspect of interpretation (or reading).

[35] For example, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, 1984), and "Life in Quest of Narrative" in David Wood (ed.), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (London, 1991) pp. 20–33.

[36] For example, see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Different models, including Bal's, are presented in Onega and García Landa, *Narratology: An Introduction*, p. 6f.

[37] For different aspects of Narratology see Gerald Prince "On Narrative Studies and Narrative Genres" in *Poetics Today,* Vol. 11, No. 2 (1990) pp. 271–282.

[38] My use of "chronicle" follows that of Webb, who assumes that the chronicle is a mere enumeration of temporally connected events (*The Book of the Judges*, p. 36).

[39] Webb and Klein state that the book of Judges is a narrative with a plot. Others – for example, Gunn – also speculate about a plot in the book. Although Gunn in "Joshua and Judges" admits that Judges has a weaker plot structure than the book of Joshua, he still claims that it is held together by certain devices and that it has at least a potential plot: "[We] may begin to see that

this deterioration creates a tension transcending the constituent tales and so at least a potential plot for the whole book. Will the promise of the Land be revoked and the people cast out?" (p. 104.)

[40] Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative*, pp. 145–161. He makes the following summary himself in "Remarks on Narrativity": "In order to start answering such questions, I attempted, in my own work, to show that the narrativity of a text depends on the extent to which that text constitutes a doubly oriented autonomous whole…which involves some kind of conflict…which is made up of discrete, particular, positive…and temporally distinct actions having logically unpredictable antecedents or consequences, and which avoids inordinate amounts of commentary about them, their representation, or the latter's context." (p. 98.)

[41] Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative*, p. 148.

[42] "Narrative shies away from abstraction and thrives in concreteness. It concentrates on the particular and not the general." (Ibid., p. 149.) This is an interesting feature since religious texts, such as the Bible, are supposed to display general truths. The use of narratives would hence mean that these truths have been transmitted through the specific and the unique.

[43] Ibid., p. 151. "[Whenever] the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and different from it rather than equivalent to it, narrativity will tend to increase." (Ibid., p. 152.)

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., p. 153.

[46] Ibid., p. 155

[47] Ibid., p. 157. Even if readers do not know the end, they still relate to it, since they expect that the events that are recounted have a function and will be resolved by the end.

[48] Ibid., p. 159. However, in "Remarks on Narrativity" he locates the "reportability" outside the issue of narrativity (p. 100 f.).

[49] Jobling can speak of an ending since he believes that the text contains Judges 2 – 1 Samuel 12 (*The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, p. 44f.).

[50] Ryan, "The Modes of Narrativity", p. 369. In a footnote (p. 385, n.1), Ryan states that she does not use "mode" as Genette does but almost as a synonym for "manner". She elucidates the difference between "modes of narration" and "modes of narrativity", saying that the latter "proceeds, in contrast, from the text to the story, taking the story as a problematic meaning to be recovered from the text. Rather than asking through what techniques narrative structures are textualized, it focuses on the function, prominence, 'visibility' or degree of integrity of narrative structures within the semantic domain projected by the text. Rather than limiting its scrutiny to those parts of the text which explicitly represent the story, the study of narrativity assesses the role of the story with respect to the whole of the text, taking both narrative and nonnarrative elements into consideration." (p. 369)

[51] Ibid., p. 369. "The following observations provide some material for answering one question or the other: the narrative structure of a text may appear on the macro or the micro level; it may be simple or complex, complete or incomplete, singular or plural; it may dominate the text, forming the focus of interest, or compete with other aspects of meaning; it may be explicitly traced by a narratorial discourse or remain implicit to the text." (Ibid., p. 370.)

[52] Ibid., p. 371f.

[53] Ibid., p. 372.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., p. 373.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., p. 374.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., p. 383.

[62] Ibid., p. 383f. If these criteria were applied to Sophocles' trilogy, it would be clear that it is not as uncomplicated as Mink seems to assume. The trilogy has a plot that includes all three dramas, and they have a common "setting". However, they are three distinct stories, and Creon is a fictional character. That the text is still problematic is confirmed by the fact that the problem is continually discussed.

[63] The expression alludes, of course, to Brooks' *Reading for the Plot.*

[64] See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* – for example, p. 153f.

[65] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 174f.

[66] Ibid., p. 177.

[67] Ibid., p. 178.

[68] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 94.

[69] Ibid., p. 132ff.

[70] Although Alter claims that Genesis 38 is inserted in a larger narrative (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 3–10), he is a competent reader who sees the primary meaning of the story, while, on the other hand, Gunn and Fewell tend to stress the "new" meaning and context too much (*Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 34–45).

[71] Amit discusses analogies and the interpretation of these in "The Use of Analogy in the Study of the Book of Judges" in Matthias Augustin and Klaus-Dietrich Schunk (eds.), *Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden* (Frankfurt, 1988). She tries to find criteria that can prevent speculations that are too far-fetched, and refers to extension, function, theme, etc. However, the problem is not to decide which analogies should be reckoned with, but whether analogous events really imply that the texts should be associated.

[72] The queries about narrativity, recurring motifs and internal reference can also be applied to the separate narratives. Is it the same God who appears in every story or every part of a story? Is Gideon or David always the same character? If we were to interpret these as "real" persons, we would probably accumulate information and form portraits of them (so to speak), but do we really interpret fictional characters in the same way?

[73] Schneider, *Judges*, p. 164.

[74] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, p. 132ff.

[75] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 153f.

[76] Susan Garland Mann, *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide* (New York, 1989). The author points out that the genre originated in the nineteenth century (p. 2), but she admits that this kind of compilation is ancient (p. 1).

[77] Dunn and Morris, *The Composite Novel,* p. xiii.

[78] "[It] is a grouping of autonomous pieces that together achieve whole-text coherence." (Ibid., p. 1.)

[79] Ibid., p.12

[80] Dunn and Morris refer to Roman Jakobson and the theory about the metaphoric and metonymic aspects of language, and state: "In other words, metaphor establishes connection through resemblance, metonymy establishes connection through location and context, and most coherent texts use one more than the other." (Ibid., p. 74.) They then say: "On a somewhat less expansive scale, Jakobson's theory means that the disjunctive texts of modernism rely primarily

on metaphoric elements for coherence while the conjunctive texts of realism rely primarily on metonymic elements for coherence." (Ibid., p. 75.)

[81] Ibid., p. 5.

[82] Ibid.

[83] "As we are defining it, then, the composite novel is a single text composed of shorter texts: its aesthetic is one that insists on a coherently developed whole text, even though that whole text must, for the most part, be composed of individually autonomous pieces. Thus a dynamic tension exists between the whole and its parts. Indeed, when we refer to the 'aesthetic' of the composite novel, we refer not only to the complex tension among text-pieces, but also to the dynamic tension between text-pieces and the whole text." (Ibid., p. 19.)

[84] Mann claims that unity in modern "short story cycles" is created by such means as: "repeated and developed characters, themes or ideas, imagery, myth, setting, plot or chronological order, and point of view." (*The Short Story Cycle*, p. xii.) But she admits that recurring characters, plot and chronology are weaker in cycles than in traditional novels.

[85] "The issue here is one of degree. How much is enough? How much is too little? How closely woven must this textual cloth be? We can probably all agree about the whole-text coherence of a large number of works, but we will most likely agree to disagree about others." (Dunn and Morris , *The Composite Novel*, p. 13)

[86] Their apprehension is that "composite novels" are a form somewhere between short story cycles and novels. Books such as *Go Down, Moses* are hence not regarded as either novels or collections of short stories: "These books were clearly not novels in the traditional sense, just as they were clearly more than collections of stories chosen at random to reside together under one cover." (Ibid., p. 3.)

[87] Ryan, *The Modes of Narrativity*, p. 384.

[88] Ibid., p. 378.

[89] The other modes are "diluted narrativity", which denotes a low degree of narrativity such as that of the classical novel, the focus being not on the story but on other elements that are lost in a paraphrase; "embryonic narrativity", which characterizes incomplete narratives that, for instance, create a "world" but lack a story so that the reader must fill in the missing part; "underlying narrativity", which characterizes narratives that have no narrator, such as film or drama, so that the reader has to interpret and create coherence; and "deferred narrativity" – for example, that of news reports that are written while the outcome is still unknown. Postmodern novels are characterized by "antinarrativity", since they consist of elements that have not been integrated into a narrative.

[90] Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics", p. 396. On p. 407 he develops this point: "The central problem of the middle section of Judges is this: Why are the majority of its protagonists antiheroes? The answer surely lies in the contrast between Othniel (and Ehud) of the south and the northern Judges. Southern judges are exemplary, while northern judges are politically and/or religiously deficient."

[91] Ibid., p. 403f.

[92] Ibid., p. 395.

[93] Abstract phenomena are comprehended through historical narratives. The whole book is hence an allegory treating political problems in the days of the redactor. (Ibid., pp. 404, 418.)

[94] Brettler's reasoning is reminiscent of O'Connell's.

[95] Ibid., p. 404.

[96] Ibid., pp. 416–418. In these pages, he develops his theory about the allegorical aspect of Hebrew history.

[97] For example, Brettler refers to the geographical movement from south to north, the anti-heroes and the deterioration of the community.

[98] Brettler exemplifies this reasoning in his analysis of Judges 19–21: "The evidence supporting this claim is substantial. Like Judges 17–18, the story is so bizarre and so stretches any notion of 'historical probability' that a context must be found in which it makes sense. An anti-Saul polemic is such a context." (Ibid., p. 412.)

[99] Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges", p. 162.

[100] Sternberg describes this tension in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, saying that the texts are ideological, literary and historical at the same time (p. 41ff). Israel Mehlman in "Jephthah", *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 23 (1995), believes that the redactor was a historian who chose to recount events and persons that he considered to be important in the history of Israel, but he admits that: "Obviously, like all ancient storytellers, he was attracted to the piquant, the bizarre, to the miraculous and the exciting." (p. 73.) According to Mehlman, the reason why the story about Jephthah was included in the history is that the redactor assumed that it was important for the inauguration of the monarchy (p. 74f.).

VII. Samson – Hero or Villain?

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In this chapter the differing views on how the stories and the larger text relate will be tried against the story of Samson. According to the synchronists Samson is an antihero who, figuratively or instrumentally, represents the fall of leadership and the apostasy of the people. Irrespective of whether this interpretation is anchored with the redactor or is motivated as literary, it is agreed that the story in its current setting portrays a negative example and that it motivates the anarchy in the following stories and ultimately the introduction of the monarchy. But is Samson really an antihero? And is he portrayed as immoral and a failure?

The Story about Samson

Chapter 13

The introduction is unusually short: "The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years." (13:1)[1] But even though the prologue consists of only one verse, it places the adventures of Samson in the same cyclical pattern as the other stories. The protagonist is thus to be viewed as one among the many judges/saviours in the book, and his story should be related to the overall conflict between Israel and God.

The Annunciation

The first episode in the story can be described as an annunciation.[2] It consists of three short scenes and an ending. In the first scene, an angel visits Manoah's barren wife and predicts that she will bear a son. In the second scene, she relates these events to her husband. A scene then follows where the couple together meet the angel. The episode concludes with a short report about the birth of the son and his growth.

This is the only annunciation in the book, but the motif is well known and it could be described, using a term borrowed from Alter, as a "type scene".[3] The synchronists, who seem to believe that the episode is constructed according to a standard model, ascribe great importance to every exception from the overall pattern.[4] According to Amit, for example, a comparison with other annunciations shows that it is the sceptical Manoah's path to faith that is the focus of interest in accordance with one of the book's principal "editorial guidelines".[5] This would, however, be viewed as an over-interpretation if one interpreted the episode in terms of its purpose in the story about Samson. The annunciation is then used as an exposition that provides various pieces of information about the story's main character and presents several motifs that will be of great significance in the story. Concerning the protagonist, there are three particulars that carry greater weight than the others. Firstly, it is clear that the boy is a miracle.[6] Secondly, we are told that he is a nazirite, which means that, among other things, his mission is related

to certain traits.[7] A specific problem for the commentators is that the angel seems to apply the majority of the nazirite rules to the mother, while it is only the prohibition of cutting his hair that is applied to Samson (13:3–5). However, this is necessary from a storytelling point of view, since Samson's secret is from now on related to his hair. Also, he is never presented as a man who lives secluded from others according to a certain code of ceremonial purity. Instead, he is a flamboyant adventurer who has a secret strength associated with a special trait. Hence the author has adapted the nazirite motif to suit his purpose. Thirdly, it is stated that Samson, in contrast with the other judges, shall not win a final victory against the enemy and lead the nation to peace. He is only to begin the struggle for freedom.[8] This information, together with the note in the introductory verse concerning the duration of the Philistine oppression, intimates that this story will not have the same ending as the other stories. Furthermore, since Samson does not receive his assignment through a calling from God or from the people, the possibility exists that he, in contrast with the other judges, is unaware of it.

The author has thereby presented a series of moments of expectation that will mould the continued story: Will Samson and his mother adhere to the given rules? In what way will Samson commence liberation? What does he himself know of his calling and his task? The author has also introduced the "secret" theme that recurs throughout the story. Apart from the secret of being a nazirite and the question whether Samson knows his task or not, he lets Manoah and his wife, like the rest of the characters in the story, act from a position of deficient knowledge. That is, an important motif in this story is the uncertainty of the characters and their inability to understand the ways of the Lord. However, I will claim that this is used not ironically but to illustrate the mysterious ways of God. In the annunciation it is primarily the visitor's identity that is unknown to the characters. As early as the first scene, the narrator clarifies to the reader that it is an angel whom the woman meets; but later, when she relates the occurrence to her husband, it is revealed that she does not have this information even though she speculates about the identity of the man.[9]

> Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like that of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring; I did not ask him where he came from, and he did not tell me his name; but he said to me, 'You shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.'" (13:6–7)

According to Polzin, the switch to an internal point of view, which is used to highlight the "secret" motif, also has a more general purpose relative to the story as a whole since the woman never realizes that the man is an angel or understands her son's mission. This in turn explains Samson's actions. However, this appears to be an over-interpretation. The words of the woman are instead used to motivate the third scene of the annunciation where the couple are trying to discover

the identity of the man.[10] The dialogue between Manoah and the angel – where Manoah tries in different ways to discover the angel's identity – has the character of an inquiry.[11] The contrast between the information that the narrator gives to the reader and the various characters' "restriction of the field",[12] which is shown in their direct speech, is very apparent. The humans' uncertainty is used to explain why the angel finally provides his name and gives a sign. The author is thereby given the opportunity to recapitulate all the various features that are connected with an annunciation.

> Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Allow us to detain you, and prepare a kid for you." The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat your food; but if you want to prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD." (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.) Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your words come true?" But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name? It is too wonderful."
>
> So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to him who works wonders. When the flame went up towards heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground. The angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. *Then Manoah realized that it was the angel of the* LORD. (13:15–21, my italics.)

The couple's lack of knowledge leads to situations that tend to become comical, but the narrator does not moralize. Instead he breaks the illusion and explains in verse 16 that Manoah did not know that it was the angel of the Lord that he was talking to.

Chapters 14–15

In chapters 14–15 we find a series of causally and temporally connected episodes that all relate to the marriage of Samson to a Philistine woman.[13] Constant movement characterizes the section, with the characters moving "up" and "down" between different locations. The first scene, which is of great importance for the interpretation of the story, is here quoted in whole.

> Once Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw a Philistine woman. Then he came up, and told his father and mother, "I saw a Philistine woman at Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among your kin, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, because she pleases me." His father and mother did not know that this was from the LORD; for he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. (14:1–4)

First it is said that Samson, who is now a grown man, sees a Philistine woman in Timnah. Thereafter a dialogue between him and his parents is recounted where he demands to marry her. Eventually the narrator again speaks. He breaks the illusion once more, becomes intrusive and explains the behaviour of the father and the mother to the reader. Indirectly he thereby explains the actions of God.

The author uses, as in the annunciation, a switch in point of view when he explains the contrasting perspectives of the human characters and God. The parents' and Samson's internal points of view are presented through the dialogue, the narrator's and God's in the explanatory commentary.

The couple react like good Israelites to their son's plan. The reader is expected to sympathize with this perspective since it coincides with the ideology that is found in the book of Judges and the OT.[14] According to the Masoretic Text (MT), Samson's answer to the charged expression "the uncircumcised Philistines" is: "She's right in my eyes". The same expression is used several times in the concluding stories to explain the prevailing state of anarchy.[15]

Some interpreters, for example Polzin, believe that the author by this expression presents Samson in a negative light and as a typical Israelite of his time.[16] If that is the case, then the protagonist, who in the initial annunciation was presented as the promised saviour chosen by God, acts as a representative for the lost Israel. The man who has been born through a miracle and been chosen to fight against the Philistines thwarts all expectations to befriend them. Even though this interpretation seems obvious, we should notice that the narrator does not moralize concerning Samson's behaviour in the comment given in verse 4. Instead he explains that this strange action is planned by God who "was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines".[17] The reader is expected to sympathize with the parents, but the narrator explains that the situation is not as simple as it seems to be and points out that the real secret is the secret of the election.

In this scene it thus becomes apparent that the story presents two different projects. On one level Samson acts according to his intentions to reach a certain goal. His actions do not conflict, but rather concur, with God's intentions on another level, for the purpose of reaching a completely different goal. Samson acts as God's instrument – as, for example, Nebuchadnezzar, without knowing it, later runs God's errands. And it is not Samson's behaviour that is explained in verse 4, but the behaviour of his parents and of God. Boling draws attention to this, saying: "The verse is interpreted as the compiler's transition, comparable in purpose to the remarks of 13:16b. In this case it was important to explain that an action contrary to the basic standards of Israelites was actually part of the divine plan."[18] The pious parents act in accordance with what can be described as the book's norm, but still end up in conflict with God's plan and the norm of the story since they do not know the secret. A scholar like Klein cannot accept this. She is therefore forced to question the reliability of the narrator.[19]

The Lion

In verse 5 Samson once again starts a journey to Timnah, this time accompanied by his parents. When he comes to a vineyard, a lion attacks him. Here the parents disappear from the picture and the thread from verse 5 is not re-joined until verse 10.[20] Samson tears the animal apart with his bare hands and the reader finally discovers what his special gift and equipment are. Some time later he finds honey in the cadaver, which he subsequently offers to his parents to eat.

