Chapter 1

Methodology[1]

The story is what penetrates and moves [us]. It is not simply that we have gotten the point, but that we have been interpreted by the story itself. We have been grasped by the story. Nelvin Vos[2]

Preamble

The methodology employed in this thesis in order to study four texts about unmarried daughters and their fathers in the Hebrew Bible is a feminist narrative analysis. The approach entails the recognition of narrative techniques utilised by the implied author of each of the selected texts and, on the basis of the narrative assessment, building a feminist rationale for the thesis. The results will inform my theory that a careful scrutiny of, and reflection on, the '*b*^{e}*tuloth* texts'[3] may reveal strands or remnants of resistance narrative originating from women's traditional tales or folklore and persisting in the extant pericope.

Support for a Feminist-Narrative Methodology

The process of textual analysis has been informed by the work of selected narratologists and feminist biblical scholars but does not exclude other scholars from a variety of disciplines whose work has been helpful in the preparation of

[1] For a summary/outline of the methodology, see Appendix 1, p. 482.
[2] Nelvin Vos, "Getting the Word," *The Cresset* 42(1979): 24.
[3] I use the phrase '*b*^{e}*tuloth* texts' to indicate a commonality between the texts. The principal female protagonist in each story is a *b*^{e}*tulah* (i.e. a young woman of marriageable age).

this thesis. I have found the most useful narrative approaches to be those of Mark Allan Powell and Adele Berlin. Their methods and analytical insights are the primary sources of definitions and insights for this thesis.[4] Where appropriate I am also working with the narrative techniques of Robert Alter, Shimon Bar-Efrat, Weston W. Fields, Jan P. Fokkelman, David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, and W. Randolph Tate**.**[5]

The feminist framework has been based on the scholarship of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Phyllis Trible and Katharine Doob Sakenfeld.[6] I have found the work of these researchers to be particularly accessible and helpful in the task of examining and "re-visioning" narrative texts in the Hebrew Bible.

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[4] Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*? (Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 1990); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983).

[5] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, Harper Collins, 1981); J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, Kn.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991); Shimon Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 30, no. 2 (1980); Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

[6] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,* ed. Letty Russell (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1985), Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing Biblical Interpretation." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973), Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1978), Trible, *Texts of* Terror, 2002; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials", in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty Russell, 55-62 (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1985), Sakenfeld, "Old Testament Perspectives: Methodological Issues", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1982): 13-20, Sakenfeld, "Feminist Perspectives on Bible and Theology", *Interpretation* 42 no.1 (January 1988): 5-18; Sakenfeld, "Wilderness, Awaiting the Land: The Daughters of Zelophehad and Feminist Interpretation," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 9, no. 3 (1988): 179-96.

As Adrienne Rich stated in 1979, "Re-vision [is] the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction."[7] Rich regards re-visioning as an act of survival for women, and although she may have overstated the case, this thesis will argue that re-visioning is a crucial skill for the biblical student who strives to look around and past the dominant patriarchal interpretations of specific texts. Drorah Setel applies Arthur Waskow's description of "Godwrestling" to this struggle. Waskow declares, "We do not simply accept the tradition, but we do not reject it either. We wrestle it: fighting it and making love to it at the same time. We try to touch it with our lives."[8]

During the difficult process of "Godwrestling" the texts by applying narrative techniques and formulating feminist questions, the biblical student reads and re-reads with care in order to ask challenging questions of the selected narrative. In this way the patriarchal "fragility" that may be in the text is exposed to "those faint, niggling voices that whisper 'all is not right with the world.'"[9] While paying close attention to the whispers, eventually I hope to experience Waskow's belief that the text transforms, and is transformed by, the person who struggles through the night and remains to see the sun rise over the Jabbock.

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[7] Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: Norton, 1979), 35.

[8] Arthur Ocean Waskow, *Godwrestling* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 11; T. Drorah Setel, "Feminist Insights and the Question of Method," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1985), 42. Trible also uses the wrestling image in *Texts of Terror*, 4.

[9] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 205.

Reasons for Choosing a Feminist-Narrative Approach

According to Powell, an important reason for the acceptance of the relatively new approach of narrative analysis is due to a perceived deficiency in the most common form of biblical study, namely, historical criticism.[10] By focusing on the text itself, rather than speculating on disputable external influences on the text, readers are engaged and their perceptions potentially changed by the narrator's literary techniques regarding form and content. Thus the narrative itself is given the opportunity to provide the reader with a broad range of interpretative clues, including the interests, ideologies and purposes of the narrator.