Since the section about the lion breaks the thread of the story, it can be seen as a digression that only serves to show Samson's strength. But it also has two important functions for the continued story. Firstly, it is the foundation for the riddle that will lead to the onset of the conflict between Samson and the Philistines. Secondly, it ties the episode to the "secret" motif that recurs constantly in this cycle. Many commentators suggest that it also has another function. They argue that the repeated comment by the narrator that Samson does not tell his parents what he has experienced or where he got the honey (verses 6, 9), stresses that Samson breaks his nazirite promise the minute he takes food from a dead animal that is considered impure. Since his parents do not know, they cannot stop him or be blamed for his crime.

Even if this interpretation is plausible, it is also possible that the narrator's purpose is to clarify that no one but Samson's wife knows the answer to his riddle (see 14:16). The latter interpretation is supported by the fact that Samson's killing of the lion, which precedes the first of the narrator's comments, can hardly be seen as a crime against the nazirite rules.

The Wedding

Even in the section about Samson's wedding party (14:10–20) the narrator speaks directly to the reader on several occasions to explain a phenomenon or to explain the behaviour of the characters. In verse 10 it is said literary, according to Gray, that Samson organized a "drinking-party".[21] The explanatory comment ("as the young men were accustomed to do") is thus necessary to show how Samson, the nazirite, could arrange such a feast.[22] Gray points out that the Septuagint has an explanatory comment in verse 11 as well, where it is said that they gave him thirty companions "because they feared him".[23] This version accords with the story's emphasis on the protagonist's enormous strength, and also indirectly provides motivation for his provoking riddle.[24] There is also an explanatory comment in verse 17. Here it is said that Samson reveals his secret to his wife "because she nagged him". A similar explanation is given in the parallel episode in Chapter 16 when he reveals his secret to Delilah.[25] If we believe that the author here points out that Samson breaks with the norm of the story, it means that the comment is not authorized speech, but rather the main character's internal point of view.[26] This interpretation, however, is not the best or most straightforward one. The author has a series of stylistic means by which he could mark such a shift in point of view,

but they are not used here. He therefore is not moralizing over the behaviour of Samson but rather explaining it just as he earlier explained the behaviour of the parents. This may seem peculiar since Samson appears to give in to temptation and to give up a higher value for a lower one. But even this serves God's purpose as it leads to new conflicts with the Philistines. Although it is possible that the narrator could be implying a weakness in Samson here, the hero does not depart from the norm or have his mission taken away from him by God. It simply is not that kind of story.

Samson's riddle, which is in the centre of this section,[27] is generally viewed as a kind of sound- or word-game.[28]

> Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments. But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments." So they said to him, "Ask your riddle; let us hear it." He said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." (14:12–14)

Here the "secret" motif recurs. The compositional function of the riddle is to begin the series of conflicts that continues in chapters 14 and 15. The woman's function is to extract the secret from Samson so that his enemies are able to defeat him and thus give him a reason for revenge. When the riddle is solved, Samson is not left speechless, but instead gives a short poetic statement, which shows him superior with the spoken word.[29] With the help of the spirit of the Lord, he can then pay his debt to the Philistines at their own expense when he kills thirty men and takes their clothes. He acts from his own personal need for revenge and satisfaction, but at the same time fulfils his God-given task. For the reader who has access to the annunciation and the explanatory commentary in 14:4, it is clear that God succeeds in using the wedding of the protagonist to start a series of conflicts with the Philistines. That these do not end with Samson's deed is foreshadowed by the excess of his actions and also by the final verse, which states that his wife is given to another and thereby functions as a "cliff-hanger".

A Vendetta

When Samson later returns to his wife, he discovers what has happened.[30] This leads to a series of struggles with the Philistines that can best be described as a vendetta. Samson sends burning foxes into the Philistines' fields, which they avenge by burning his wife, and so it goes on. The occurrences are, according to the commentary of the narrator (14:4), planned by God and serve his purpose. Once again, the reader knows more than the characters, whose lack of knowledge is revealed in their speeches, which in turn reflect their internal and limited point of view and explain their actions.

It is of particular interest that Samson's undertakings in these battles are not connected with the spirit, since many scholars consider that this signals that God

is not part of what is happening. I have earlier established that Keil and Delitzsch, and Klein reason in this way when they interpret the story of Ehud, and we shall see that Amit uses this argument in her analysis of Samson's undertakings in Gaza. None of these scholars, however, argues in this way when he or she interprets this section.

After the first disputes with the Philistines, Samson withdraws and three thousand men march to Judah to search for him. In two similar scenes, the men of Judah meet first the Philistines and then Samson, and ask both parties what is happening. They ask Samson: "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then have you done to us?" (15:11). Both parties answer the questions in the same way – they both refer to the ongoing vendetta.

The men of Judah, like Samson's wife and father-in-law, have the role of mediators between the feuding parties. Ironically, however, their attempts to avoid conflict actually lead to an escalation of the fighting. The role of the men of Judah confirms the description of the situation that was hinted at in the introduction. Israel is not at war with the Philistines and there are no open conflicts between them. They therefore see Samson as a threat rather than a saviour – the "secret" motif once more. Neither is Samson presented as a leader of a war for independence, but instead as someone who acts for personal reasons.

The third scene, when the hero meets the Philistines, is presented in a summarizing way. The spirit falls upon Samson again and he performs yet another notable action after which he composes poetry. The story and the poem end in an aetiology. An episode follows where Samson becomes very thirsty after the struggle, and for the first time in the story turns to God in prayer. The prayer, which is used, among other things, to provide an internal point of view, shows that he sees himself as God's servant and that he knows that God has granted him the victory. The prayer leads to a miracle, which is used in yet another aetiology. In verse 20, the episode is concluded with a summary that is reminiscent of the final words of the other narratives in the book of Judges: "And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years."

O'Connell believes that Samson is unaware of God's plan and only realizes that God has been controlling the events when he becomes thirsty and begs for his life.[31] According to this interpretation, the protagonist undergoes a process that leads to insight and conversion. Boling argues similarly, but claims that Samson lets himself be "enlisted" by God because of his thirst.[32] A problem with this interpretation is that Samson acts in the same way in Chapter 16 as in earlier sections. His "insight" does not change his moral. O'Connell also points out that the subsequent events show that Samson does not conclude that God's interests should precede his own. He thus assumes that the projects that I have described as parallel and coincidental are really competitive.[33] Since it is not explicitly stated that Samson acts immorally, the interpreters have to obtain their criteria by which to judge Samson's morals from other texts. O'Connell hence refers to the nazirite vows in Numbers.[34]

It becomes apparent yet again that these scholars are looking for another type of logical structure than that which the story provides. This is not a story about Samson's path to maturity and insight. It is not a moral story that shows how a person's wrongs are punished either. It is a story about a remarkable adventurer who, with God's help, performs several notable actions.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 begins with an episode about Samson's visit to a prostitute in Gaza. Thereafter, the meeting with Delilah that ends in the death of the hero in the temple of Dagon is recounted. The whole Samson story then ends with a few words about his funeral.

If we read the cycle as a running text, about twenty years should have passed between the stories that are told in chapters 14–15 and chapter 16, since 15:20 states that Samson judged Israel during that amount of time. This length of time is in no way reflected in the text. The Samson that we meet in the final chapter is the same character as he is in the earlier episodes. If one excludes 15:20, the whole cycle appears to be one long temporal chain with causally joined stories. The text in its present form, however, has a temporal break between the occurrences in chapters 14–15 and chapter 16.

Samson Visits a Prostitute in Gaza

The short episode about Samson's visit to a prostitute in Gaza has a fast narrative pace and is told in a summarizing style. Only once is a speech presented. In direct discourse it is said that the Philistines are planning to attack Samson. The story takes on an almost comical style because of the contrast between their plans and the ease with which Samson frees himself. In my earlier analysis of the Ehud story, I have claimed that this satiric tendency is typical for the genre where one glorifies the hero and ridicules the enemy.

According to Gray, the author does not moralize about Samson's behaviour in this episode.[35] Amit, however, believes that he does.[36] She claims that this is indicated by the fact that the redactor does not mention that the spirit is with Samson during the incidents involving immorality.[37] However, as I have earlier pointed out, it is not mentioned that the spirit is with Samson during the episode with the foxes or when he beats the Philistines after they have burnt his wife either. Amit views the episode in Gaza as a turning point in Samson's career as a judge, since it presents the first "missed pretext".[38] According to her interpretation of 14:4, Samson's contact with Philistine women will always lead him into direct conflict where he kills and harms his enemies. But in this case he is satisfied with taking their city gate, and neither God's expectations nor those of the reader are fulfilled.[39] Hence, the episode forewarns of the events that will lead to the death of Samson.[40] He has not fulfilled his mission and has kindled the wrath of the Philistines.

Samson and Delilah

The dramatic episode about Samson and Delilah begins with a short exposition in which the latter is introduced and we are told that Samson is in love. According to Amit, this is the key to the story, because it is the only time that it is stated that Samson loves any of his women. Amit believes that this shows the reader that: "in this affair Samson will be acting out of subjective involvement."[41] She is here looking for a kind of psychological motivation that these stories seldom provide.

After the short exposition we are told, in direct speech, that the Philistine rulers offer Delilah a large sum of money to extract Samson's secret from him. The "secret" motif recurs once again. As in the wedding episode, it is the woman's task to lead Samson astray. Amit claims, based on her sequential reading, that the reader is wondering with great expectation whether Delilah will agree to the proposition or not, and what will happen to her lover.[42]

In a series of similar scenes, Samson is portrayed giving untrue explanations of his strength. These, which imply magic, seem to meet Delilah's expectations.[43] In verses 16–17 the narrator explains that Samson has grown tired of Delilah's nagging and so finally reveals his secret.

> Finally, after she had nagged him with her words day after day, and pestered him, he was tired to death.[44] So he told her his whole secret, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me; I would become weak, and be like anyone else."
>
> When Delilah realized that he had told her his whole secret, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "This time come up, for he has told his whole secret to me." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. She let him fall asleep on her lap; and she called a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. He began to weaken, and his strength left him. Then she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" When he awoke from his sleep, he thought, "I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him. So the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles; and he ground at the mill in the prison. But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. (16:16–22)

As in the depiction of Samson's wedding, the story does not shift to an internal point of view when the reason for Samson's revealing his secret is stated, but the narrator explains his behaviour instead. If it is autorized speech, it means that the author is not moralizing concerning the actions of the hero. This view, however, is harder to defend in this passage, since the author says that Samson became so tired that he could die, which is an expression that could be viewed as suggesting an internal perspective. According to Amit, Samson should have left his woman. Instead he stays and subjects himself to enormous pressure. "The narrator penetrates to his thoughts and tells us that 'his soul was vexed to death.'"[45] She thus

believes that it is Samson's thoughts that are presented in verse 16.[46] This reasoning leads to the conclusion that the "blinding" and the torture are punishments from God.[47] Amit's argument is based on the fact that 14:4 says that his contacts with women will serve as a pretext.[48] When meeting Delilah, the three first scenes, when Samson tears himself loose, should lead to the killing of the Philistines.[49] When this does not happen, the reader realizes that he is straying from the norm.[50] Amit sees God's interfering and helping Samson in the temple of Dagon as an example of God's grace.[51] The author is also given the opportunity to show that Samson's strength is not in his hair.[52] Boling also moralizes concerning Samson's actions: "The compiler is implying that judge Samson learned nothing from his near fatal Gaza escapade, but nearly destroyed Israel as a result of the Delilah affair."[53] He believes that Samson should have realized that the women were trying to betray him.[54] According to Boling, the real reason for Samson's fall is not that he breaks his vow but that he does not take it seriously enough.[55] Many other commentators reason in a similar way.

When Samson finally reveals his secret, it becomes apparent that he knows the connection between his strength and his being a nazirite.[56] In verse 20, a situation with a slightly ironic twist occurs again – Samson does not realize that he has lost his strength and that the Lord has left him. Here the narrator interjects and provides an explanatory commentary. As in the case of Manoah and the angel, and the case of his parents and their view of Samson's wedding, the explanation provided is that the human character "does not know". Samson is later blinded by the Philistines and imprisoned in Gaza. But the dramatic words in verse 22 concerning the fact that his hair has begun to grow function as a cliffhanger and imply that the last word has not yet been spoken.[57]

The Death of Samson

In the episode about the death of Samson in the temple of Dagon, which occurs at the end of the cycle, the narrator dominates with summarizing accounts. But by the use of a slow narrative pace and a cluster of details the episode retains a scenic character and is more "showing" than "telling". As in earlier incidents when Samson wins, the story elevates the hero and belittles the enemy. Here the Philistines are objects of irony. From lack of better knowledge they thank their god for having given them the victory and having disarmed the enemy. They do this without knowing that he is about to claim his greatest victory and that there is a God other than Dagon that has the power.

Samson prays in the temple for the second time in the story. Many scholars claim that he has understood that his strength is not magical.[58] Thus they assume that there is a conflict in the story between a magical view according to which the strength is associated with the hair and a more orthodox view.

The author presents Samson's death as the greatest of his victories and shows through his evaluation that it was very notable.[59] According to Webb, an impor-

tant motif is the feud between the gods, as in the story about Gideon.[60] Therefore the climax of the story is when the temple of Dagon is torn down.[61] But the story is also Samson's, and its climax is his revenge for his eyes.

The story ends with a few words about Samson's dead body, and how his family fetches it and buries it in his father's grave.

Samson – Hero or Villain?

The narrative about Samson is pertinent to this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, it is well known and a significant number of readers can therefore be expected to have an opinion about the character and the story. A more important reason, however, is that it sets itself apart from the other judge stories and stands out in the book and in the redactor's project. The commentators have also speculated as to why it is included at all.[62] Gray, for example, suggests that it was included at a late stage because it was well known and popular, and because it was the only story that dealt with the conflict with the people who for a long time were the main enemies of the people of Israel – the Philistines.[63] Irrespective of why it was included, there existed in the case of Samson, according to a common opinion, various stories of legendary character about a hero with superhuman power who lived in the bordering neighbourhoods.[64] The task of the redactor was to weave these popular stories into his project without losing their "tellability".[65] Therefore he added an introduction and a conclusion similar to those of the other stories – even though the introduction is considerably shortened. (13:1, 15:20, 16:31) He also let the narrator be unusually intrusive and speak directly to the reader time and again to explain and interpret the events of the story. The comments are necessary since the story presents two projects – God's and Samson's – even though they coincide with one another rather than conflict. Samson acts for personal reasons throughout, but at the same time he is used by God to fight the Philistines.

A third reason for the story's pertinence to this thesis is that it is the last of the judge stories and thereby carries a special significance for scholars who treat the book as a coherent text. A common belief is that the book reflects an increasing decline in the situation of the people, and a mounting leadership crisis.[66]

The last reason, which is closely related to the previous one, is that Samson is viewed as a person of bad moral character. Exum's description of the judges as "unlikely heroes in some sense" is typical of synchronic scholars.[67] But many of the judges are also considered to act almost immorally and to "exhibit highly questionable behaviour."[68] Exum claims that Gideon and all the judges who follow him are afflicted by troubling weaknesses and that after the story of Samson the pattern of the judges cannot continue. It appears as if the synchronists are convinced that the stories focus on the morality of the heroes. Hence they constantly evaluate and comment on the Protagonists and their actions.[69]

The moral dilemma – now the main question – can be formulated as follows: How can God use a character like Samson to free his people? To be able to address

this problem we need to consider questions such as: Does the story really bring the morality of the hero to the fore?[70] Does the same morality exist at the various levels of conflict in the book? Are the so-called "deviant actions" always wrong, or is David J. Chalcraft right when he claims that the value of an action is judged according to who performs it and at whom it is directed?[71]

Some Different Alternatives of Interpretation

There are several possible conflicting views concerning the protagonist and his actions: (1) Samson is a crook and therefore a reflection of the fall of the leadership and the fall of the people; (2) Samson is a failure, but is still used by God and is therefore a reflection of the people; (3) Samson is God's hero whose morals are of no interest, but whose exploits are. The vital point in the conflict among the various alternatives is that according to the first two, Samson breaks the "norm" and therefore instrumentally and/or figuratively represents the apostasy, the failure in leadership, the sins of the people and so on. According to the third alternative, however, he is the hero in the story.[72] Soggin summarizes the two prevailing views: "by and large there are two lines of approach: those who see in Samson a religious hero with tragic elements, and others who make an essentially negative evaluation of him, as an example not to be imitated, the opposite of a true hero."

Samson – A Failure?

The synchronic scholars, who are being examined in this thesis, usually view Samson as a failure. Polzin claims that the character is used to depict the book's hermeneutic theme and that he represents "the negation of ideology".[73] Samson does not know of his own mission and appears completely to lack interest in the nation.[74] He is the most "misguided" of all the characters in the story and the one who least deserves God's help.[75] The hermeneutic dilemma and the theme of insecurity are also presented via the voice of the narrator.[76]

Webb, however, believes that Samson is well aware of his task and refers to his words in 16:17. As with the story of Jephthah, he provides a psychological description of the protagonist and says that he is acting irrationally. Webb, who bases his interpretations on the demands that are formulated in Numbers 6, claims that Samson is constantly breaking his nazirite promises.[77] His wish is to be an ordinary man and to live with the woman he loves – his strength therefore becomes his problem.[78] These observations lead to the conclusion that God finally abandons Samson not because of the cutting of his hair but rather to prevent him from becoming an ordinary man. God wants to keep him for special assignments.[79] According to Webb, to understand the story we should view the hero as an image of Israel.[80]

Klein sees Samson as a typical example of the ironic distance that these stories create. He is unreliable and has a bad character, but ironically, despite this carries out God's will.[81] She gives a vivid description of the hero's character and claims

that he is the weakest of all the weak judges that we meet in the book.[82] It is interesting to observe that Klein – in contrast to Polzin and Webb – claims that it is not God who gives Samson strength when he is dying but that his strength is located in his hair.[83] Webb and Polzin claim that God is portrayed as unpredictable and that the characters cannot control him. Klein, however, provides a moralizing interpretation and says that God is bound by the covenant.

Schneider believes that Samson is the worst of the judges and that he can be seen as God's last attempt at a temporary leadership since he "abuses almost every aspect of the office of judge."[84]

O'Connell claims throughout his interpretation that Samson fails and that he figuratively represents failed leadership on the one hand and the failure of his people on the other.[85]

According to Amit, as a judge Samson is portrayed as a failure.[86] Although the author has managed to depict him as a unique person with superhuman powers, without the use of magical or heathen references, he is still a useless leader.[87] "The selection and combination of this cycle reflects the author's wish to present Samson as the opposite of the desired leader."[88]

Three Arguments of Interpretation

The interpretation of Samson as a failure and a symbol of the apostasy of the people have been justified by the use of three types of arguments.

Firstly, the synchronists claim that the placement of the story indicates that the downward spiral of the book has reached its end.[89] Schneider's description can be quoted as representative:

> Although the book of Judges is cyclical and does follow the aforementioned pattern, such a synopsis misses the critical point that the Israelites do not begin each cycle at the same place each time. The present study will argue that the book of Judges is organized to show a degenerative progression; each cycle shows a generation beginning yet lower on the scale of legitimate behavior regarding the Israelites' relationship to their deity than the previous generation had. The worsening situation is shown in the book through the actions of the judges and the Israelites in their relationship to each other, to the surrounding communities, and, most importantly, to their deity.…Israel's decline is revealed by the order of the stories, which are unified by thematic threads, the use of irony, and specialized terminology.[90]

With regard to this point, it is possible to see a certain difference between the scholars who view the book as a narrative with a plot and those who interpret it primarily from a thematic viewpoint. The former emphasizes that this story is the last story about judges and that the gradual decay here reaches a low point. The latter consider above all that the theme, or the rhetorical message, is summarized or depicted in an especially clear way in this story.

Amit serves as an example, since she refers to both the plot and the rhetoric. She claims that the placement of the cycle is important because the failed leader-

ship of Samson creates a feeling of disappointment in the reader and provides motivation for the anarchy that distinguishes the book's final stories.[91] And the editorial guidelines – signs and leadership – that characterize the book come to an end with the story of Samson. Here a considerable number of signs are presented, while the problem of knowing God is not treated at all in the stories that follow. In terms of the leadership theme, after the death of Samson the people are left without a leader in the midst of ongoing battles against the Philistines.[92] The solution that will be presented in the following chapters is that of monarchy. Other scholars, however, have referred to other themes and hence have placed the book's centre elsewhere. Some refer to the declining situation for the women, and view chapters 19–21, with the rapes and murders, as the complete decay that the book has been heading towards throughout.[93] Jobling, who believes that the "text" does not conclude until 1 Sam 12, conducts a structuralist study and analyses a number of isotopes that mark the way toward monarchy.[94] The most important of these is the continuity versus discontinuity in the leadership. Other related isotopes are divine versus human initiative, the quality of the leadership, the oppression of a different people, and internal conflicts. Accordingly, the centre of the book is said to be found in the story about Gideon.

Another argument is that the story contains many allusions to the other stories. Through type scenes, reappearing motifs, key words and so on, a textual web is created from which the story and its separate motifs can be understood. For example, Webb claims that the "weak woman defeating a man" motif is also found in the stories of Jael, Abimelech and Jephthah's daughter; that Gideon uses 300 torches; that Shamgar, like Samson, kills Philistines with improvised weapons; and that the scene of annunciation is related to the scene in which Gideon is enlisted (6:11–24). He believes that these allusions confirm that the story about Samson forms the climactic realization of major themes in the book.[95] It therefore performs a special function in the book, and the protagonist will end up personifying Israel and its history during the time of the Judges.[96]

Finally, many scholars claim that the interpretation generated by the story's placement in the book and the allusions to the other stories is confirmed by a close reading of the story itself.

Samson – A Hero?

If we use Ryan's parameters, the story could be described as proliferating narrativity, since the author is agglomerating stories that all relate to Samson and his conflicts with the Philistines.[97] The causal connection between the various episodes is vague in many cases. For example, it is difficult to decide how the episode in Gaza (16:1–3) is related to the preceding and following episodes. Indeed, some commentators consider that there is a connection with the following episode, since Samson annoys the Philistines after twenty years of truce. The feat involving the city gate hence induces the high price that Delilah is offered.[98] But these expla-

nations appear far-fetched. The episode is rather an example of how the hero's contacts with the Philistine women lead to conflicts and notable victories. However, a geographical connection is possible, since Samson is later taken to Gaza, after his blinding. There are also temporal weaknesses in the story. Where are we to locate the twenty years that pass in 15:20? Do these pass between 15:20 and 16:1? There are additional problems in individual episodes, as in the case of the parents and the lion in the vineyard.

That the story, despite this, is seen as well composed, can be explained by its being characterized by a recurring "secret" motif that grows into a theme.[99] The mysterious protagonist, together with several other secrets, moves the story forward, holds the various sections together, and also creates suspense. However, the ultimate riddle is the activity of God. As the spirit of the story, he uses human characters to fulfil his plans. This perspective is hidden from them but revealed to the reader. The "secret" theme and the description of God's and Samson's projects, which coincide rather than compete, help to create a specific type of hero. Samson is an adventurer who is thrown from one feat to another. He is a miracle and a mystery. His character is static, and it is not his inner self or his morals that are displayed. He does not stray from the norm by breaking implied rules for nazirites or by having contact with Philistine women. It could be claimed that his revealing of the secret is a mistake, but even here the narrator is keen to explain his actions. Nor does he lose our sympathy when he is taken to Gaza to grind the Philistine's mill, but rather gains even more of it.

Nor is the narrative distinguished by dramatic irony, even though the narrator informs the readers throughout so that they have more knowledge than the characters. It is not unusual to claim that irony occurs every time this situation appears, but to create an ironic effect the characters also need to act incorrectly because of their lack of knowledge.[100] In this case, the odd thing is that the characters act correctly even though they do not know or understand.

The story could therefore be described as a classic adventure story; and Samson, like Jacob (Gen. 25–33), can be compared to the hero figure of adventure stories that Bakhtin has described.[101] This hero is passive, and encounters that lead to adventures accidentally cross his path.[102] If it were a moral story instead, we would probably have a different type of hero. He would not be passive but would be placed at cross-roads, and the focus would be on the choices rather than the achievements. However, Samson (like Jacob) does not choose, he merely drifts into situations. His handling of these situations may lead him into trouble, but he never leaves his path.[103]

A Story about a Story

In many cases, the stories in the Bible can be described as stories about stories, since the author tells a life story where the "author" is God. When Joseph reveals himself to his petrified brothers, he says:

> "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt." (Gen. 45:7–8)

Joseph acts as the reader of his own story when at the end he interprets it from his privileged position. In the story about Samson, there is a similar "plot of life". His parents, however, do not have knowledge of this story and do not know that the affair with the woman in Timnah is a result of compositional concerns.[104]

Different Ways of Viewing the Moral Dilemma

If narratives are autonomous, then it is fully possible that there exists a morality in the frame and another in the individual stories, and that a reader accepts this since embedded narratives always tend to fill out "the entire room", so to speak, so that the frame is forgotten. The two levels are simply two different kinds of texts, and the morals cannot be harmonized. This explanation can be related to other explanations that are probably either competing or complementary. Gros Louis provides the following description of the two levels in the book:

> The dominant, unifying pattern is clearly the cycle we have described, a theory of history, not only of human history, but of individual histories as well. Someone does wrong, he is punished for his error, either by his own guilt or by an outside agent, a parent or authority figure of some kind. He repents and asks for help which can come either from within himself or from an outside source; the help comes; balance and equilibrium is restored; the individual is at peace with himself and his society, large or small, community or family, until he does wrong again and the cycle begins anew. In Judges this cyclical theory of history, both personal and collective is not, however, futile or meaningless. God's abiding love for Israel and his determination that Israel shall love him impose an even larger pattern on the cycles.[105]

According to this view, the frame and the narratives have the same moral. A retributive pattern is presented on both levels according to which individuals and communities act and God reacts. Gray's more traditional historical-critical view represents a contrasting opinion:

> The figure of Samson is in fact so unlikely among the judges that it has been taken to have been included by the Deuteronomistic Historian as a tragic example of the abuse of a high calling. That, however, is rather the reflection of modern homiletics, and it is not supported by any Deuteronomistic comment in the entirely neutral presentation of the Samson tradition. Those considerations seem to confirm the view that the Samson cycle represents a well-established

> local folk-tradition in the Shephelah, and particularly about Beth-shemesh, of a local Danite strong man and colourful leader in frontier exploits with the Philistines, both more and less hostile.[106]

Gray's viewpoint seems completely incompatible with that of Gros Louis, since Gray believes that the story lacks the moral of which the latter speaks. This in turn is explained by the fact that the story was known before it was even inserted into the book.

However, it is not necessarily the case that so-called literary scholars hold the view that there is no tension between the different levels in the book. Many have identified the problem and tried to explain it. Polzin claims that the book has a dialogic character where many different voices can be identified, and that the book is about the hermeneutic dilemma – that it concerns, for instance, the relationship between the morality of the people and its history. This view (to be discussed in depth in Chapter VIII) assumes that the work is seen as one single text in which a dialogue between different voices is displayed. The gist of this reasoning is that the book's role in the DH is to call into question the theology of retribution and its connection between the well-being of the people and their abiding by the law. The tensions in the text hence become significant and important. Another way to solve this moral problem is to associate it, as does Alter among others, with the Hebrew art of storytelling.[107] He believes that these stories use indirect characterization and that the characters are presented as unpredictable and inscrutable.[108] This in turn is explained by the special Hebrew anthropology. A result of this technique of presentation is that "one of the most probing general perceptions of the biblical writers is that there is often a tension, sometimes perhaps even an absolute contradiction, between election and moral character."[109] From this we have paradoxical causality in the narration of the Bible:

> The biblical writers obviously exhibit, on the one hand, a profound belief in a strong, clearly demarcated pattern of causation in history and individual lives, and many of the framing devices, the motif-structures, the symmetries and recurrences in their narratives reflect this belief. God directs, history complies; a person sins, a person suffers; Israel backslides, Israel falls. The very perception, on the other hand, of godlike depths, unsoundable capacities for good and evil, in human nature, also leads these writers to render their protagonists in ways that destabilize any monolithic system of causation, set off a fluid movement among different orders of causation, some of them complementary or mutually reinforcing, others even mutually contradictory.[110]

If we assume that tension between the stories and the larger text really exists, then we can explain this in different ways: (1) the tensions are explained by the fact that we read different types of material characterized by its prehistory (Gray); (2) the tensions are explained by the work's dialogical character (Polzin); (3) the tensions are explained by the special view of humankind that is presented in the texts (Alter).

Even though Polzin's and Alter's views appear to concur there is an important difference between them regarding an important issue. Polzin's model demands that the reader view the work as one sole text and juxtapose the different perspectives. Alter, however, seems to be open to the idea of the work's containing several different stories that face in different directions.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter, I claimed that the vital point in the conflict between different interpretations is whether Samson is a hero or a failure. A better description of the problem is probably to claim that the story and its current interpretations leave us with two questions: What is the genre of this story – that is, its purpose and its function? What evaluation is placed on the actions of Samson?

These questions relate to the discussion of the relationship between the macro- and micro- levels of the text, since the "larger text" has a clear ideological tendency. The dominant view is that the redactor presents Israel's history in such a way that the people's welfare is completely dependent on their relationship to God and his law.[111] This description coincides with the introduction of the book of Judges and the important speeches by God, angels and prophets that appear throughout the book. In these sections, it is said that the people of Israel have broken the covenant since they have allowed themselves to be assimilated with other peoples and thus have begun to worship other gods. Because of this, their God abandons them, becomes their enemy and allows them to be oppressed by other peoples. The situation is close to ironic. When they serve other gods, they are forced to serve these other peoples also. When they turn back and serve God, God delivers them. However, many scholars have pointed out that the second layer is not as clear-cut as the first and that salvation hence is portrayed as an unmotivated act of God's mercy.[112] Irrespective of this and irrespective of how we choose to describe the deuteronomic theology, it is beyond all doubt that the actions of the people are of the deciding significance for their fate, and that the work therefore has a moral character. The tendency is for the people to play the active part while God reacts. This causality focuses on moral qualities – here faithfulness. If we imagine that the redactor compiled this work in connection with the exile of the Judeans, then the message is that they brought the suffering upon themselves and that the defeat is not a sign of God's weakness. In this message there is a certain amount of hope, which may seem strange. Firstly, the redactor claims that he can show that their history is meaningful and not chaotic. Secondly, the argument implies that the God of Israel has the power to save and deliver yet again if only the people return to him.

The problem however, is that this logic has not been superimposed onto the individual stories. By means of the introduction and the frame motif within the individual stories – this is where the "larger text" is expressed – three levels of conflict are presented. The primary conflict is between God and Israel.[113] This in

turn leads to conflicts between Israel and other peoples. Thirdly, there are conflicts between individual characters. By using the frame and the allusions to this frame, it is stressed that the two latter levels of conflict should be understood relative to the primary level of conflict. But it is not this conflict that is in the foreground in the stories. The prologue of the book and the introductions to the individual stories do provide a deuteronomic model for the material, but when the stories begin this perspective tends to disappear. Here we meet characters who are not presented as masters over their own lives and fates. They are instead often presented as puppets involved in events that they cannot control and often do not even understand.[114] God is not passive either: he is rather the real actor who uses individuals and people to punish and save. A very important consequence is that the moralizing explanations used to interpret Israel's history cannot be applied to the individual stories. Although we can state that Barak loses his honour because of his lack of trust (Judges 4) and that the story of Abimelech follows a strict retributive pattern (Judges 9), generally there are no simple connections between the morality of the characters and their own happiness or misfortune. It is therefore meaningless to interpret Ehud's and Jael's assassinations in this way or to try to explain why Jephthah deserved his fate. The stories have a different logic according to which Ehud and Jael are heroes and Jephthah is a good man who commits a terrible mistake. A recurring point in this study is that there is no morality in a fictional story other than the one that is provided in the story itself. To the question whether Samson breaks the rules of cleanliness, we can therefore answer: Who says that there are any?

Even though those who have compiled the material seem to accept this tension, there are examples of interference in the text to avoid serious contradictions – for example the connection between Gideon and Abimelech (Chapters 8–9) where the revolt of the latter is given an indirect explanation by the episode about Gideon's *ephod*. There are also texts where the narrator makes explicit evaluations, as in the case of the concluding stories where it is stated repeatedly that Israel did not have a king and that everyone did as he or she pleased. This type of interference, however, is an exception to the rule.

Even in the case of Samson, my criticism of the synchronists and their interpretations is that they presuppose that the narrative should not be read as an autonomous unit as the composition obviously invites us to do. This means that they approach the story with a predetermined understanding of the structure and the message of the larger text. When the synchronists interpret it, they investigate how it relates to, and reinforces, the structure and theme of the book. Therefore, in this case they need to view Samson as a failed hero. For example, Webb and Klein assume that Samson represents Israel and its history in a figurative way.[115] Israel, like Samson, has received an assignment that they risk losing since they constantly yield to various temptations. This in turn leads to imprisonment and suppression. Through the Lord's mercy they are saved and continue as his ser-

vants. To succeed, these interpretations need to be supported by various allusions. This means that the motifs are not interpreted through their function in the story, but rather in relation to other similar texts. The synchronists also refer to sophisticated devices in their interpretation of separate narratives. They hence succeed in presenting a coherent text, but at a high price. Firstly, they are forced to read the stories against an intuitive interpretation – for example, in the cases of Ehud and Jephthah. They read the book's stories as ideological and moral texts and ignore their narrative identity. Secondly, they cannot explain the tensions, between the different levels of meaning in the book, with which readers through the ages have struggled.

Notes

[1] Many scholars, for example Gray, claim that the Philistines here appear as a new enemy. But according to Boling in *Judges* they have been present throughout the book and during the applicable time period (p. 218).

[2] Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* claims that the annunciation is a popular feature in legends of heroes. He refers to Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah and Elizabeth. He also considers that Samson's and Samuel's stories are somehow dependent on one another (p. 323f.).

[3] When Alter in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (pp. 47–62) describes a "type scene", he refers to the classical duel between the sheriff and the crooks that is found in almost every Western. A type scene is conventional and the author can presume that the reader knows it so well that any change will be noticed. Alter has not classified the annunciation in this story as a type scene, but he has interpreted Samson's wedding in relation to other scenes of betrothal in the OT.

[4] See, for example, Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 163ff. and Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 115.

[5] Amit in *The Book of Judges*, relates the episode to, among others, Gen. 18:1–16 and Judges 6:11–24 and presents a number of deviations in a table on p. 292f. She first and foremost stresses the angel's repeated visits and the considerable number of "signs" (p. 290f.). The annunciation and the calling are thus seen as merely unifying motifs. It is Manoah's path to enlightenment that is in the foreground. He is, according to Amit, portrayed as "stubbornly sceptical, refusing to be convinced that the angel of the Lord has indeed appeared to him" (p. 291). This kind of sceptic can only be convinced with visible signs. "Analysis of the story reveals that its structure, the shaping of its characters, and the development of its plot all serve the goal of testing the attitude to the issue of revelation, toward which the present birth story makes an important contribution." (p. 304) Manoah is thought to have a figurative role since he represents "the generations of the judges" who demand signs to believe (p. 290). The story about Samson is also "a concluding discussion on the decisive effect of signs of showing" (p. 291). Amit claims that the couple represent contrasting viewpoints and that this fact deepens the theme. The husband is sceptical while the wife is wise and insightful (p. 298). Samson and his mother are also said to function as figurative representations of the people and their situation, since their welfare is dependent on their ability to follow the given rules (p. 299).

[6] See Boling, *Judges*, p. 218; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 291.

[7] Nearly all scholars refer to the nazirite rules that can be found in Num. 6:1–21. Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* points out that the text in Numbers stems from the so-called P-source, but that it does reflect older traditions (p. 324). Many scholars state that the rules given in Numbers apply to temporary nazirite promises, while Samson is a nazirite for life. Amit in *The Book of Judges* claims that Samson is portrayed as a unique nazirite and that it is a mistake to judge him based on Numbers (p. 299).