Biblical narratology pioneers - Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg - are quoted by Yairah Amit from their 1968 article, "The King through Ironic Eyes" in which they advocate a narrative approach. "Reading with close attention to details and subtleties…'pays off' better than any other kind of reading, because it delivers the story in the richest, clearest, most complex, complete and organized manner."[11]

[10] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 3. However, as Powell states, the older, long established forms of biblical analysis such as form, source and rhetorical criticism are also important as each potentially complements and balances the work of the others. Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 10, 80, 86.

[11] Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg, "The King through Ironic Eyes: The Narrator's Devices in the Biblical Story of David and Bathsheba and Two Excurses on the Theory of Narrative Text," *Hasifrut/Literature* 1:292 [Heb]; Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 2001), 13.

In narratology, attention is focused on the story which itself is the narrator's means of communicating with the audience.[12] Powell summarises narrative criticism as both a "text-centred" and "reader-centred" approach. "Basically, narrative criticism interprets the text from the perspective of an idealised *implied reader* who is presupposed by and constructed from the text itself."[13] Jack Dean Kingsbury identifies the implied reader as an imaginary person who is always the fulfillment of the narrative's purposes.[14] Thus it is important for readers today to look for signs in the text which expect the reader to respond in a particular way.[15]

Having scanned various scholarly options, a combination of narrative and feminist approaches appears to be the most appropriate means of achieving my stated purpose, namely, to critique the four pericopes to see if there is evidence of resistance narrative connected with women in any or all of the stories. Initially I plan to dissect the texts using narrative techniques which provide the best tools for exposing nuances and anomalies. The process will provide background material for further textual examination and assessment using the critical eye of feminist biblical scholarship. This approach has been tried and tested by "some feminist and third world theologians [who]…have discovered that narrative criticism opens the door for reading texts in a manner unfettered

[12] For a definition of "audience," see "Narrator and Audience," pp. 21-23.
[13] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 15.
[14] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story,* 2nd ed., (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1988), 38.
[15] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 21.

by what they regard as patriarchal or provincial restraints."[16] In other words, various exegetes have discovered that feminist and narrative methodologies successfully support each other in their aims.

A Summary of the Analytical Approach of the Thesis

In the first half of this chapter, I introduce the narrative methodology by defining the principal terms which is used throughout the thesis. Using concise explanations and biblical examples, I summarise what constitutes narrative analysis. This entails a discussion of plot under the headings of events and settings, an exploration of discourse in terms of narrative patterns, ambiguity and irony, and an examination of character portrayal, point of view and names. I will conclude the section on narrative analysis with a brief discussion on narratorial purpose.

In the second part of the chapter, I summarise the approaches of the three feminist scholars whose work informs my choice of methodology, and I follow this with an outline of the feminist strategies which are used to examine the chosen texts. These strategies are catergorised according to three principles: suspicion of patriarchal biblical authority, identification and retrieval of strands of resistance narrative.

Narrative Analysis

[16] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 90.

In order to achieve the aim of determining the presence or absence of resistance narrative - that is, remnants of diverse, alternative or more ancient traditions and legends - in the chosen texts, I employ the narrative techniques of Powell, Berlin and others to analyse each story. Based on the information gathered from the narrative analysis, I apply feminist principles to the texts. The choice of analytical tools to study the narrative is confined to those techniques which are relevant to the b^{e}*tuloth* pericopes. Consequently I do not utilise the full range of concepts and techniques mentioned and/or explained by Powell and Berlin.

Powell aims to describe the principles and procedures of narrative criticism in general. He illustrates the principles by analysing the narratives in the categories of story and discourse. While his examples are drawn from the New Testament only, the principles are also applicable to narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Using her "poetic" approach, Berlin analyses Hebrew narrative by directing most of her attention towards female characters and their points of view. In following her principles, students of the Bible can expect to discover how the narrative techniques of ancient authors and redactors have been instrumental in shaping a reader's interpretation of the story.

Definition of Narrative Terms

Narrative and Story

Narrative is a literary genre which is distinct from poetry, proverbs, epics and legal codes, for "narrative recounts a series of facts or events, either real or imaginary and establishes a temporal connection between them."[17] A narrative may be a report of a series of events, or it may be a story. Strictly speaking, stories can encompass literary forms such as poetry as well as narrative passages, but in English, story and narrative are terms often used interchangeably [18] - as they will be in this thesis.

Each of the pericopes studied in this thesis is embedded in a broader narrative context. Consequently, the narrative analysis in each chapter will be preceded by a synopsis of the 'historical' world in which the story is set.[19]

Stories, or narratives, are defined by plot, characters, word play (e.g. word rhythm and/or repetition), and other ploys in order to engage the audience.[20] Yet stories are much more than mere entertainment for they are, and have always been, inseparable from human activity. Stories employ diverse ways of ordering human experience as they link the past, present and future; as they reflect and even create the 'real world' through what is called the performative word [21] to

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[17] Jean-Marc Heimerdinger, *Topic, Focus and Foreground in Hebrew Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 41.

[18] Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah,* 12-13.

[19] See "The Story World" p. 24.

[20] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 1-3.

[21] "A performative utterance….indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action." The power of the "performative word" is evident variously in biblical literature where it is almost always associated with the deity. J. L. Austin, *How To Do things With Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 6, 13.

establish moral guidelines as well as set amoral precedents, and as they critique culture and become a source of inspiration. These are some of the attributes of the narrative genre which prompt Darrell Jodock to say that "story has the capacity to form and influence a person's identity."[22]

Constituting one third of the Hebrew Bible, stories are "manipulated transmitted materials" which the implied authors present as a means of persuasion to promote their ideas about the natural, supernatural and social world.[23] According to Alter, ancient Israel was singular in its choice of prose to preserve and convey "sacred national traditions."[24] Yet, as this thesis is proposing to explore, the prose so carefully chosen and moulded may also contain subversive elements that undermine some of those sacred traditions.

<u>Narrator and Audience</u>

In written texts, the narrator is a fictional construct: the voice created within the text by the author and through which the author tells the story. The narrator has the predominant point of view and controls the story and the points of view of the characters. In the Hebrew biblical narrative, this omniscient person usually assumes that YHWH shares his viewpoint or he refrains from reporting the deity's opinion about earthly events.[25]

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[22] Darrell Jodock, "Story and Scripture," *Word and World* 1, no. 2, 133.
[23] Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 14-15; Amit, *Reading,* 1.
[24] Alter, *Art*, 25.
[25] The problem of identifying authors of the extant biblical texts is on-going. Since the prevailing scholarly assumption is that almost all the authors were male, so when necessary a masculine pronoun is used interchangeably with 'narrator.' The masculine pronoun is also used for YHWH in accord with his portrayal as Israel's male God in the Hebrew Bible.

Historically, there would have been a series of real authors and editors - and probably a series of audiences who hear the story told or read aloud. In the case of narrative in the Hebrew Bible, it is broadly accepted that a story - perhaps transmitted orally at various stages before being put into writing - is revised, added to, and redacted over the centuries for different audiences at different times. Since the historical authors and redactors of biblical narrative are unknown, scholars refer to them as "implied authors." These are persons who are assumed by the narrative, and thus only revealed to the audience by the text itself.[26] The implied authors are literary composers whose perspectives and interests are revealed through their choice of settings, textual nuances and particular phrases or words, and through their references to related situations, events, geographical features and/or place names. For example, the implied author of Genesis states that after Rachel's death, "Jacob set up…the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day" (Gen. 35:20)**,** thereby connecting the story of Rachel's death with an edifice with which the implied author believes the implied audience is familiar.

The narratee is the person to whom the story is being told. Before the second millennium of the Common Era, some audiences would have been readers, but most would not have been literate. Even those who were able to read probably

[26] Tate, *Interpretation,* 75.

voiced the words as they read a scroll.[27] However - unless it is oral communication - the narrator and narratee are not physically in each other's presence. In a written story, therefore, the narratee is a construct of the author and consequently part of the story. In the latter situation, the narratee is synonymous with the implied audience, namely, the listener or reader envisaged by the implied author as the narrative is taking shape.[28]

As with the implied author, the text itself gives clues to the kind of audience which is implied, making it different from any historical or "real" audience. In one sense, this implied audience is a hypothetical concept or "idea" in the head of the implied author, and thus could also be called the "ideal" audience because the latter understands the references and allusions made by the implied author. Because narrative criticism is closely associated with reader-response criticism, its explicit goal is to "read the text as the implied reader."[29]

In order to simplify the textual analysis and discussion below, the implied author will henceforth be referred to as "the narrator," and the narratee or implied audience/reader will be referred to as "the audience."