[8] Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* ties this comment to the redactor ("the compiler"). He was aware that Samson's action was not complete but rather only the beginning of the conflicts that would follow. The allusion to the whole of "Israel" is also tied to the redactor (p. 325).

[9] Boling in *Judges* compares this with Judges 6:11–24 and claims that the characters who meet God's messengers usually say things that they themselves do not understand. It is ironic, for example, that the woman says that the man looked like an angel sent from God since the reader knows that that is what he is (p. 220).

[10] The woman's words about the death of Samson function as a forewarning.

[11] Amit in *The Book of Judges* claims that Manoah uses several angel tests (p. 302). For example, she believes that he tries to lure the angel into a trap when he suggests a meal. She goes so far as to say that Manoah is still having doubts about the identity of the angel when he is lying on his face. It is only because the angel does not return that he gains insight (p. 303).

[12] Prince in *A Dictionary of Narratology* defines "restriction of field" as "[the] subjecting of point of view to conceptual or perceptual constraints" (p. 82).

[13] According to Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* the marriage to the woman in Timnah has been "used to connect a number of independent traditions" (p. 331f.).

[14] It is often said that the reason for the apostasy was that the men of Israel took the daughters of the inhabitants of the land as wives and that they gave their daughters to their sons. According to Schneider in *Judges*, this is the sin that is repeated by Israel time and time again – for example, see p. 194.

[15] The expression is found in Judges 17:6 and 21:25. Barry Webb in "A Serious Reading of the Samson Story (Judges 13–16)", *The Reformed Theological Review*, 54 (1995) says: "Samson is every man." (p. 117.)

[16] Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 184. O'Connell in *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* believes that Samson's contacts with the woman from Timnah and his attempts to make her his wife are to be viewed as signs of religious deterioration (p. 214f.) Schneider in *Judges* says that Samson follows what he believes is right and not his parents or God. She points out that this leads to a situation in which several Philistines get into trouble (p. 203f.) She does not modify her view because of 14:4, but instead says: "the narrator allows the reader to identify with the parents, sharing their discomfort." She insists throughout that Samson should not be in contact with the woman in Timnah and raises purely moral aspects when she says that he should listen to his parents and should not have asked his father but rather his mother since she was wiser.

[17] Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* interpreting the story from a diachronic perspective, bases his views on the redactor's having a set material to use. In the case of Samson, this material does not fit very well, but he has adapted it to serve his purpose with, among other things, explanatory comments like the kind we come across here (see p. 328). Trible in *Texts of Terror* says, when she analyses chapters 19–20, that: "[a] second response comes from the editor of the book of Judges, whose voice merges with that of the narrator" (p. 84). Even though she has a literary-critical approach (p. 3), she also assumes that it is possible to separate the voices of the narrator and the redactor.

[18] Boling, *Judges*, p. 229f.

[19] Klein in *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* states that the great expectations of the reader are not realized since the annunciation is immediately put to shame when Samson does not act according to the expected pattern. She mentions as an example that he does not obey his parents and that he leaves Israel's territory (p. 116). In 14:4 the narrator introduces his understanding of: "Yahweh's *modus operandi*. Samson's desire for the Timnite woman is not justified *by* Yahweh; it is *attributed to* Yahweh by the reliable narrator: 'he [was] *seeking* an occasion against the Philistines' (14.4). The narrator is reliable – within human limitations of knowledge." (p. 116.) Klein here shows that she understands that the narrator's task in 14:4 is first and foremost to explain God's ways. She interprets the comment to be that God does not control, but rather uses, the actions of Samson. A specific problem is that Klein limits the narrator's reliability: "Though the narrator is reliable, it is an Israelite, *human* justification of Yahweh's actions. The author uses direct speech when an idea is to be attributed to Yahweh." (n. 7, p. 225.) She claims that Samson should not be viewed as morally neutral and states that he is presented as a failed leader. "As leader, the hero must demonstrate ethical standards. Without such standards, the leader is not a hero." (p. 116f.) She continues: "Sometimes, as in the Samson narrative, man accomplishes Yahweh's will unwittingly, and the divine purpose is realized as a consequence of man's unethical actions." (p. 117) This interpretation is based on Klein's conviction that the stories present the relationship between Israel and God in a symbolic way. "In the book of Judges, Yahweh has repeatedly recalled Israel to the covenant. Not morally neutral but morally unfaithful to Yahweh and his commandments, each protagonist is Israel, each is an image of the covenant relationship of the people with its god; and as a result, the

book records the degeneration of the people." (p. 117.) Samson is the extreme symbol of this deterioration, while at the same time the story shows that in spite of this God can have his way.

[20] Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* claims that two traditions have been joined – the story about the lion and the story of the betrothal (p. 328).

[21] Ibid., p. 329.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.; Boling, *Judges*, p. 231.

[24] Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* states that riddles are used "as a test of natural ingenuity in diplomatic encounters" (p. 330).

[25] According to Gray, Samson's wife and Delilah receive the exact same mission from their countrymen; even the same words are used (p. 331).

[26] The term "authorized" is taken from Skalin, *Karaktär och Perspektiv* [*Character and Perspective*]. Skalin contends with Lubomír Doležel and his term "authenticity", suggesting that "authorized" is a better term that denotes narrative facts – that is, things that cannot be questioned in the story (pp. 151–159). He claims that a reader acknowledges that an utterance can be "transparent" or "opaque". If the words of the narrator in the verse under consideration are "transparent", then we are to believe them and accept them as true since the voice is authorized; but if they are "opaque", then it is Samson's point of view and this is not to be regarded as authorized.

[27] Samson is as some of the heroes in Icelandic sagas a combination of a berserk and a poet.

[28] "The riddle is set in the characteristic parallelism of Hebrew poetry. It is a word play on ʿᵃrî, which means 'lion' in Hebrew and, to assume a Hebrew noun cognate with Arabic, 'ary, 'honey'. The lion was 'the eater' and 'the strong, or fierce' and the honey 'the food' and 'the sweet'. The riddle may have meant, What is both eater and for food and both strong and sweet? The answer: ʿᵃrî. This probably prompted the tradition of the unlikely swarming of bees in the carcase of the lion, if not indeed the tradition of Samson's slaying the lion." (Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 330.)

[29] Ibid., p. 331.

[30] The last time he visited her he tore a lion apart as if it was a lamb. This time he brings a lamb as a gift. It was also a kid that his father offered the angel during the annunciation. Overall there are many animals or parts of animals in the story: lion, bees, cows, foxes, donkey jaws etc.

[31] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 216.

[32] Boling, *Judges*, p. 239. According to Boling, everything in the story has this encounter between Samson and God in view. He also believes that the pragmatic historian ended the story here and that the work probably continued with the stories of Eli and Samuel (p. 239f.).

[33] "The development of Plot C, wherein Samson attempts to secure a bride from among the Philistines, competes with the development of Plot A, wherein YHWH attempts to deliver Israel from the Philistines through Samson." (O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 219.)

[34] Ibid., p. 225f. One problem that none of the scholars deals with is that a nazirite was not allowed to come close to a dead body (Num. 6:7), a rule that is hard to combine with Samson's brutal missions.

[35] "Samson's visit to the harlot is narrated without inhibition or stricture, an indication that the Old Testament must be understood in its own context." (Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 334.)

[36] Boling, *Judges*, moralizes over Samson's behaviour in this episode: "The woman was going about her publicly recognized business; the judge of Israel was not going about his publicly recognized business." (p. 248.)

[37] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 279.

[38] Ibid., p. 282f.

[39] Ibid., p. 285.

[40] Ibid., p. 283.

[41] Ibid., p. 285.

[42] When it comes to Samson, the reader's question, according to Amit, is: "Will he continue to serve as a tool in the plan of pretext for which he was destined by God, or will events develop differently?" (Ibid.)

[43] Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* refers to the use of the number seven and the different conditions connected to ligaments and ropes (p. 335f.).

[44] According to Boling in *Judges*, p. 250, Samson's feelings can be compared to those of Elijah and Jonah (1 Kings 19:4; Jonah 4:8).

[45] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 286.

[46] According to Webb, "A Serious Reading of the Samson Story", Samson's perspective is mainly expressed in the formulation: "I would become as weak as any other man". It is this that is his innermost wish and the only plausible explanation for his actions (p. 115f.).

[47] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 287.

[48] Ibid., p. 287f.

[49] "In its extant fashioning and location, the Samson and Delilah affair demonstrates Samson's deviation and distancing from the plan that had been intended for him by God, whether done consciously or not. Samson, who revealed the secret of his power to the Philistines, cannot continue to serve in the role of judge-deliverer." (Ibid., p. 287.) According to Amit, Samson's deterioration is gradual and the episode with Delilah is hence worse than the episode in Gaza. She states: "Samson's destiny proves that the judge and his powers are a tool in the hands of Providence, and that a judge who fails to fulfill the task assigned to him by Providence brings destruction upon himself." (Ibid., p. 287.)

[50] In 15:13–16 Samson acts for personal reasons too, but he follows the given pattern. (Ibid., p. 286.)

[51] Ibid., p. 305.

[52] "Samson wreaks vengeance upon the Philistines through the power of prayer and not trough the power of his hair." (Ibid., p. 305.)

[53] Boling, *Judges*, p. 252.

[54] Ibid., p. 249. See also Soggin, *Judges*, p. 257. He believes that Samson is portrayed as stupid and that his actions are described as being a result of "mental abnormality".

[55] Boling, *Judges*, p. 250.

[56] This counters Polzin's hypothesis that Samson does not know of his mission. Gray in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* points out that the story until now has not connected the strength with the hair. (p. 336.)

[57] Amit in *The Book of Judges*, avoiding a magical interpretation, claims that the verse functions primarily as an indication of the passage of time. (p. 305f.)

[58] See, for example, Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 279.

[59] One factor that sets the Samson story apart from other judges' stories is his violent death. The other judges restore the nation to a state of stability after oppression. They die natural and peaceful deaths. Samson never manages to restore a national stability and he dies a violent death. A problem for the interpreters therefore is to locate the twenty years during which he should have been judging Israel.

[60] By referring to the list of gods in the story about Jephthah (10:6) and the Introduction's words about other gods (2:11–12), Webb claims in "A Serious Reading of the Samson Story" that Dagon symbolizes all other gods. (p. 117f.)

[61] Fensham in "Literary Observations on Historical Narratives in Sections of Judges" hesitates and believes that it is not clear whether the occurrences in chapter 16 should be viewed as a climax or an anticlimax (p. 83).

[62] Carol Smith, "Samson and Delilah: A Parable of Power?", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 76 (1997), pp. 45–57, begins by describing the problems caused by the story (p. 45). She later states that Moor, in his 1903 commentary, provides perhaps the best description of the story when he gives it the heading: "The adventures of Samson".

[63] Gray, *Joshua*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 217f.

[64] Gray claims that the story of Samson deviates from the other stories with its legendary style (ibid., p. 190f.) and describes it as a "hero-saga" combined with an "aetiological legend" (p. 219). He believes that it probably has its roots in mythology and discusses, among other things, the myth about the sun (p. 220f.) and compares it with Heracles. Both Heracles and Samson could, however, be influenced by Gilgamesh (especially the roles of the women). Boling in *Judges* claims that the Samson story differentiates itself in many ways from the other stories in the book, but that in spite of this Samson is still presented as one of the judges (p. 224).

[65] Soggin in *Judges* describes in great detail the complicated character of the story (p. 225ff.) Fensham in "Literary Observations on Historical Narratives in Sections of Judges" stresses that the story is hard to interpret and that it obviously posed a problem for "the final author", who struggled to adjust these stories about the hero's adventures to his pattern (p. 82).

[66] Polzin, who has an opinion that to some degree differs from the other synchronists, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VIII.

[67] Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold", p. 412. She describes Samson as "a Nazirite who does not live up to his promise".

[68] Ibid.

[69] Bal, *Murder and Difference*. In a critical study, Bal discusses how the story about Deborah has been interpreted and claims that the interpretations under consideration have been limited by various codes. She points out that the theological and religious codes have a "parasitic moral code" (p. 50). I believe that this description is valid when applied to the studies that I am criticizing. It should be noted, however, that J. Cheryl Exum does not read the story from a moral standpoint in her study, "The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga", *Vetus Testamentum* XXXIII (1983) pp. 30–45. Taking the view that Chapters 14–15 and Chapter 16 are two parallel units, she puts the prayer and God's answer as the theological centre, not the nazirite promises or the crimes against these. The fundamental theological principle in the story is that God acts in and behind the story. This is expressed through God's interference by sending the spirit as an answer to prayer and providing the reader with insight into God's perspective (p. 36). The prayer's special function is, for example, that it can rearrange the expected, as at the end when Samson regains his strength even though God has abandoned him (p. 40).

[70] Prince in *A Dictionary of Narratology* defines "foreground" as: "[that] which is focused on, underlined, emphasized; that which comes to the fore against a [background]." (p. 33.)

[71] David J. Chalcraft, "Deviance and Legitimate Action in the Book of Judges" in David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *The Bible in Three Dimensions* (Sheffield, 1990), pp. 177-201.

[72] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 258. He gives a short historical overview that confirms that these alternatives are very old. The problem is also well known and has been given various explanations. A common one is to refer to the different traditions and reworkings that have made the story's theme and "theological message" confused and ambiguous.

[73] Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 194f.

[74] Ibid., p. 181.

[75] Ibid., p. 189.

[76] Ibid., p. 186f.

[77] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 169f.

[78] Ibid., p. 169.

[79] Ibid., p. 169f.

[80] See also Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges", p. 161.

[81] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 109f.

[82] Ibid., p. 118.

[83] Ibid., p. 126f.

[84] Schneider, *Judges*, p. 193.

[85] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 224.

[86] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 267.

[87] Ibid., p. 276.

[88] Ibid., p. 288. A common denominator among the scholars who consider the book to be a well-composed unit is their belief that the book presents a spiral of ever greater deterioration and failure. Based on this reasoning, Samson must be the worst of all the judges. For example, Brettler in "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics" says: "Samson breaks all the components of his vow: he eats impure food; he (implicitly) drinks intoxicants; and he has his hair cut. ...His behaviour with women is far from exemplary. In a sense, his career is the *climax of a type started with Barak and Deborah: the judge as anti-hero*." (p. 407, my italics.) The scholars who stress the conflict between David and Saul claim that the Benjamite Ehud began this series; others leave out Deborah. Brettler's division is based on his theory that the conflict is between North and South.

[89] Webb, "A Serious Reading of the Samson Story", p. 112f. He claims that if we miss the point in this serious story, we risk missing the message of the book as a whole.

[90] Schneider, *Judges*, p. xii.

[91] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 266.

[92] Ibid., p. 307.

[93] Schneider also refers to the themes of leadership, tension between the North and the South, and Israel's relationship with God. See Schneider, *Judges*, p. xiii.

[94] Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, p. 52ff. An isotope is defined as: "[a] semantic category defined broadly enough to subsume a large number of elements of meaning in the text, but precisely enough for useful organization of these elements" (ibid., p. 14).

[95] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 179.

[96] "For Milton is right; in terms of the whole way it functions in the book of Judges, the story of Samson is the story of Israel recapitulated and focused for us in the life of a single man." (Webb, "A Serious Reading of the Samson Story", p. 116.)

[97] A difference between this and the other episodic stories in the book is that here the hero's whole life is presented as a unifying motif – not the time of the battle or the time between the hero's calling and his death.

[98] See, for example, Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 272f.

[99] James A. Wharton in "The Secret of Yahweh: Story and Affirmation in Judges 13–16", *Interpretation* 27 (1973) says: "Only a Philistine can deny that the Samson stories are superb examples of ancient narrative art." (p. 48.)

[100] William Van O'Connor and Ernst H. Behler, in "Irony" in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, claim that dramatic irony can be identified by four elements: "(a) the spectators know more that the protagonist; (b) the character reacts in a way contrary to that which is appropriate or wise; (c) characters or situations are compared or contrasted for ironic effects, such as parody; or (d) there is a marked contrast between what the character understands about his acts and what the play demonstrates about them." (p. 635.)

[101] Michail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1994) pp. 84–258.

[102] Ibid., p. 85ff.

[103] For a character to make a mistake, a choice between competing values is required. A correct or incorrect choice should also have serious consequences. It should be life-deciding values that are at stake. Samson's revelation of his secret leads to the loss of his life, but even this mistake is used by God in his project. (See 14:4).

[104] It is possible that the redactor realized that the story was "impossible" to include in his project, but also that he could not leave it out. He saves the story by claiming that God uses the strange hero "in a secret way". This does not legitimize Samson's actions or make them representative; instead the question of his morality becomes irrelevant.

[105] Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges", p. 145.

[106] Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*. p. 218.

[107] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, he deals with the question in a chapter titled: "Characterization and the Art of Reticence", pp. 114–130.

[108] Ibid., p. 126f.

[109] Ibid., p. 117.

[110] Ibid., p. 125f.

[111] Fensham in " Literary Observations on Historical Narratives in Sections of Judges" presents the scheme that can be found in the book and provides the following comment on behalf of the redactor's efforts: "He places the traditions into a religious framework, a kind of sermon from the history of ancient Israel. Living in the time of the exile the final Deuteronomistic author experienced the hard way what happened to the Judeans when they became apostate. From this shameful situation the history of Israel in the time of the Judges is described as a sermon lesson that Israel were disobedient to the Lord from its earliest times. The result of their sins was every time punishment from the Lord and his deliverance from times of oppression must be solely attributed to his grace." (p. 81.)

[112] However, the rescues are compositionally motivated by Israel's suffering, prayer or something of that nature.

[113] Since this conflict never reaches a real solution, it causes new conflicts constantly to occur on the other levels.

[114] Israel is presented as God's partner, while the heroes are his tools.

[115] Webb "A Serious Reading of the Samson Story", p. 116. He even associates Samson's imprisonment with the imprisonment of Babylon. He refers to Greenstein, who says that the deep riddle in the story is that Samson is Israel and that being nazirite really refers to the convenant. (p. 118, n. 14.)