Story World

[27] There is some evidence that silent reading was unknown in the Mediterranean world and unusual in the West until the advent of the novel. In the early fifth century CE, Augustine of Hippo tells of his astonishment at the sight of his mentor Ambrose reading, "but his voice and tongue were silent." Augustine, *Confessions: Books I – VIII,* trans. William Watts (Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1912), 272-5.

[28] Heimerdinger, "Topic," 46. However, as reader-response critics are quick to point out, "real life" narratees are not so easily controlled.

[29] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 20.

The story world is a place and time "created" by the narrator, and although stemming from and/or related to the narrator's own life experiences, the world of the story is a reality only in the text. The narrator directs and structures the settings, events and characters of the story. As a story is compiled, some material is selected and some is discarded in accord with the aims of the narrator.

In the story-world of Hebrew narrative no settings, events or characters can be historically verified.[30] This means that in biblical narrative analysis, the various facets of the plot are regarded as components of mimetic narrative and are thus implied rather than historical. Mimetic narrative, according to Tate, is "storicized" history, "a redescription of reality, the creation of a literary world or a textual world that reaches beyond itself and beyond its historical milieu."[31]

Meaning and purpose is found not only in the story but also, as Tate explains, in the "extra textual reality to which the story world points," namely, in the world of the narrator and/or the audience.[32] As the major aim of this thesis is to seek evidence of resistance strands of women's traditions, from time to time I will refer to research-based and therefore plausible "extra-textual reality" in order to provide possible reasons for certain features of a particular story. For example, when Jeremiah calls on women to lament (Jer. 9:17-20) the audience learns that daughters in ancient Israel are taught by their mothers to perform laments as a

[30] I use "historically" as it is understood in Western thought. See "historical" in "Narrative and Story," p. 20.
[31] Tate, *Interpretation,* 76.
[32] Tate, *Interpretation,* 78.

public service at funerals and/or in the wake of disasters. The narrator even recounts some phrases of the women's songs.[33]

Plot, Discourse and Characters

Powell's definition of plot is that it is synonymous with story and embraces the interaction of the three major elements of story, namely events, characters and settings.[34] Gunn and Fewell, on the other hand, divide narrative into two components, namely, plot – which includes events and settings - and character. They define plot as "a sequence of actions, often explicitly connected in terms of cause and effect, leading from an initial situation, through complication, to some sense of resolution or 'revelation.'"[35] I have chosen to 'hybridise' Gunn and Fewell's definition of plot with Powell's idea of separating plot - or story - from discourse.[36] The result is that the narrative of each of the four texts will be analysed under the headings of "Plot", "Discourse" and "Character."

The most important elements of narrative are the literary units of events, characters and settings. While almost all biblical stories are embedded in a broader narrative, a certain text can be selected for particular attention because

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[33] van Dijk-Hemmes, "Traces," 84. Another example is that of Miriam in Exodus 15:20-21. See also "Orality and Folktales," p. 88, for Trible's example of the song of Miriam.

[34] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 23.

[35] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 2.

[36] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 23, 35-74. Powell acknowledges Chatman's influence in his choice of categories. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978).

its plot has a discernable cohesion or theme which defines it. As Gunn and Fewell explain, "There must be events for there to be story…events that are connected…events that are in fact 'plotted.'"[37] For example, the stories to be analysed in this thesis have been selected because each features a series of events in the lives of female protagonists - the *b^{e}tuloth* - whose voices are heard either initiating or responding to those events.

Discourse, or the rhetoric of the narrative, is concerned with the art of storytelling.[38] Discourse analysis is the examination of structural patterns and rhetorical nuances or devices such as repetition, ambiguity, paradox and irony. Through these devices, the narrator aims to alert the audience to the narrator's own evaluative point of view and thereby convey his objective via a story.[39] Vital to the art of storytelling, discourse subtly influences the reader's response to the settings, events and characters of the story.[40]

"Characters are the actors in a story, the ones who carry out the various activities that comprise the plot."[41] Characters are the narrator's constructs of human beings - and sometimes non-human beings - who appear in the story,[42] and

[37] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 101.
[38] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 23.
[39] The narrator and the deity's viewpoint are usually aligned. See "Narrator and Audience," p. 21.
[40] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 25.
[41] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 51.
[42] Non-human characters which appear in the Hebrew Bible include animals – e.g. Balaam's donkey - and the Earth. Norman C. Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Ecological Hermeneutics,* ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 4-5.

whose actions propel the story. The task of the narratologist begins when three basic questions are asked about characters: Who speaks? Who sees? Who acts?[43]

The narrator may describe the character, or show the character through their action and speech - or through absence of action and speech - so that the audience is able to form a view about them.[44] The audience may also hear the points of view which characters have about each other.

Powell's Framework for a Narrative Approach[45]

Plot Analysis

Setting

The setting of a story provides the background of space, time, and social context.[46] The various background attributes of a story contribute to narrative structure and atmosphere, provide clarity to character portrayals and influence the course of the story's action. The key questions regarding setting analysis are: where is the action located, where to or from where do the characters move, when does the event take place, how long does it last, and what are the social circumstances of the protagonists?

[43] Mieke Bal, "Anti-Covenant: Introduction," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible,* ed. Mieke Bal (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 17.

[44] I use the plural pronoun to refer to a single person where he/she is undefined.

[45] Although Powell discusses point of view and devotes a chapter to character portrayal, I will meld his approach with this chapter's section on Berlin's narrative framework which more fully develops her primary areas of interest, namely, characterisation and point of view. See "Berlin's Framework for a Narrative Approach," pp. 43-51.

[46] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 70.

Spatial Setting

Descriptions of spaces or surroundings are spare in Hebrew narrative. The few words used to locate an event in a particular place require the audience to fill in the details from their experience of that or similar locations, or from their imagination. A narrator's decision to say very little about the setting means that the inclusion of one word or phrase may prove critical to the plot. In Genesis 24:1,[47] the phrase "Dinah went out" is the only indication that the rape has not taken place inside her father's household compound (*beyt 'ab*) but somewhere in the land of the Hivites. By moving outside of her father's compound, Dinah is endangered.[48]

Spatial settings in the Bible also provide opportunities for the audience to draw contrasts between inside and outside, land and water, city and countryside or the wilderness and the Promised Land. Events and the actions of characters are influenced and sometimes determined by place. David's group of outlaws is able to conduct guerilla warfare against Saul's troops because the mountainous terrain contributes to the success of their strategies (1 Sam. 23:15-24:2).

A particular spatial setting can add to the drama of an event by providing a special atmosphere. In the "temple of the Lord" which houses "the ark of God" at Shiloh, it is dark and the single "lamp of God" burns. The young Samuel is

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[47] The examples given to illustrate Powell's ideas are my own, since Powell's examples are from the New Testament only.

[48] Young women are confined to the *beyt 'ab* because in the ANE public space is regarded as unsafe for women. Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 54-55.

lying down in the temple when YHWH calls him (1 Sam. 3:3). The narrator uses the sacred setting and the ambiguity of darkness to accentuate the significance of the event in which the deity speaks to the boy Samuel.

Temporal Setting

Chronological references within the text can be either locative or durative.[49] Locative time means the narrator may nominate a single point in time - a year, a day or an hour - in which an event takes place. When the narrator of Genesis reports the commencement of the great flood, locative time is announced with precision. "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth" (Gen. 7:11).

A durative period is an interval of time between an event's commencement and its completion. This is illustrated by Joseph's prediction of Egypt's seven year period of plenty followed by a seven year period of famine. During these fourteen years, Joseph manages Egypt's economy (Gen. 41:25-57). Time can also be marked by journeys to and from named locations, as exemplified by the report on Joseph's journey from Hebron to Shechem and finally to Dothan in search of his brothers (Gen. 37:12-17).[50]

Social Setting

[49] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 72-73.
[50] Fokkelman, *Reading,* 99-101.

References to the social settings of events and characters within a story also contribute to the narrative analyst's store of information. The social setting is important in Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt. When the Israelites find themselves in the wilderness, they grieve about losing the food and water security they once had in Egypt (Exod. 14:11-12, 16:1-3, 17: 2-3; Num. 16:13). Later when the religious and social customs of the Canaanites have been absorbed by the Israelites, almost every prophetic message in Israel and Judah contains dire warnings about the consequences of apostasy. It is significant that in the first and third texts analysed in this thesis, social disruption in terms of the holocaust of a city (Gen. 19) and warfare (Judg. 11) is an important background feature; in the fourth text family violence triggers further social disruption (2 Sam. 13); and in the second text the protagonists' ability to combine planning and assertiveness with compliance averts the social disruption that new land law amendments may have created (Num. 36).