VIII. The Book of Judges and Polyphony

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Introduction

An important reason behind the endeavours to find a consistent larger text seems to be that scholars are searching for some kind of coherent message or theme in the book or in the DH. However, in this study the significant observation has been made that the form of the book resists such an interpretation. This is so both because the larger unit contains autonomous narratives and because of the non-didactic character of the individual stories.

This tension between the desire of interpreters and the character of the texts has been observed and discussed by several scholars. For instance, Carroll claims that the Bible does not fulfil the demands of systematic theology for consistency and that it therefore has always frustrated its readers.[1] Bal criticizes biblical scholars because they have projected onto the text a coherence that originates in their own conceptions of the world, history and literature.[2]

Alter and Sternberg refer to the Hebrew worldview when they try to explain the form of the narratives and their resistance to an ideological reading. Although Sternberg says that it is indeed ideological literature, he also points out that: "[anything] like preaching from the narrative pulpit is conspicuous for its absence. So is its immemorial mate and nearest equivalent – black-and-white delineation of agents, motives, causes, processes."[3] The narratives are said to be composed in such a way that the reading becomes a process of interpretation – "the drama of reading" – analogous to the interpretation of life that the characters in the stories dramatize. This is so because a characteristic description of human beings is that they are "ignorant", and the difference between God and man is not (as among the Greeks) that God is immortal, but that God is omniscient.

Alter also believes that the tensions in the texts can be explained by the Hebrew view of God and humankind. The Bible contains different kinds of narratives from different hands, but everything is presented as history: "The ancient Hebrew writers…seek through the process of narrative realization to reveal the enactment of God's purposes in historical events."[4] He points out that there are certain tensions in the texts:

> This enactment, however, is continuously complicated by a perception of two, approximately parallel, dialectical tensions. One is the tension between the divine plan and the disorderly character of actual historical events, or, to translate this opposition into specifically biblical terms, between the divine promise and its ostensible failure to be fulfilled; the other is the tension between God's will, His providential guidance, and human freedom, the refractory nature of man.[5]

The narratives form a spectrum between "disorder and design". The former characterizes books such as Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings; the latter characterizes, for example, Esther, while books such as Genesis are placed somewhere between these extremes.[6]

The paradox in Sternberg and Alter's reasoning is that they claim that the literary character of the texts resists an ideological and systematic interpretation and yet is compatible with the ideology of the texts. Even though the biblical authors' purpose was to edify their audience, their world view and their pedagogical project prevented them from yielding to the kind of simplification that is typical of didactic texts.

A consequence of this reasoning must be that all interpretation of the biblical texts demands literary competence. Lyle Eslinger claims that historical-critical scholars lack this competence, and points out that distinguishing the perspectives and voices heard in these texts is particularly problematic:[7]

> In fact, however, historical-critical analyses have run roughshod over the hierarchical narrative ontology. The complex narrative layering of varying views of characters, the comments of narrators, and the overarching structural and thematic implications of the implied author have all been lumped together in a literary-historical hypothesis that sees the narrative literature as a flat, two-dimensional mass of opinions from the long line of actual authors who have contributed to these stories. The third dimension, that of the hierarchical narrative ontology, is entirely overlooked in conventional historical-critical treatments. And aspects of the narrative that are, without presupposing anything beyond the generic conventions of narrative literature, part of the third dimension – the narrative's vertical ontology – have been mistaken for the products of compositional production through time.[8]

The vital point in this and similar accounts is that historical-critical scholars have performed a historical or ideological interpretation at the expense of the literary and narrative character of the texts. However, this study has established that scholars who claim to have a literary starting point often can be criticized in the same way, since they tend to harmonize the texts – searching them for a coherence that is not there – and hence to disregard their literary form.

A Polyphonic Book

Several scholars who study the book of Judges synchronically claim that the text contains different voices. For example, J. H. P. Wessels says that scholars "within a typical modernist paradigm" have tried to achieve coherence in the book of Judges via chronological or logical explanations. He suggests instead a deconstructive study that illuminates the polyphonic character of the text.[9]

Jobling tries, in a structuralistic analysis of Judges 12 – 1 Samuel 12, to describe the character of the text.[10] He assumes that Genesis – 2 Kings is a "a single sequential narrative", and presents an isotopic, a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic analysis.[11] He refers to D. J. McCarthy who has suggested, in a study of 1 Samuel 8–12, that the different opinions about the monarchy that can be found in these chapters are explained by the ambivalence of the redactors regarding this issue, and not by the amalgamation of different sources. Jobling applies this reasoning to the text under consideration and claims that the fundamental issue therein is: "What form

of government is appropriate for Israel?"[12] Hence he does not search for pro- or anti-monarchical sources,[13] but proposes that the text displays two different perspectives.[14]

According to this reasoning, the textual unit has been composed in such a way that it handles, and depicts in a narrative form, a difficult ideological issue that could be solved only by a compromise.

Disposition of the Chapter

A major conclusion of this study is that a significant explanation for the synchronists' having produced interpretations that are "disturbing" is that they have not sufficiently considered the narrative form of the texts. The problem is quite simply that the book of Judges is not a single coherent text. Thus, the reader does not perceive *one* text, *one* voice or *one* ideology in the book, but several texts, voices and at least partly contrasting perspectives. This can be explained in two ways that may be seen as complementary. According to the first explanation, the material has been reworked several times and therefore reflects different voices that can be related to different segments of the text. According to the second explanation, the book is composed of independent narratives and thus contains different voices.

However, some synchronic scholars, such as Polzin and Klein, claim that the larger text expresses different perspectives even though they apprehend the book or the DH as a single text. This opinion seems to be compatible with the observation that there are certain tensions in and among the texts. These scholars believe, however, that the tensions can be systematized, even though they do not refer, as Jobling does, to the process of redaction. Although they do not harmonize the book, they still treat it as a single text.

The task in this chapter, therefore, is to discuss whether the book can nevertheless be seen as a meaningful and coherent unit, and whether problems and tensions in the texts can be explained as shifts of point of view, or if there are better ways to describe the polyphonic character of the book.

First, two texts will be presented: the introduction (1:1–3:6) and the story about Deborah (4–5).[15] The former is relevant in this regard since it is often treated as an almost unreadable conglomerate and since it interprets the whole period. The latter is perhaps the most well composed story in the book. In order to capture the reader's attention, the storyteller portions out the information and shifts the point of view. After this presentation, Polzin's and Klein's analyses of these sections will be discussed. The focus will be on the former's hypothesis about the dialogic character of the text and the latter's hypothesis about its ironic structure.

The Introduction to the Book of Judges

The quite extensive introduction to the book seems to be an amalgamation. Scholars commonly claim that the Deuteronomistic version began in 2:6, a verse that relates to, and continues, the book of Joshua. The section 1:1–36 was then inserted for inscrutable reasons. This chapter is often said to describe a different version of the conquest from that recounted in the book of Joshua. According to Soggin, the section 2:1–5 is an addition from "the latest stratum of Deuteronomy, DtrN".[16]

The first words of the book – "[after] the death of Joshua" – connect to the large "story", and signal both continuity with, and discontinuity from, the foregoing book.[17] It can be understood as a heading to either the chapter or the book. The former alternative is problematic since the events that are recounted in this chapter are otherwise placed in the time of Joshua. According to the latter alternative, the chapter serves as an exposition. Following this verse is a dialogue between the people and Yahweh in which the people ask who – that is, which tribe – will "go up first" and lead the people in the war. This question recurs several times in the book.[18] Then, in an almost symmetrical account, the victories of Judah and Simeon and the difficulties of the northern tribes are reported. This section has a clear pattern of victory followed by agreement and assimilation. The report is interrupted occasionally by comments from the narrator, aetiologies, and anecdotes or mini-stories.

Even though the narrator intrudes – for example, to explain that the victories are from God – he does not evaluate this pattern in the text. Hence, it is not until the angel's speech in 2:1–4 that the reader understands that the recounted events are a deviation from the norm:[19]

> I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you. For your part, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. See what you have done! So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you.

The function of the first chapter is thus changed into an explanation of the events that are depicted in the rest of the book.

Verse 2:6 then follows without a break in the syntactic flow: "When Joshua dismissed the people, the Israelites all went to their own inheritances to take possession of the land."[20] Hence, it seems as if it is the assembly at Bochim (2:1–5) that Joshua closes, rather than the one in Shechem (Joshua 24).[21] In 2:6–3:6 the perspective is panoramic and the author speaks about and interprets the whole period of the judges from the death of Joshua. However, the suggested interpretations and explanations are not unproblematic, and in some cases are even contradictory. For example, what is the relation between the failed occupation of the land and Israel's breaking of the covenant? Does their occupation of the land fail

because they have broken the covenant, or vice versa? Why has God not fulfilled his promise and expelled the inhabitants of the land? If the reason is the sin of Israel, then why did Joshua and his generation not drive them out? Nor do the peoples who are left have an obvious function. Are they a punishment, a test, a pedagogical instrument – or all these things at the same time?

Besides the explanations that refer to the sin of the people, there are also explanations of another kind, such as 1:19 ("The LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron.") or 3:1ff. The latter text explains that God did not drive out these peoples because God did not want the Israelites to forget how to make war.[22]

These chapters also contain an interpretation of the book that explains the circular character of the period.[23] However, several scholars claim that it is in fact a spiral, and that the book describes an accelerating problem that eventually leads to the anarchy of the final stories. Some, such as Polzin and Webb, point out that the pattern does not present a mechanistic relationship between the fortunes of the people, the covenant and the law. Although this seems to be right so far as the deliverances are explained as a result of God's mercy, the precarious situation of the people is nevertheless caused by their apostasy.

Webb, Amit and O'Connell

Eslinger points out, in the passage quoted above, that a problem for the interpreter of these texts is to identify the different voices that they contain. Before I present the second text and analyse the strategies of Polzin and Klein, I shall give a brief account of how Webb, Amit and O'Connell handle this problematic text and the issue raised by Eslinger.

The scholars under consideration treat the introduction as a consistent unit with a meaningful structure and an important function in the book.[24] It is an exposition that introduces important characters, motifs and themes.[25] It also supplies different patterns and paradigms that are keys to the interpretation of the individual stories.[26] In their discussions about finding the voice of the "author", they refer to symmetrical structures, analogies and shifting points of view. Here, I shall present and discuss some examples of their argumentation.

Both O'Connell and Webb refer to the symmetrical structure in their analyses of 1:1–2:5, but I shall restrict myself to the former's suggestion. O'Connell divides the chapter into three parts around occurrences of the verb "go up", and claims that it has two parallel sections.[27] This structure is significant since it puts the focus on the verse about Benjamin ("But the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem among the Benjaminites to this day.") by placing it between the two blocks.[28] According to O'Connell, this structure establishes the fact that the words of judgement in 2:1–4 are directed first and foremost to this tribe, and even implies that God was

not with them.[29] The contrast with the victories of Judah and Joseph reinforces the failure of Benjamin. O'Connell's point is, of course, that the author has presented his criticism of Saul and his tribe already in the introduction.[30]

Amit refers to analogies and makes a comparison with the book of Joshua, and notes that the role of Judah, for example, is different in Judges 1.[31] Moreover, it is only the failures of this tribe that are explained (1:19). This foregrounding is said to have two reasons: firstly, it compensates for the insignificant role that the tribe has in the rest of the book; and secondly, it explains and provides motives for its role in the monarchy.[32] None of the three scholars moralizes about the alliance between Judah and Simeon. Webb even states that Judah did not show "any lack of enthusiasm for the task."[33] Amit claims that one reason for the failure of the northern tribes was that they did not cooperate in the same way.[34] They also agree, on the other hand, that the occupation of Bethel (1:22–26) deviates from the norm:

> The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel; and the LORD was with them. The house of Joseph sent out spies to Bethel (the name of the city was formerly Luz). When the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you." So he showed them the way into the city; and they put the city to the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. So the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city, and named it Luz; that is its name to this day.

This story is said to exemplify the behaviour that is condemned in 2:1–4. Even though O'Connell thinks that it serves as a positive contrast to Benjamin (1:21), he also claims that the texts in the first chapter receive a new meaning retrospectively, and that 2:1–4 establishes the judgement that the tactic of the house of Joseph was erroneous.[35] In a similar way, the explanation in 1:19 is invalidated by the fact that, in Chapter 4, Barak defeats Sisera even though the latter has 900 chariots of iron. Webb refers to different allusions when he claims that the occupation of Bethel is criticized in the text. A comparison with the occupation of Bezek shows that the focus in 1:22ff. is on tactics rather than the power of God. A comparision with the rebuilding and naming of Bethel shows that the rebuilding of Luz is an ironic parallel and a comparison with the occupation of Jericho reveals that this traitor is of a different kind from Rahab.

Webb believes that the speech of God in 2:1–4 anticipates the speech in 2:20–22. In the time between the two speeches, Israel has fallen into idolatry. There is, hence, a logical connection that explains the analepsis to the time of Joshua.[36] The introduction depicts three periods: the time of Joshua, the time of the elders, and the time of the judges.[37] Webb also points out that there is a shift in point of view, and that the first chapter recounts the point of view of the people and focuses on political and military issues, while Chapters 2–3 describe God's point of view and focus on religious matters.[38] The theme of the whole section is then the question of why God did not drive out the inhabitants of the land, and God's reply in which he explains that he has not fulfilled his promise because of Israel's apostasy.[39]

Some Critical Reflections

These examples imply that the scholars under consideration try to read these chapters as coherent from both literary and logical perspectives.[40] Hence, they claim that there is a "voice" in the text that can be detected through the text's structure, through analogies, and by an analysis of the different points of view. However, there are two obvious difficulties with these suggestions. The first is that their interpretations seem rather far-fetched. The second is that the meaning that they propose is not inherent in the texts (or narratives) themselves, but must be imported from other texts. These problems relate in their turn to what I consider to be a fundamental theoretical mistake of these scholars. They believe that any collection of linguistic signs can be understood as a coherent literary text if it is possible to produce a hypothesis about any kind of meaningful organization whatsoever in it. However, the "organization" or "system" that they suggest will often contrast with the "organization" or "system" of the text that a conventional literary reading produces. It could therefore be claimed that their analyses are not literary at all, since such an analysis implies taking "the literary point of view".

This applies to O'Connell's argument that the material has been given a new function within a rhetorical message that is conveyed by motifs and schemas within the larger text. The key to a correct interpretation is thus to identify structures such as the one in 1:1–2:5, which stresses the role of Benjamin, and gives 1:21 a significance that does not correspond at all to its content and placement. It also applies to their references to different allusions, such as O'Connell's hypothesis about a retrospective reinterpretation. This would mean that the authority of the voice of the narrator in 1:19 is annulled by that of the voice in Chapter 4. A similar hierarchy between different statements of the narrator is suggested by Gunn and Fewell, who claim that 1:19 represents a human point of view, since the verse contrasts the promise in 1:2:

> The question arises, then: is it the narrator's view that Judah was 'unable' to take the low country because of the iron chariots? Given the space the narrator has devoted to those reports of divine assurance and to the extraordinary story of Jericho's capture, for example, that seems doubtful. More likely the narrator presents here Judah's point of view. In that case, Judah's failure, perhaps a paradigm for understanding the other failures, is a failure of vision.…Thus those strategically placed chariots of iron represent in this chapter a vision of reality opposing that conjured by YHWH's words.[41]

This reasoning, in which features in the text that violate the interpreter's understanding of consistency and coherence are dismissed through references to irony or internal point of view, seems very difficult to defend.[42]

Other examples in which these scholars base their interpretations on allusions are Amit's proposition that a reader should compare the different versions and realize that every difference is significant, and Webb's interpretation of the Bethel

episode. The common denominator in these examples is the view that the meaning cannot be found in the individual texts, but is communicated by the author through implicit commentaries in the larger text. Hence, there is once again a conflict between the search for a coherent message in the larger text and the meaning of the individual narratives.

Polzin and Klein choose to handle the problems in the introduction by applying a different strategy, but before discussing this I shall present yet another text.

The Story about Deborah, Barak and Jael

Introduction, 4:1–5

> The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoiim. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years. At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.

It is often assumed that the introduction ends with v. 3, since vv. 1–3 are seen as an addition by the redactor. However, I have chosen to include v. 4–5 in the prologue. The section is then a repetition of the pattern that was presented in the introduction to the book. It presents a situation of broken equilibrium and introduces the antagonist and protagonist of the story, although the story itself has not yet begun to unfold.[43] There is an ironic contrast in the descriptions of the antagonist and the protagonist. On the one hand, there is an army that has been able to oppress the Israelites for 20 years because of its superior military power, and on the other hand there is a tableau with a lonely woman under a palm.[44] Several scholars believe that the gender and role of this judge surprise the reader and hence call for an explanation.[45] I am not sure about this, since it is difficult to evaluate the effect created by the fact that the judge is a woman.[46] However, it is obvious that the tension between male and female is an important theme in the narrative. Scholars also comment on the fact that the text departs from the paradigm in not stating that God "raised up" a deliverer. Amit claims that this signals that the focus is on the identity of the deliverer.[47] Webb, on the other hand, says that a feature is excluded from the introduction when it is an element in the narrative.[48]

Deborah and Barak, 4:6–10

> She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your

> hand.'" Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him.

The relationship between the antagonist Jabin and his commander Sisera has a parallel in the relationship between Deborah and Barak.[49] The words of Deborah set the narrative in motion. However, since Barak does not accept his assignment unconditionally, a complication that creates suspense is introduced immediately. The motif of the hero who hesitates is common in the OT and can even be understood as a set pattern in scenes of appointment.[50] The narrator seldom condemns this reaction although it implies a certain doubt about the value of God's promises and support.[51] However, Deborah's reply shows that Barak's reaction will receive an exact retribution.[52] His demand for support from a woman will eventually lead to a situation in which the honour is taken away from him and given to a woman.[53] The words of Deborah function both as a forewarning and as a mystification.

In these narratives, it is often the complications – rather than the national conflict – that create suspense, and this is hence a story that recounts how Barak loses his honour to a woman rather than a story about the Israelites' victory over the Canaanites. However, the latter conflict is commonly believed to be the one that the redactor uses in his project, the former being "included in the price".