Events

An event is an incident which is brought about by a character or characters in a story. In presenting the event, the narrator may include the characters' words, thoughts and feelings as well as actions. The primary questions relating to events are: what happens, why does it happen, and how does it happen?

Some events within a narrative are more important than others. A "kernel event" is one which is essential in order to make sense of the plot, while a "satellite

event" could be removed without disrupting the story. For example in Genesis 22, a kernel event is Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, whereas an associated satellite event is Abraham's earlier instruction to the servants to "stay here with the donkey" (vs. 22:5a) while he and Isaac continue the journey alone.

In biblical narrative, "plotted events"[51] are presented sequentially, beginning with a catalyst followed by a response or responses. Subsequently a complication may arise, and the response usually leads to a resolution. If the resolution is delayed, this construct may be repeated a number of times within one narrative as it is in the story of the ten plagues of Egypt (Exod. 7:8-14:31). After each plague there is a temporary resolution when Pharaoh allows the Israelites to go into the wilderness to serve YHWH. The complication arises repeatedly when Pharaoh changes his mind and refuses to let the Israelites go. A final resolution is achieved only when Pharaoh's soldiers are drowned in their pursuit of the Israelites through the Red Sea.

Narrative Tension and Conflict

The portrayal of conflict is a significant element in storytelling for "as a general rule, plot is thrust forward by conflict."[52] According to Powell, a narrative without conflict would be the mere listing of a series of events. A story

[51] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 101. Heimerdinger defines a plot as "a rhetorical highlighting of causuality" or causation. That is, causation is the process of linking events to each other through cause and effect and as such is a crucial element of narrative technique without which there is no plot. Heimerdinger, "Topic," 43. I will use the term "catalyst" rather than "causation" throughout this dissertation.

[52] Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Academic Books, 1987), 93.

presumes a plot, and a plot almost inevitably requires a complication or conflict which in turn requires some kind of resolution.[53] When the moment of dénouement arrives, it often follows a growing tension which may be developed through repetition or perhaps via the judicious use of narrative reticence.

Both repetition and reticence are evident in the description of Abraham's journey to Moriah to offer his son as a sacrifice to his God (Gen 22:1-19). As the story gathers momentum, the narrator repeats the word "son" four times and the word "burnt offering" four times in the space of only eight verses (Gen. 22:1-8). The regular recurrence of these two words builds tension as the little group nears its goal. Only movements and two brief conversations about what is to take place are recounted. Yet this very reticence has the power to convey the mounting dread as they draw closer to Moriah. Not once does the narrator need to refer to Abraham's distress, for the story is told so skillfully that the audience cannot but feel his pain.

Although the Book of Ruth appears to tell a story which is free of struggles, complications are present in covert form. Not only do Naomi and Ruth have the strictures of widowhood with which to contend, but Ruth also faces danger when she works as an unprotected foreigner in the fields and when she visits the threshing floor at night. Later, when Boaz wants to marry her, a complication arises with Boaz's announcement that another kinsman or *goel* (גואל) has a prior

[53] Powell, *Narrative Criticism,* 42. Contra Longman and Powell, I question whether the word "conflict" is applicable to the plot of every story - perhaps "complication" is more appropriate.

right to buy Naomi's land and marry Ruth. Resolution occurs when the *goel* foregoes his rights through a legal transaction with Boaz. In some other tales, for example, in the quarrel between David and his wife Michal, the plot is laden with conflict which is never resolved (2 Sam. 3:12-16, 6:20-23).

Narrative Time

The duration of the telling of an event is variable and therefore of interest to a narrative analyst. The narrator may choose to summarise a story or section thereof, may brush-over or omit certain events with an ellipsis - a gap in the narrative - or may pace the story so that the time required to narrate or read aloud is roughly equivalent to the time estimated for the story's events to take place.[54] In biblical narrative the latter is usually achieved by the extensive use of direct speech or dialogue either between two people or between a person and someone speaking on behalf of a group. An example of this technique is in Genesis 44:14-45:15 where Joseph's revelation of his identity to his brothers is communicated almost entirely through direct speech. By slowing the flow of narrative time in this way, the narrator is indicating that this scene is important and that here an audience needs to pay careful attention to a particular event.

Discourse Analysis

The most important rhetorical devices in Hebrew biblical narrative include narrative patterns, ambiguity, irony and paradox. The narrator's varied use of

[54] Bar-Efrat, "Observations," 159.

these devices makes it possible to build, maintain and/or break narrative tension which in turn creates connections or distance between the audience and the story characters.

Narrative Patterns

Patterns in the narrative are vital to the understanding of discourse, as it is through pattern recognition that the audience recognises what happens and what is said in the narrative. The audience is able to bridge the ellipses in information based on their past experience of "schema" or packages of patterns which have been experienced on other occasions.[55]

Narrative patterns have been analysed by David Bauer and divided into categories which include repetition, comparison and contrast, climax, pivot, inclusio, coda, interchange or step- parallelism, palistrophe and chiasm.[56] Although attention to pattern overlaps with the discipline of structural criticism, narrative scholars study structural patterns because they both reflect the interests and purposes of the narrator and influence the reader's interpretation of the story.

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[55] Heimerdinger, "Topic," 40.

[56] David Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 13-20. I have omitted five of Bauer's categories of narrative patterns or "compositional relationships," citing only those most useful in my analysis of the four narratives. I have also added "coda" to his list.

Structure based on Narrative Content

Analysis of the structure of a literary unit is defined as "the network of relations" within a literary unit.[57] Definition of the boundaries of a literary unit in the Bible is challenging because not only does it depend on the audience's focus - which may be broad or narrow - but also because boundaries may be based on events, repetition of specific phrases or words, the arrangement of time and space, or on the movements of characters.[58] Since this thesis is about events in the lives of unmarried daughters and their fathers, boundaries are character-focused and defined by the activities of the *b^e^tuloth.*[59]

Most, but not all, biblical narrative structures are symmetrically patterned words, phrases and/or sentences. Step parallelisms (e.g. a b a_1 b_1) in a narrative involve the repetition of ideas or similar information in two or more sections which follow on from each other (e.g. the butler and the baker's dreams in Genesis 40). Concentric ring patterns, also known as chiasms, inverted parallelisms or palistrophes (e.g. "the image of God" in Genesis 1:27) [60] are also created by the use of repetition. Where the two halves of a concentric pattern meet, a change or pivotal event may be noted. Noting a structural pattern helps an exegete to see what is important in the story and the narrator's aim in telling it.

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[57] Bar-Efrat, "Observations," 155, 161.
[58] Fokkelman, *Reading*; 97; Bar-Efrat, "Observations," 155.
[59] Bar-Efrat, "Observations," 155.
[60] Wenham has different definitions for 'chiasm' and 'palistrophe' (or 'introversion' as preferred by Milgrom). According to Wenham, a chiasm has an ABB_1A_1 pattern, whereas a palistrophe's pattern is $ABCB_1A_1$. I have chosen to use Wenham's definitions in this thesis. Wenham, *Numbers,* 23; Milgrom, *Numbers,* xxii.

Pivots

Occasionally the narrator uses one or more narrative patterns to lead the audience to assume the plot's direction before a pivotal event presents a surprising development or unexpected reversal. A pivot is a change in direction of an event or a character, and often occurs at the centre of a concentric ring structure (a, b, c, b^1, a^1) or following a climax in the story. When Nathan tells David a parable of a self-serving man, the climax is the accusation, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7a). When the king is told that his baby son will die, he fasts for seven days. Yet immediately after his baby's death David returns to normal life. This unexpected reaction follows the pivotal moment, namely, the baby's death. The king's behaviour turns around because during his son's illness, he is motivated to fast by his desire to influence the deity. When the baby dies, David recognises that his attempt has failed so he stops fasting (2 Sam. 12:13-23).

<u>Coda</u>

A coda is an epilogue which appears at the close of some narratives. It is related to, but separate from, the preceding text.[61] Its function may be to summarise, make conclusions about the plot, add a touch of irony and/or add information about later events connected with the characters. The book of Judges repeats the coda "In those days there was no king in Israel" (Judg.18:1, 19:1) and twice adds, "All the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg. 17:6, 21:25).

[61] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 120.

In the light of the multiple failures of the monarchy following the period of the judges, this may be a narrator's ironic touch.[62]

Repetition: Leitwort, Motif and Theme

Repetition is a potent rhetorical device which the biblical narrator employs effectively in multiple ways. The narrator delights in repeating a word and/or providing variations on the root of a verb, phrase or idea in order to structure, comment on the behaviour of a character, emphasise or exaggerate a point, build suspense and/or subtly develop a characterisation.[63] He may also use repetition followed by a variation - sometimes a very slight variation - in the repetition to contrast events or to hint to the audience about a particular character trait of a protagonist.