Some scholars assume that the reader is led to believe that the mysterious woman who will kill Sisera is Deborah.[54] For example, Amit argues that important effects and meanings ensue from the relationship between the hypotheses that the reader continually makes and the outcome of the story.[55] However, although the text highlights Deborah's going with Barak, the question is whether the reader, on encountering a mystery, does not rather assume that the enigma will be solved later in the story.

A Delayed Exposition, 4:11–13

> Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, that is, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had encamped as far away as Elon-bezaanannim, which is near Kedesh. When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the troops who were with him, from Harosheth-ha-goiim to the Wadi Kishon.

In these verses, three actors are introduced who are either on their way to, or already present at, the place where the decisive events will occur. Barak and Deborah come from one direction with 10 000 men, and Sisera comes from another direction with his army and 900 chariots of iron. The third actor is – surprisingly – a lonely Kenite and his tent. This information, which interrupts the flow of the narrative, is an excellent example of how the storyteller disperses the information

throughout the story. The note functions as a delay, and reinforces the sense of mystery and enigma. The reader realizes that it is in the interplay between these three actors that the matter will be settled and the riddle solved.

The Battle, 4:14–16

> Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day on which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. The LORD is indeed going out before you." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him. And the LORD threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his army into a panic before Barak; Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot, while Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-ha-goiim. All the army of Sisera fell by the sword; no one was left.

The battle is described in a summary fashion and can be viewed as an anti-climax. However, in spite of the fact that the account accords with the expected pattern, in which the narrator states that the victory comes from God and that the defeat of the enemy is total, there is also a feature that creates suspense: while Barak pursues the army, Sisera escapes on foot.

The synchronic scholars comment on the fact that Deborah's speech in this section seems to contradict her earlier speech. For example, O'Connell says that the reader realizes that "Sisera" is used as a metonymy but that Barak misunderstands these words, which would explain why he nevertheless pursues Sisera.[56] But the text has an external point of view and does not motivate the actions of the characters.

Sisera and Jael, 4:17–21

> Now Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite. Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; have no fear." So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink; for I am thirsty." So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. He said to her, "Stand at the entrance of the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'" But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground – he was lying fast asleep from weariness – and he died.

It is easy to compare this scene with the scene in which Ehud murders Eglon. The similarity is reinforced by the fact that the same word is used in the Hebrew text for the two "stabbings". However, in the story about Ehud, the lonesome hero is out on the road searching for the enemy. He enters the enemy's innermost room and kills him there. In this story, it is the enemy who is on the road and who then enters the innermost room of the heroine, who kills him there. As in the story about Ehud, the scene is characterized, through its dialogues and the many details,

by a slow narrative pace. The point of view is external, and even though motives are provided in v. 17 for the actions of Sisera, Jael's motives are mysterious and the murder can hence be seen as surprising. However, the forewarnings that have been presented earlier in the story have prepared the reader for these events. In the end, the mighty enemy is, as in the story about Ehud, an easy target because of his stupidity and weakness.

The synchronists agree that Jael fulfils her role in the story – a role that has been prepared by the words of Deborah (4:9) that introduce the motif – and that she acts in accordance with the norm of the narrative. However, Klein has a different opinion and claims that Jael's act is morally wrong and that it deviates from the norm.[57]

The Discovery, 4:22

> Then, as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he went into her tent; and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

In this verse, the story is brought to a conclusion. As in the story about Ehud, the author uses *hinnēh*-clauses to signal a shift to an internal point of view.[58] O'Connell points out that the phrase is used in two different ways. It illuminates first a mistake or misunderstanding that a person makes, and then how the same person realizes this mistake.[59] An important difference in relation to the story about Ehud is, of course, that in this story it is the Israelite hero, Barak, who is the target for the irony.

Resolution, 4:23–24

> So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites. Then the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed King Jabin of Canaan.

The element in the resolution that says that the land had rest is placed after the hymn in Chapter 5, which in this way is integrated into the story.

A Contrasting or Dialogical Perspective: Klein and Polzin

Polzin and Klein believe that the book of Judges is composed in a meaningful way, but that it displays different perspectives. However, they differ on a crucial point: Klein claims that the perspectives are hierarchically related, so that there is an ironic opposition between them, whereas Polzin claims that the text is dialogic. According to the former view, the task of the reader is to identify the "right" voice – that is, the voice that is associated with the norm in the book – and hence to understand the irony that befalls the other perspectives. Polzin, on the other hand, refers to Bakhtin and assumes that there is no "final" perspective in the work from which the other voices can be evaluated. The reader perceives a continuous dialogue within and among the voices of the book instead.

Polzin

Polzin refers to Russian formalists, and analyses the structure of the text according to shifts in point of view, on psychological, spatio-temporal and phraseological levels. The latter in particular are said to imply shifts of perspective on an ideological level. These in turn are decribed by Polzin using Bakhtin's theory about dialogicity in the poetics of Dostoevsky. He also refers to Gadamer's hermeneutic and claims that the DH displays the hermenutical dilemma concerning the application of the law in the history of Israel.

The dialogue in the book of Judges is mainly between (and within) the voice of the narrator (reporting speech) and the voice of God (reported speech), and is first and foremost about the relationship between the word of God and the history of Israel. In the DH, different positions regarding this issue are considered and rejected in a continuous search for a tenable understanding.[60]

Polzin's Analysis of the Introduction (1:1–3:6)

Polzin claims that the psychological point of view in 1:1–2:5 is external and that the narrator is synchronic. The effect is that readers "experience the same shifts in thoughts and emotions that the Israelites are described as experiencing as they live out the exploits described in 1:1–2:5",[61] and "accompany the Israelites as they descend from high hopes to final discouragement and a realization of further troubles."[62]

In 2:6–3:6, the psychological perspective is "not so clear-cut." However, the narrator becomes an "omniscient panchronic observer",[63] who is able to penetrate the consciousness of all characters – even God. There is also a temporal shift that breaks the chronological sequence when the story goes back to the time of Joshua, and the narrator presents a "panoramic temporal overview of the entire period covered by the Book of Judges."[64] The time-line that was linear in 1:1–2:5 now becomes circular. The narrator explains through this change of perspective why Israel fails.

On a phraseological level, the text shifts between "reported and reporting speech". God speaks in 2:1–5 and 2:20–22. The first speech explains the narrator's "reporting speech" about the partial failure of Israel. However, this speech is not commented on, or interpreted by, the narrator. The second speech of God is integrated into the narrative and is "fundamentally interpreted and semantically extended by the narrator's reporting words in 2:23."[65]

> 2:20 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their ancestors, and have not obeyed my voice, 2:21 I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died." 2:22 In order to test Israel, whether or not they would take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their ancestors did, 2:23 the LORD had left those nations, not driving them out at once, and had not handed them over to Joshua.

The point is that "whereas in 1:1–2:5 the reporting speech of the narrative is interpreted by the reported speech of God, in 2:6–3:6 the reported speech of God is interpreted by the reporting speech of the narrator. And the two sections are not entirely in agreement in the interpretations they give."[66] The effect of this is that 2:1–5 displays a mechanistic view of God's acts and the relationship between the law and history, a view that is modified in 2:6–3:6 through the application of God's speech to the generation of Joshua: "and had not handed them over to Joshua."[67] This is anticipated in 1:1–2:5 because the anecdotes in this section do not display a retributive pattern.[68]

The cyclical schema that is presented is not "disobedience/repentance" but "punishment/mercy".[69] The book depicts the continuous disobedience of the people of Israel, who never repent. Hence, the question is: "[How] long will this cycle of punishment/mercy continue before the very nation itself will be blotted out?"[70] The hermeneutical dilemma found in Deuteronomy and Joshua is hereby deepened.[71]

The ideology that assumes that there is an almost mechanistic relationship between the law and history is hence challenged in three ways in the text under consideration: How is the failure of Joshua to be explained? Why is Israel delivered over and over again in spite of the people's disobedience? and Why do the individual narratives not display this retributive pattern? Because of these issues, the narrator is compelled to modify the view that he himself expresses in the earlier books, and that is expressed in the voice of God.

Polzin's Analysis of the Story about Deborah

The story about Deborah is characterized by uncertainty, such that not even the Israelite heroes or the reader knows the ways of God.[72] This is reinforced by the shift in temporal perspective between retrospection and synchrony, not least in the roles of the different characters.[73]

The words of the narrator provide an unexpected "twist" to the reported words of the characters – including even God – as when, for example, Deborah and God say that Sisera is given into the hands of Barak. When Barak finally gets his hands on Sisera, his enemy is already dead. In a similar way, Deborah, Barak and the reader are misled into believing that the mysterious woman is Deborah[74] – hence Polzin's claim: "The relation between reported and reporting speech is so consistently nonconcurrent that one must see equivocation and obfuscation as major themes of the story."[75] The phraseological composition thus "suggest[s] the inability of man, even God's elect, fully to understand either God's words or his own, or to predict his own destiny."[76] Polzin makes the following conclusion:

> In other words, this greatly intensified alternation in the Book of Judges between panchronic narration, which appears necessary at this point in the history to preserve some semblance of stability as well as to continue the reader's confidence in the narrator, and synchronic narration, which tends to destroy one's

> sense of the stability of God's dealings with Israel, depends upon the present object of description, that is, the particularly chaotic period of Israel's history between Joshua's death and the establishment of kingship. The distanced and estranged viewpoint of the body of the stories about the judges, as opposed to the evaluative utterances that form their framework, puts the reader into the very experiencing of chaos and ambiguity that is portrayed as the inner experience of Israel during this period.[77]

The Book of Judges – A Dialogic Text

Polzin tries to read and interpret the DH as if it were a meaningful literary text, and to find its ideological perspective – that is, its "implied author", who is a construct, the abstract voice in and behind all the other voices in the work. He proposes that the ideology that such a study reveals differs from the deuteronomic theology that is commonly believed to characterize these books. Instead of a simple mechanistic relationship between the law and history, the work expresses a continuous search for a tenable hermeneutic and ideology.

Although this is an ingenious solution to the difficulties of the work, I shall discuss some problems with the designation of the text as dialogic, and consider whether there are other ways to describe it. Prince gives the following description of a dialogic narrative:

> A narrative characterized by the interaction of several voices, consciousnesses, or world views, none of which unifies or is superior to (has more authority than) the others…the narrator's views, judgements, and even knowledge do not constitute the ultimate authority with respect to the world represented but only one contribution among several, a contribution that is in dialogue with and frequently less significant and perceptive than that of (some of) the characters.[78]

Polzin believes that the DH is a dialogic text and that it hence only seems to be monologic. These concepts are taken from Bakhtin and his description of the poetics of Dostoevsky, whose novels, according to Bakhtin, is not characterized by a plot to the same extent that the epic is.[79] This means, among other things, that characters cannot be reduced to functions in an intrigue but that they are persons, subjects.[80] These novels are hence not stories in which every feature relates to a plot, with a norm according to which every event or character can be evaluated. Instead, they represent an ongoing and open dialogue. A characteristic trait is extensive speeches, which are presented without comment. There is no "last word" that interprets all the different words.

According to a common view, the DH was composed during the exile and the purpose of the redactor was to recount the history in such a way that it explained this event. However, as I have already noted, scholars such as von Rad and Wolff have criticized Noth, claiming that the work is not so one-sidedly negative as he assumed. They believe that the exile was not the final word and that the redactor composed a history without a fixed ending. This would then explain why the work intimates that there is a future after the catastrophe. Polzin could hence be

right when he describes the DH as a text in which an ongoing dialogue is recounted concerning the relationship between the law and the fate of the people. However, a prerequisite is that the whole work should be seen as the relevant text. The individual narratives on the other hand, such as the stories about Ehud or Deborah, are traditional narratives with a single plot and a norm. It is thus obvious that Eglon and his servants misunderstand the situation, or that it is Jael who fulfils the prediction in 4:9. This is an important observation, since Polzin maintains that he performs a Bakhtian analysis. However, Bakhtin claims that there is no real polyphony in Shakespeare, for example. Polyphony can only be found if we read the plays as a single work, not in the individual plays.[81] This seems to be true for the DH also. The dialogue is hence found only in the "larger text", and if there is polyphony, then it differs from that in Dostoevsky. A related issue is that it seems as if Polzin presumes that the same voices can be found in all the different texts – that is, the same narrator, the same God and the same implied author.

In the novels of Dostoevsky, the storyteller withdraws and, as it were, "gives the floor" to the intradiegetic characters. Regarding Shakespeare, Bakhtin states: "In essence each play contains only one fully valid voice, the voice of the hero, while polyphony presumes a plurality of fully valid voices within the limits of a single work – for only then may polyphonic principles be applied to the construction of the whole."[82] A necessary prerequisite for a dialogic text is hence that there be no perspective or voice that dominates – that is, no implied author. However, in Polzin's analyses it is not the intradiegetic characters who speak as subjects and represent different perspectives, but rather the ideological dialogue is found in and between the voice of the narrator and the voice of God.[83] It would therefore be possible to object that a reader in fact understands both the words of the narrator and the words of God as authorized speech that expresses the norm – that is, the voice of the implied or real author. The problem could be formulated as the questions: Does a reader really perceive the voice of God and the voice of the narrator as two different and "opaque" voices? Do the authors of the OT use the device of an unreliable narrator?

An author can leave the floor to a character in the narrative for several different reasons. Hence, it is not always used to signal an internal or "opaque" perspective. The character can quite simply be used as a witness or informant, and his or her speech is then transparent – and thus authorized – and there is no tension in relation to the voice of the author. The character "lends", so to speak, his or her voice to the author, who uses it for artistic or rhetorical purposes. The question is now whether we perceive the voice of God as authorized or as opaque speech. In the former case, the author uses both the voice of God and the narrator in the prologue, for example, to interpret and comment on the events recounted in the book. The tension between these voices is then illusory. If, on the other hand, God's words are opaque speech, then this is not totally identical with the norm – that is, the ideology – of the text.

According to Polzin, the text signals that the speech of God is opaque, since it is not completely consistent and since it is not fully compatible with the reporting speech of the narrator. He argues that God's words in 2:1–4, for example, are modified in 2:23 by the narrator, who points out that the generation of Joshua also was unable to drive out these peoples, and by the stories that do not describe a retributive chain of events. But does not Polzin exaggerate the differences between the words of God and the words of the narrator, and suggest a function that they in fact do not have? Are the words of God really opaque and relativized by the stories and the voice of the narrator? Would it not be easier to claim that the different voices are synthesized? That would mean that the norm – that is, the implied author – is not a voice beside these two voices, but a voice that speaks in them.[84] Does not Polzin misjudge the weight of the anecdotes about Adoni-Bezek or the deserter in Bethel when he argues that they modify the speech of God in 2:1–4? Would it not be easier to say that the Judahites' exception from the rule of *herem*, when they did not execute Adoni-Bezek at once, does not relate to 2:1–4 at all?

Another problem with Polzin's hypothesis is that he claims that the voice of the narrator is not identical with the voice of the implied author. This implies that the narrator is not totally reliable. Gunn is explicit regarding the latter issue, claiming that the biblical narrator is not so reliable as is commonly assumed, and that a close reading reveals inconsistencies that imply that the narrator is in fact unreliable.[85] Gunn criticizes Sternberg's thesis about a "foolproof composition" – but are they not both making the same mistake? Both scholars seem to assume that there is a single narrator in the OT and that the independent narratives can be treated as a single unit. A contradiction between two separate stories could hence, at least according to Gunn, be understood as an indication that the narrator is unreliable. A basic assumption in Sternberg's reasoning is that a compatibility exists between the ideology and the poetics that demands that the *author* completely controls his material. An omniscient and reliable *narrator*, on the other hand, is a device. The reader gradually realizes that the voice is opaque and that it deviates from the norm. It is, of course, possible to compose a text that lacks a coherent ideology or that contains contradictions without using this device, especially if the text under consideration contains independent texts.[86] An unreliable narrator is thus something completely different from the kind of unreliability that appears when an alert reader is able to find mistakes and inconsistencies in the author's text.[87]

It is difficult to imagine how the norm would be communicated if the biblical authors really used this device. It is probably easier to claim that the voice of God and the narrator are not voices beside the implied author's but are instead authorized speech. The tensions and ambiguities that these voices express can hence be attributed to the "author", either because the author has not been able to find an

ideology that contains all the elements that constitute the history, or because the text does in fact reflect the voices of several authors or redactors.

In his analyses of individual stories such as Ehud orDeborah, Polzin claims that the words of God and human beings have a mysterious and enigmatic character that leads to misunderstanding so that their real meaning is understood only when it is too late. However, it is not obvious that this is a device used to display a hermeneutic problem. It could instead be claimed that the precarious situation of humankind is a prerequisite for narratives in general. The tensions that Polzin has observed would hence be related to the redactor's choice to recount the history of his people through a series of independent narratives about individuals. It is difficult to imagine how a mechanistic narrative on this level would be composed. However, even if possibility exists, it is obvious that the narratives of the book of Judges are not of this didactic character. We must hence accept that the redactor claims that Israel is punished for their sins while the individual narratives function at the same time according to another logic.

Klein

Klein does not harmonize the different perspectives in the text in a synthesizing interpretation but claims that the book is marked by irony. Hence, her approach differs from Polzin's since she believes that there is a dominant perspective that coincides with the norm in the text.

In an appendix, she states that irony appears when there is an opposition between different perspectives.[88] An interesting feature in her description of different kinds of irony is "specific irony".[89] It is corrective and normative and can only be found in cultures with an established value-system.[90] This description explains her interpretation of the story about Ehud, for example, in which she assumes there are implicit values to which the author can allude. The reader who is familiar with these values realizes that the protagonist is a deceiver and that he deviates from the norm in the cultural context. However, there are two major difficulties with this argument. The first problem is the way that the irony is manifested in the text. Klein seems to presuppose that the norm is external in relation to the text and that the reader must understand this in order to avoid misreading. She also assumes that the norm is signalled in the text through subtle devices. For example, Klein believes that the author's evaluation of Ehud's acts is communicated via omissions, when it is not stated that the Lord raises Ehud or that the spirit comes over him.[91] And finally she assumes that the norm can be found in the larger text. The second problem is that if the norm cannot be found in the text, then Klein herself risks becoming a victim of irony. Authors can place themselves outside a value-system and direct irony against their readers. It is hence possible that the author in the story about Ehud surprises and shocks his readers by presenting a hero whose character and acts do not conform to their expectations, but who is God's elected instrument nevertheless. The purpose could be to make readers surrender or mo-

dify their limited assumptions. If Klein now claims that God cannot work this way or use this kind of instrument, then she and her theology or value-system will become targets of irony.[92]

Klein's Analysis of the Introduction (1:1–3:6)

Klein treats the whole section, including the story about Othniel, as an exposition. It supplies relevant information and presents, often in an allegoric way, important motifs, themes and keys to the interpretation of the rest of the book.

In her analysis of the first chapter, she states that 1:1 should be interpreted as paradigmatic since the verse depicts an ideal behaviour. However, Judah's co-operation with Simeon is a mistake, and it introduces the important theme that deliverance can be achieved either in God's way or in a human way:

> [But] Israel only partially heeds Yahweh's command: Judah immediately establishes a battle pact with his brother Simeon. Thus, from the outset, Israel exerts self-determination, evidencing automatic trust in *human* perception. These verses may be regarded as introducing the ironic configuration of the book – the implicit difference in perception between Yahweh and Israel and Israel's insistence on following human perception.[93]

This interpretation is said to be confirmed by the facts that the author does not mention Simeon when he reports about Judah's success, and that he describes the victories of Judah with a different expression from the one used for the victories of the alliance.[94] However, God does not punish this "sin" because "no *anti*-Yahwist practice is involved."[95] This is a common motif in the book. God tolerates the "insistence on self-determination" of characters such as Ehud, although their actions display the choice between obedience and disobedience.

The short stories in Chapter 1 are understood in a similar way. For instance, Klein claims that the anecdote about Adoni-Bezek contrasts a heathen, retributive view of God with the Hebrew view.[96] The story about Caleb and Achsah introduces the bride-motif – a model for the relation between Yahweh and his people – that recurs in the book. Moreover, Achsah is depicted as an ideal Israelite woman.[97] The two stories hence display the difference between the worship of stone idols and faith in Yahweh.[98]

Klein's interpretation deviates from the interpretations of the other synchronists on several issues. For instance, she states that all the tribes except Joseph are criticized, while the others claim that the tribe of Judah is the exception.[99] She also thinks that the story about the occupation of Bethel does not condemn the behaviour of the tribes of Joseph. The traitor's being allowed to rebuild the city does not indicate criticism since the city was built outside the borders of the land.[100]

In Chapter 2, the perspective becomes religious and the implicit irony becomes explicit. The theme is not the failed conquest, but Israel's disobedience to Yahweh.[101] However, it is a shift not only of focus, but also of focalizer so that the point of view becomes that of God.[102] In spite of this shift between a human and

a divine perspective, Klein says that the prologue mainly prepares for the ironies in the book.[103] She states that: "the divergence of human and divine perceptions in the exposition alerts the reader to the ironic opposition of two 'voices' of the book: Yahweh's knowing voice and humanity's ignorant one."[104]

I believe that both Klein's allegorical interpretation of Chapter 1 and her description of the shifting point of view can be questioned. The issue in the latter case is whether she really has been able to establish the existence of two contrasting perspectives. The proposition that there is a human and a divine perspective demands that these be identifiable as two voices in the text, unless she refers to her description of a "specific irony" and assumes that the reader should recognize the "right" ideology. An interesting example is her discussion regarding the final verses of Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3. She claims that 2:20–23 expresses a divine perspective, while 3:1–3 expresses a human one:[105]

> 2:22 In order to test Israel, whether or not they would take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their ancestors did, 2:23 the LORD had left those nations, not driving them out at once, and had not handed them over to Joshua. 3:1 Now these are the nations that the LORD left to test all those in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan 3:2 (it was only that successive generations of Israelites might know war, to teach those who had no experience of it before): 3:3 the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.

Although the same voice speaks in this section, Klein claims that there are two contrasting perspectives and that the first of these is authorized speech while the latter is opaque speech and thus should be regarded as ironic. The distinction between these perspectives is discerned not from intratextual data, but from previous knowledge of the "right" ideology. It hence seems as if the divine perspective coincides with a certain theology and morality. This is not, as Polzin suggests, a voice in dialogue with other voices, but a perspective that dominates in such a way that the book becomes ironic.

However, in fact, there does not seem to be any divine perspective in the text that reveals that the tribe of Judah are disobedient when they co-operate with Simeon, or that Ehud's murder deviates from the norm. Nor is there anything that signals that the voice of the narrator speaks in 2:23–24 from a divine perspective, but in 3:1–3 from a human one.

A similar criticism can be applied to Klein's analysis of the story about Deborah. Moreover, this reveals the weakness in the implicit devices to which she refers. It is not stated that Yahweh raises Deborah or that the spirit comes upon her, omissions that in the story about Ehud revealed that he was deceptive.[106] However, these criteria are no longer valid, since Deborah already is a judge, and since her prophecies show that she has the spirit. Deborah is hence acting in accordance with the norm, and it is rather Jael who is devious and who does not follow the ways of the Lord.[107] Ehud deceives with power, Jael with sexuality.[108] Moreover,

she breaks the code of hospitality.[109] There is also a contrast between Jael and Achsah since the verb "dropped" is used of both of them (see 1:14 and 4:21).[110]

> Like Ehud, Jael gains advantage for Israel by transgressing social and ethical codes, by acting in forbidden ways: she is seductive and she takes matters into her own hands. Finally, Jael not only acts directly, without the intermediary of a male figure, but she acts against the interest of her husband, who is friendly with Sisera. She values her people over her husband and acts upon her own values.[111]

The hymn in Chapter 5 in which Jael is described as the "most blessed" is interpreted in a similar way. In the first part of the hymn, the singer is Deborah who, as an ideal woman, praises Yahweh. In the latter part, the people sing, and it is their human perspective that is revealed when they praise Jael.[112] Klein's conclusion is: "Through irony, the Deborah narrative recalls a motif already suggested in the exposition (2.1–3): Israel's propensity to forget the *ethics* of its covenant with Yahweh in its eagerness for land, for *substance*, a motif that will gain in significance in the subsequent narratives."[113]

Klein hence suggests an interpretation that contradicts the other synchronists' understanding of the story. They claim, correctly, that Jael is the instrument of God who fulfils her role as the mysterious and unexpected heroine. According to Klein, these interpretations must be misreadings that can only be explained by the fact that these interpreters have not used the keys by which the events and the characters can be evaluated.

Conclusion

The difficulties with the introduction to the book of Judges, for example, can be solved in different ways. It is commonly assumed that the text reflects different voices and that nobody actually had full control over the text. The inconsistent character is thus explained genetically and is not considered to carry significance. A synchronic alternative is to claim that readers always assume that God and the narrator are reliable and that readers therefore always try to fill in gaps referring to, for instance, the structure of the text, analogies, etc.[114] Klein suggests that there is a dominant perspective that accords with the norm, and other perspectives that do not. Polzin's theory about the dialogic character of the text means that he can propose an interpretation that differs from a traditional historical-critical view and yet seems, from a superficial point of view, to avoid harmonizations.

I have already criticized scholars who try to harmonize the tensions in 1:1–3:6, for example, and to find a single coherent voice through references to the larger text. I have also criticized Klein's theory about implicit values to which the author can allude while assuming that readers will recognize them. According to this view, the hero can turn out to be the villain, and the voice of the narrator can turn out to express both a divine and a human perspective. This, of course, means that the narrator cannot be totally reliable. In spite of the fact that Polzin's theory about the dialogic character of the text seems to solve the problems, it too has

certain weaknesses. The observation that the so-called deuteronomic theology cannot accommodate and explain all the narratives or voices that can be found in the DH is very important. However, it is doubtful whether the text can be described as dialogic in a strict sense. An important feature in Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's poetics is that not every text is dialogic. The polyphony that Polzin claims to have found in the DH deviates in at least three ways from the polyphony that Bakhtin describes. The first of these is that Polzin regards the entire collection of individual texts as a single unit and assumes that the same voices recur throughout. The second is that the characters in the DH are of a different kind, and have different functions, from those in Dostoevsky's novels. The third is that Bakhtin speaks about Dostoevsky's poetics, while Polzin refers not to poetics but to the reader. The DH is then dialogic, since the implied author cannot "be synthesized into one authorial vision."[115] But is this not just another way to say that the text lacks consistency? That is, the polyphony is not a device that is used in the individual texts, but is created by the montage of several texts in a book or a work, and the tensions cannot be systematized.

The common problems in these suggestions are two. First, these scholars are making a theoretical mistake when they assume that a literary analysis automatically will turn the text into a literary unit. That is, they assume a system in the text that actually is not there. The second problem is narratological. They interpret the whole book or the DH as a single unit and do not realise that the stories are individual and autonomous units within the larger text.

Notes

[1] Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*.

[2] Bal, *Lethal Love*, *Murder and Difference* and *Death & Dissymmetry*.

[3] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 37f. He also says: "Instead of polarizing the reader's emotional and ethical response in line with some preconceived scheme of values, the Bible habitually generates ambivalence: consider Jacob, Aaron, Gideon, Saul, David, Solomon, Jehu.…Rather than aligning divine election and moral stature, it usually foregrounds their discordance. Rather than imposing an automatic or at least intelligible system of rewards and punishments, it undermines every rule of thumb, every simple proportion. Its commissions even radicalize the unsettling effect of its doctrinal omissions, by diverting notice, as it were, from the all-important focus of interest. The characterization is complex, the motives mixed, the plot riddled with gaps and enigmas, behaviour unpredictable, surprises omnipresent, the language packed and playful, the registration of reality far more governed by the real and the realistic than by the ideal. In short, where didacticism would insist on subordination, one encounters proliferation; where the discourse should move in a straight line, it weaves a net; where propositions should readily follow from premises, the premises themselves often remain ambiguous or double-edged and the propositions become multiple; where transparence is expected, we have to struggle with opacity on all levels, from word to world to thought. Far from falling under some thesis detachable from its illustrations, therefore, the narrative structure renders any such detachment an act of violence." (p. 38.)

[4] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 33. Exceptions are Jonah and Job.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 33f.

[7] Lyle Eslinger, "Narratorial Situations in the Bible" in Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier (eds.), *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text,* Bucknell Review 33/2 (Lewisburg, 1990).

[8] Ibid., p. 76.

[9] J. H. P. Wessels, "'Postmodern' Rhetoric and the Former Prophetic Literature" in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series 131 (Sheffield, 1996), pp. 182–194; "Persuasion in Judges 2:20–3.6: A Celebration of Differences" in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds.), *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference,* Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series 146 (Sheffield, 1997), pp. 120–136.

[10] Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*. I refer mainly to the Introduction (pp. 9–16) and the chapter "Deuteronomic Political Theory in Judges and 1 Samuel 1–12" (pp. 44–87). The text begins with the death of Joshua and ends with the speech of Samuel (1 Samuel 12).

[11] In the paradigmatic study, the texts are detached from their context and read in relation to parallel texts. This study is motivated by the fact that the texts are composed of independent units (ibid., p.14f). However, since they have been transformed into a unitary text in a process of narratization, he also performs a syntagmatic analysis in which he reads them in relation to the sequence found in the present text (ibid., p. 15). "An *isotopy*, as I use the term, is 'a semantic category defined broadly enough to subsume a large number of elements of meaning in the text, but precisely enough for useful organization of these elements'" (ibid., p. 14).

[12] Ibid., p. 45. However, it is important to note that in the section that McCarthy studies (1 Samuel 8–12), the polyphony is found within a "text". Jobling, on the other hand, studies a text that contains several independent stories, and the polyphony is found mainly between these texts.

[13] Jobling refers to Veijola, who has suggested a pro-monarchical (DtrG) and a later anti-monarchical (DtrN) version of the Deuteronomistic History.

[14] Source-oriented studies are criticized since "such treatments cannot avoid the problem of why the final form of the text brings together such apparently opposed points of view" (ibid., p. 45). Jobling later asks: "What, in other words, is the final form of the Deuteronomic History *doing*?" (ibid.) He states that the redactors and those who gave the canon its form took responsibility for the text and its perspectives. "If the Deuteronomic History does not present a clear 'point of view' towards monarchy, may this not be because its editors do not have one? I speculate that if I could ask them whether, in their view, the restoration of the monarchy would be a good thing, I would get a complicated rather than a simple answer! My analysis will, I believe, demonstrate that the deuteronomic treatment of monarchy is a classic example of talking around a contradiction." (Ibid., p. 46.)

[15] A poetic version of the story follows this narrative (Chapter 5). Bal has analysed the relationship between the two versions in *Murder and Difference*. Since my purpose is to discuss the hypotheses of Polzin and Klein, I shall confine myself to Chapter 4.

[16] Soggin, *Judges*, p. 4.

[17] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 81.

[18] For example, see Judges 10:18; 20:18.

[19] Similar speeches are recounted in 6:8–10 and 10:11–14.

[20] The Hebrew text has "...and Joshua sent the people…".

[21] This is, of course, a fundamental reason for the suggestion that an earlier version of the book began with 2:6.

[22] That this was a difficult problem can be seen by the many alternative explanations that are offered in the texts. According to Exodus 23:29ff. and Deuteronomy 7:22, the inhabitants were not driven out, because the Israelites were so few that the wild beasts would have become too numerous.

[23] Judges 2:13–19.

[24] Other "literary scholars" have suggested similar interpretations. They generally claim that it is the role of Judah that is highlighted – for example, see Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics" (p. 399ff.); Schneider, *Judges*, (p. 1ff.).

[25] Webb points out in *The Book of the Judges* that the anecdotes introduce characters and motifs that recur later in the book. The story about Caleb and Achsah includes the motif of a woman who outwits a man, and Othniel later returns as the first judge; while the promise of Caleb has a grotesque parallel in the vow of Jephthah, (p. 87). The short note about the Kenites in 1:16 has the similar function of preparing for the story in Chapter 4 (ibid., p. 89), and is at the same time associated with Numbers 10: 29–32.

[26] Amit believes that the theme of leadership is presented in Chapter 1, and the theme of signs in 2:6ff., where we are told about those who "have seen" and those who "have not seen". O'Connell in *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* thinks that 1:1–2:5 introduces the tribe-oriented scheme while 2:6–3:6 presents the religio-cultic one. "Whereas the individual stories in the body of Judges may have been originally designed to depict how heroes from various tribes, with the help of YHWH, overcame personal limitations to deliver Israel from enemy oppressors, they now serve a scheme that shows how each new cycle functions as a 'test' of Israel's loyalty to YHWH." (p. 77)

[27] O'Connell presents a detailed suggestion regarding the structure in *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 62.

[28] Ibid., p. 60f. He compares the situation of Benjamin here with the role of the tribe in the final story of the book, Chapter 19–21.

[29] Ibid., p. 61. In the introduction to the sections about both Judah and the northern tribes, it is explicitly stated that God is with them. Now, if the verse about Benjamin is a separate section, it is significant that the same words cannot be found here.

[30] Webb in *The Book of the Judges* believes that the structure contrasts Benjamin with Caleb, and that the tribe is evaluated negatively. This is reinforced by the explanation that Judah "*could* not" while Benjamin "*did* not". (p. 91)

[31] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 144f.

[32] Amit says: "These data again seem to leave room for the conjecture that the contrasting fashioning of this section, posing Judah and the other tribes against one another, is a preparatory stage towards understanding the character and destiny of the kingdom of Ephraim. The period of judges is thus portrayed, not only as a preparatory stage for understanding the preference for the Judahite monarchy, but also as basis for a proper perception of the days of the monarchy and the differing destinies of the northern kingdom and that of Judah." (Ibid., p. 150.)

[33] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 83.

[34] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 149.

[35] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 66f.

[36] Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 106.

[37] "This introduction is composed, as we have seen, of two major segments: 1.1–2.5, which deals with the way in which conquest gave way to co-existence as Israel 'came to terms' with the Canaanites, and 2.6–3.6, which deals with the apostasy which followed upon and was the consequence of this accommodation." (Ibid., p. 115)

[38] Ibid., p. 106.

[39] Ibid., p. 116ff.

[40] Webb is explicit about this issue in *The Book of the Judges* and states that the section is coherent (p. 121). This is explained by its narrative structure, which gives significance through configuration. He refers also to the symmetrical structure of the text, but his ultimate argument is the logical coherence: "There is a fundamental continuity of thoughts which links them as parts of a conceptual whole." (p. 118.)

[41] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 159.

[42] The verse 1:19 is an interesting example, since it seems to call for an explanation. One possibility, of course, is to claim either that the text actually reflects two different voices or that the author was content with this logic. Amit suggests that the purpose of the verse is to explain that the failure of Judah was not caused by their disobedience. O'Connell believes that although this is the voice of the narrator it is reinterpreted by the same voice in Chapter 4, and Gunn and Fewell think that this must be a "human" perspective.

[43] Amit argues in *The Book of Judges* in the same way (p. 206f.).

[44] Webb has taken the description "tableau" from D. F. Murray (*The Book of the Judges*, p. 134).

[45] For example, Webb, ibid., p. 134; Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 40f.

[46] Exum has a similar view in "The Centre Cannot Hold": "...many commentators consider her an unlikely choice for judge because she is a woman, though the text does not make gender an issue" (p. 412.).

[47] Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 204f.

[48] In this story and in the stories about Gideon, Jephthah and Samson, the election or appointment motif is recounted in the narrative, and hence is not mentioned in the introduction. (Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 175.)

[49] I support Webb's opinion that the story is readable and that it is not necessary to assume that having two antagonists implies that it is a conglomerate of different war-accounts. (Ibid., p. 247, n. 40.)

[50] The translators of the Septuagint pondered over the reasons for Barak's reaction. Boling quotes the "LXX: 'for I never know what day the Yahweh envoy will give me success'" (*Judges*, p. 96). See O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 108, n. 81. In the book of Judges, Gideon and Jephthah also demand security in order to take the risk involved in leading the liberation.

[51] Gros Louis speculatively claims in "The Book of Judges" that the reason is doubt about either the power of God or the truth of the words of Deborah, since she was a woman (p. 148).

[52] Webb believes that a motif of manipulation that occurs in the book is introduced here (*The Book of the Judges*, p. 137).

[53] O'Connell claims in *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* that there is an "escalated parallelism" between Barak and the tribes that are criticized in the hymn. The rhetorical effect is described as "entrapment" – that is, the reader first condemns the hesitation of Barak and then realizes that this hesitation characterizes the people as a whole (pp. 101f., 125). The theme is, as always, a criticism of the leadership in the north.

[54] For example: Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, p. 135; Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 207; Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, p. 164.

[55] Amit's reasoning is exemplified by her commentary on verse 12: "It is natural that the reader should pause to ask whether Deborah continued to go up to Mount Tabor with Barak and his army." (*The Book of Judges*, p. 208.)

[56] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 109.

[57] Exum expresses a similar opinion in "The Centre Cannot Hold", p. 416.

[58] "*Hinnēh* as Barak came" and "*hinnēh*, there was Sisera lying dead".

[59] O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, p. 127.

[60] Polzin gives in *Moses and the Deuteronomist* the following description of the problem, and of the theme and purpose of the book: "The evaluative gaze of the Deuteronomist, so intent upon the principles of divine justice in the Book of Deuteronomy, then measurably softened by the actual account of God's merciful giving of the land in the Book of Joshua, now confronts the awesome fact of God's continued compassion on Israel in spite of their continual weakness. The task that faces the Deuteronomist is to make some ideological sense of the chaotic period of the judges. Nothing in Israel's history is more remarkable than that they continued to exist in spite of their sustained apostasy in the days between Joshua's death and the establishment of kingship. The main task facing the author of Judges is to explain why the Deuteronomic History did not in fact end with this book. Each of the traditional stories selected and fashioned for this period explores and deepens the mystery of Israel's existence." (p. 161.) The book of Judges shows the limits of all ideologies and "[the] genius of the Deuteronomic storyteller lies in the depths of his self-reflection and in his ability to force his readers to reexamine the deadening effect of believing one finally understands." (p. 162.)

[61] Ibid., p. 149.

[62] Ibid., p. 150.

[63] Ibid. However, Polzin says that the section (2:6–3:6) shifts between an external and an internal point of view. It begins as external, then becomes internal, and finally 3:1, 2 and 4 are external while 3:3, 5 and 6 are internal.

[64] Ibid., p. 151.

[65] Ibid., p. 154.

[66] Ibid.

[67] The generation of Joshua is described as obedient, and hence should not have failed according to a mechanistic view. Polzin refers to Joshua 24:31 and Judges 2:7 (ibid., pp. 151, 155). The comment of the narrator in 2:23 answers the basic question concerning Joshua's failure, and transforms the narrative from cyclical to circular. Polzin claims that this application of God's word to Joshua is "totally unexpected, and profoundly influences the significance of 1:1–2:22 on the one hand, and everything that follows on the other." (Ibid., p. 152.)

[68] Ibid., p. 154.

[69] Ibid., p. 155.

[70] Ibid.

[71] The "critical traditionalism" is hence tested (ibid., p. 155f.).

[72] Ibid., p. 162f.

[73] For example, Polzin says: "Deborah, the one accustomed to sit and judge, is constrained to get up and go with Barak to Kedesh. Barak the go-getter walks a path of glory but does not attain it, pursues Sisera but only finds him too late. And Sisera the fallen never 'fell' at all, since he was lying asleep when Jael killed him."(Ibid., p. 163.)

[74] Ibid., p. 164.

[75] Ibid., p. 163.

[76] Ibid., p. 164.

[77] Ibid., p. 166.

[78] Prince, "dialogic narrative" in *A Dictionary of Narratology* (p. 19f.).

[79] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature Series 8 (Minneapolis, 1984) and "Epic and Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1994) pp. 3–40.

[80] I use "intrigue" in the sense that Ricoeur, Hayden H. White, Mink and Brooks have given to the concept, which is the third definition of "plot" that Prince presents in *A Dictionary of Narratology* (see Chapter 6, n. 5).

[81] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 34.

[82] Ibid. There are three criteria that – although they allow for Shakespeare's dramas to contain "embryonic rudiments, early buildings of polyphony" still make it impossible to speak about "a fully formed and deliberate polyphonic quality" in them. The first is that drama cannot contain multiple worlds since "it permits only one, and not several, systems of measurement." The second is then that there is always one valid voice. The third is that the voices in Shakespeare "are not points of view on the world to the degree they are in Dostoevsky". (Ibid., p. 33f.)

[83] This is valid, although Polzin says that the narratives describe the contrast between the panchronic perspective of the narrator and the limited knowledge of the characters.

[84] We have to query whether the notion that there exists no implied author in the novels of Dostoevsky is actually a premiss in the theory of Bakhtin. However, it is not totally clear how Polzin uses the concept.

[85] David M. Gunn, "Reading Right: Reliable and Omniscient Narrator, Omniscient God and Foolproof Composition in the Hebrew Bible" in Clines, Fowl, Porter (eds.), *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 87 (Sheffield, 1990), pp. 53–64.

[86] Satterthwaite comments on Gunn's opinion, saying that "there are points where the narrator appears to undermine the reliability of his own narratorial voice by allowing contradictions concerning matters of fact to stand in his text". ("'No King in Israel': Narrative Criticism and Judges 17–21", p. 79, n. 14.)

[87] For example, Gunn refers to different versions of the account of the killing of Goliath. An interesting question is whether it is the theological concept of "omniscience" that creates this problem, since both Gunn and Sternberg seems to define omniscience in a way that differs from a traditional narratological definition.

[88] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 195ff.

[89] Ibid., p. 199.

[90] "The ironic forms classified in the above discussion are regarded by Muecke as kinds of 'Specific Irony', differentiated from 'General Irony'. Specific irony is primarily corrective or normative; it prevails in the literature of a society 'whose values are more or less established'. In contradistinction, general irony places us 'all in the same hole and there is no way of getting out of it'….General irony is directed not against a particular circumstance, but against all of life at any time or place; it arises with the development of doubt as to the purpose of life. Only specific irony is relevant to biblical literature." (Ibid.)

[91] Ibid., p. 37.

[92] This becomes very disturbing in those cases where Klein seems to refer to a very conservative view, such as when she says that Jephthah's lack of knowledge is caused by the fact that he is fatherless, or that Jael is not loyal to her husband.

[93] Ibid., p. 23.

[94] Judah "took" while the alliance "destroyed", (ibid., p. 24).

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid., p. 25. "Adoni-bezek said, 'Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has paid me back.' They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there." (1:7.)

[97] Ibid., pp. 26, 34. This can be compared with the opinion of Gros Louis, who says in his synchronic interpretation in "The Book of Judges" that Achsah represents "opportunism and shrewdness", traits that characterize several of the judges (p. 145).

[98] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 27.

[99] Ibid., 27f.

[100] Ibid., p. 28.

[101] Ibid., p. 30.

[102] For the term "focalizer", see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, 1985); Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*); Marjet Berentsen, "The Teller and the Observer: Narration and Focalization in Narrative Texts", *Style* 18/2 (1984), pp. 140–158; Irene J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Amsterdam, 1987). The term is not accepted by Genette – see his *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca, New York, 1988).

[103] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 35.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., pp. 33, 36. Schneider points out that the Masoretic notes mark a new section in 3:1. (*Judges*, p. 35.) It is the same voice that speaks nevertheless.

[106] "Ehud, who proved himself deceptive, did not receive the spirit of Yahweh."(Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 41.)

[107] "Jael is not a judge, and there is no indication that she acts under the spirit of Yahweh. She is a woman who breaks the codes, and though her actions seem a gain for Israel, they are devious. Jael acts, but Yahweh is silent. Yahweh's name is not mentioned in direct conjunction with Sisera or Jael's deeds, as it is with those of Barak. In this narrative, Israel recalls both the victory of its God, through Deborah, and that of Israel, through the trickery of a woman." (Ibid., p. 43.)

[108] Ibid., p. 42.

[109] Klein claims that there is a guest-host motif in the book (ibid., p. 217, n. 12).

[110] According to Klein, this has the effect of "[evoking] Achsah's respectful action and inviting comparison with Jael's contraventions of her role as woman." (Ibid., p. 42.)

[111] Ibid., p. 42f.

[112] "Ironically, the Israelites honor Jael's deceptive (and brutal) acts on her own initiative more than Deborah's honorable and ethical leadership under Yahweh's guidance." (p. 47.)

[113] Ibid.

[114] "The reader of biblical literature – like many of its exegetes – tends not to doubt what is told, so long as it is done by the all-knowing and reliable narrator. The discovery of contradictions and inconsistencies leads him to a process – at times complex and tortuous – of explanations by means of filling in gaps. Thus, even when the known information included in the exposition does not match other versions, it does not undermine the reliability of what is narrated." (Amit, *The Book of Judges*, p. 129.) She refers to examples such as the two versions of the occupation of Jerusalem (p. 130f.), Joshua 24:28–33 and Judges 2:6–10.

[115] T. V. F. Brogan, "Polyphonic Prose", *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (p. 967f.).

Summary

During recent decades, biblical scholars have applied new methods, often borrowed from literary studies, to the old and familiar texts. This reorientation, which has been described as a paradigm shift, is closely related to a new understanding of the object of interpretation. It has been pointed out time and again that the biblical texts should be regarded as literary productions, and that it is the final text rather than a hypothetical reconstructed earlier version that is to be studied. However, my concern has been neither this development in general nor the study of individual narratives or poems, but the synchronic study of larger units such as entire biblical books. Generally, the object of literary analysis is such a large-scale work, but in the Bible, composition at this level often seems to be arbitrary and without significance. Still, merely because literary studies are performed on units such as books, does a literary study then automatically turn a book into a unit?

I have worked from the assumption that "literary methods" can be used both to find and describe meaningful patterns, and to explain and confirm difficulties that the literary form generates and that professional interpreters and general readers have discussed. My intention has been to examine whether narratological theory can be beneficial in an evaluation of the synchronists' suggestions regarding the structure of the text and the relationship between the individual stories and the larger text, and in a discussion about disagreements regarding interpretation. I have restricted this study to the book of Judges, which was selected because it is often regarded as an amalgam with a rather diffuse macro-structure. Moreover, several synchronic and literary studies of the book have been published recently. These studies, together with a more traditional approach, are presented and discussed in Chapter III.

Analyses of the stories about Ehud and Jephthah (Chapters II and IV) have confirmed that the combination of literary methods with a synchronic approach is problematic, since the interpretations that are suggested by synchronists deviate in some cases from a "natural" or "intuitive" reading and hence are perceived as "disturbing". To explain this perception, I have examined the relationship between the suggested interpretations and a conventional reading of narratives and collections of narratives. I based this on Skalin's *Karaktär och Perspektiv* [*Character and Perspective*] and his assumption that what might render an interpretation "disturbing" is a possible violation of general rules of interpretation. When the scholars under consideration claim, for example, that Ehud deviates from the norm, or that Jephthah's catastrophe is motivated and explained in the text, or that Samson (Chapter VII) is a villain who personifies the people's apostasy and their leader's failure, these interpretations can only be explained by the fact that these scholars – in spite of their literary approach – read and interpret the stories in a way that is not accepted as the regular way of interpreting fictional narratives in general.

I have argued that synchronists share three premisses that must be questioned: firstly, that the stories display a coherent ideological message – that is, that they have a thesis and not just a theme; second, that they are composed with an "iceberg technique" – that is, they only seem to be laconic and amoral; and third, that they are integrated into a larger text in such a way that they lose their autonomy and are transformed into episodes within a larger narrative.

These premisses imply that synchronists search for coherence in two ways. The first way is to eschew any distinction between the interpretation of fictional texts and factual reports. Hence, all stories are treated as factual reports and they all take place in the same "world". An interpreter familiar with this world will be able to fill in gaps and handle ambiguities using only one type of competence – the ability to interpret reports. I argue that this is to neglect "the literary point of view". The second way is to claim that the whole book or the DH has been transformed into a single unified text in the process of editing, and that the individual stories or motifs in them can be understood in relation to the larger text. I argue that this is to disregard the fact that narratives are autonomous and hence resistant to reworking.

I have focused mainly on the latter of the above-mentioned three premisses – that is, that the independent narratives are episodes within a larger text – since it seems to be a prerequisite for the combination of literary method and synchronic approach that these scholars propose. However, they present different reasons for the claim that the book or the DH should be treated as a unified text. Some assume that a reader can be expected to read the book or the history in this way, and hence refer to what they claim to be a conventional reading. However, on the other hand, they often seem to argue first and foremost like traditional redaction critics, although with an extreme stress on the "last hand". The book of Judges and other parts of the OT are then classified as examples of a unique genre in which the stories, and certain features within them, are commented on and perspectivized by means of montage and the use of analogies and contrasts. According to this reasoning, the text has been produced by one or several redactors working as authors and editors in a process of composition. In both cases, the gist of the argument is that the larger text has a coherent ideological message and that the individual narratives have been amalgamated into a larger narrative.

I have based my examinations and criticisms of these scholars on conventions that are valid for narratives in general – that is, I have contrasted the suggested interpretations with interpretations that a conventional reading can be supposed to produce. In several cases, I have been able to confirm my readings through references to the history of interpretation, which provides many examples of readers who have been troubled by the bizarre events recounted in these stories and the difficulty of harmonizing the stories with the rest of the book or the OT.

I have argued that narratives have structures that make them autonomous units containing their own meaning (Chapter V), referring to theoreticians such as Bar-

thes, Kermode, Genette, Mink, Ricoeur, Prince, Brooks et al. They claim that a narrative is a self-contained utterance with its own separate space or "diegesis", and that the interpretation of narratives therefore follows a unique and paradoxical logic. Following Russian formalists such as Thomashevsky, I have claimed that a certain element in a story is transformed into a motif and acquires its significance primarily from its function in the literary construction that the individual narrative constitutes. This is especially so if we restrict the label "narrative" to fictional narratives. To distinguish between different kinds of narratives, I have suggested three parameters: narrative scheme, discourse, and situation (which resemble the narratological terms: story, discourse and narration), and claimed that a fictional narrative is a specific language game (Chapter VI).

The autonomy of narratives explains the resistance of the stories in Judges to a harmonizing and synthesizing interpretation. This resistance can be overcome only by the creation of new versions, a fact that was realized intuitively by the translators of the Targum in the case of the story of Jephthah. An important thesis of this study is thus that the narrative form creates problems since several independent narratives cannot simply be put together to form a larger story. Stories compiled into a book will always function as texts within the text, and even if the same motif can be found in several stories, this does not transform all the stories into a single "event".

I have treated the book of Judges as part of a history in which the individual narratives are embedded: they are agglomerated like stories compiled into a short story cycle (Chapter VI). The macro-level is hence not a narrative in a strict sense, since it has no plot that sustains the interest of its readers. Referring to the different modes of narrativity presented by Ryan, I describe the book as an instance of the mode of "multiple narrativity" according to which readers can be expected to read the stories as separate and autonomous narratives. I have also made use of the thesis of Dunn and Morris regarding "composite novels" and the assumption that individual narratives considered together can illuminate a certain time, milieu and number of themes. However, neither this nor an instrumental or figurative function replaces the primary meaning of the narrative; rather, these functions are dependent on this meaning and must always co-operate with it.

Hence, the problems associated with the book of Judges remain, even if it is read as literature and even if one refrains from the diachronic segmentation of the text that has characterized traditional historical-critical studies. On the contrary, a literary study confirms that the book contains different texts and voices. Quite simply, there is not *one* text, or *one* voice – for example, one implied author or one narrator. It cannot even be assumed that characters such as Israel and God are the same, or have the same function, in different texts.

This problem cannot be solved by reading the book or the DH as a single text in which "the same voice" is said to recur, albeit in a dialogue (Polzin), or as a set of contrasting ironic perspectives (Klein). The conclusion of this kind of systematic

approach is not confirmed by a close reading of the text, and the scholars under consideration have not been able to show how the different voices are manifested in the texts (Chapter VIII). Although there is an important difference between studies that try to harmonize disparate elements and studies that claim that the text displays different perspectives (either dialogic or ironic), they all share the common denominator of starting with the larger text rather than the individual narratives.

Hopefully, this study has answered some questions and raised some new ones. I shall conclude by presenting two groups of issues that have only been touched on.

The first group concerns the narrative, and hence literary, form of these texts. I have argued that although this form is an important cognitive instrument, it also entails certain restrictions. One of these is that several narratives cannot simply be put together to form a single larger narrative. Another interesting issue arises from the claim that narratives always recount specific events – that is, if an author wants to say something about the human condition in general, then he or she has to do this by referring to the specific and unique. Scholars such as Alter and Sternberg point out that the biblical narratives are not clear-cut didactic texts and claim that this is a typical trait of Hebrew storytelling. However, this might be a problem associated with narratives in general. Yet another issue is the question whether it is possible to have an omniscient and omnipotent God as a character in narratives, since this form always presupposes time and space.

The second group of issues concerns the scholars under consideration and their application of methods borrowed from literary studies. One of these issues is the question whether methods and theories taken from literary studies are applied in a special way within biblical studies, since studies by biblical scholars seem to have certain implicit yet specific aims. For example, it is obvious that in spite of the fact that they state that these texts are literary productions, they assume that they contain a message and that the task of the scholar is to describe and interpret it. Time and again I have shown that they are not satisfied with a literary analysis but ask why these stories and the events that they recount have been included in the book and the Bible, and how they display a theological message that can be analysed and described. Another topic is, of course, the question of how the strong tendency among scholars towards harmonization and synthesis – perhaps especially among those who claim to study these texts as literature – should be explained. Bal uses in her studies a metacritical approach that seems to be very promising, and biblical scholars must now accept that they themselves have become an object of interpretation.

Finally, we have to ask how the book of Judges should be interpreted if we choose not to overcome or "tame" its difficulties but to take it at face value with all its remarkable characters and bizarre events. I have only been able to point out some possible answers to this question. For example, it seems that the authors – perhaps constrained by the narrative form – have allowed a certain degree of

ambiguity and variety of perspective. It is even possible to speculate whether this is intentional, and whether the redactors actually used a montage-technique to accomplish this effect. This brings us close to the theories of Polzin, even though I do not share his opinion of how polyphony is achieved and dispersed among the texts.

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