Repetition is also a feature of oral traditions: the folktales and legends which are passed from one generation to the next.[64] Eventually they are incorporated - more fully or as remnants - into texts such as the Hebrew Bible.[65] The story of Jonah carries a number of the characteristics of the folktale, including repetition. When he preaches to the people of Nineveh so successfully that they repent and escape death, Jonah repeatedly expresses a wish that he might die (Jon. 4:3-9). The narrator declines to explicitly describe Jonah's perversity. Instead, repetition

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[62] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 121.
[63] Alter, *Art,* 97, 98. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 148, Berlin, *Poetics,* 105.
[64] See "Orality and Folktales," p. 87.
[65] Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 5.

of Jonah's anger and complaints is skillfully employed to present an understated portrayal of a disgruntled prophet whose death wishes end in life.

A narrator may also adopt strategic variations in the repetition of words or phrases which can alert an audience to a change in emphasis, assist in the contrast and comparison of characters, highlight a theme and/or foreshadow an event. The narrator of 1 Kings details a conversation between Ahab and Naboth (1 Kgs. 21:2, 3). Yet when Ahab repeats their dialogue to Jezebel, half of the original verbal exchange is omitted (1 Kgs. 21:6). Through this narrative device and others, the narrator conveys to the audience that Ahab is also guilty of the murder of Naboth.

Alter nominates five types of repetition, including the type scene and sequence of action.[66] However, for this methodology, only *Leitwort,* motif and theme are relevant. A *Leitwort* is a repeated word or word-root which may be used in word plays and the development of a theme in a text or group of related texts.[67] *Leitworten* can also build tension, make connections between scenes, and create ambiguity. In 2 Samuel 7 a covenant is established between YHWH and the house of David. In this pericope, the *Leitwort* "*beyt*" (בית) refers to a house, palace, temple or dynasty. The word recurs frequently to illustrate the meaning and significance of the covenant by interweaving the motif with David's proposal to build a house for the deity just as he has built his own palace.

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[66] Alter, *Art,* 94-95.
[67] Alter, *Art,* 93.

A motif is the recurrence of an object, an idea, a sense, a character, or an incident which appears either within a particular narrative or throughout various literary traditions. Encapsulating a fundamental social experience, "a motif often carries the essential message of a story."[68] Culley quotes Stith Thompson's definition that a motif is an easily-recognised literary convention which is "the smallest element in a tale having the power to persist in tradition."[69] An example is the dream, a recurrent motif in the Joseph saga (Gen. 37:5-13, 40:1-41:36).

A theme is variously defined but is generally viewed as an idea which dominates or is central to a narrative and its value system, whether moral, political, legal or religious.[70] Bar-Efrat describes a theme as the drawing together of various narrative elements into a "unifying and integrating principle."[71] The identification of a narrative's theme, therefore, serves to summarise the narrator's probable purpose in telling the story and for presenting it in a particular way. "The best statement of the theme of a work is the statement that most adequately accounts for the content, structure and development of the work."[72] In the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, a significant theme appears to be that of human fallibility and deceptiveness which YHWH counters with love and commitment towards Abraham and his descendants.

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[68] Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 19-20.
[69] Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York: Dryden Press, 1951), 415; Robert C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, Press, 1976), 6.
[70] Alter, *Art,* 95.
[71] Bar-Efrat, "Observations," 168.
[72] David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 18-21.

Ambiguity

One of the joys of language in general, and narrative in particular, is its unpredictability when a word in a particular context changes the meaning of a phrase or sentence. "Together, difference and deferral produce the instability of language which, depending on its form, we call ambiguity, or multivalence, or metaphor."[73]

Multivalence, where one word has the potential to contain a number of meanings, can lead to interpretative uncertainty or ambiguity, and it is this ambiguity which serves to disturb and alert an audience to possible complications ahead. An example of verbal ambiguity is in Judges 19:22-24, where the Benjaminites of Gibeah want to know (*yada'* ידע) the Ephraimite's guest, a Levite. The word "to know" might mean that the Benjaminites wish to interrogate the stranger, but when the Ephraimite tells the men to "ravish" (*v^e'annu* ועַנּוּ) his *b^etulah* daughter and the concubine instead, the context indicates that the Benjaminites' intention is to sexually abuse the Levite.

Sometimes a character's speech can resolve an ambiguous situation, for example, when YHWH assures Abraham that Isaac, not Ishmael, is to be his heir (Gen. 21:12, 13). On the other hand, a speech can also lead to further confusion and uncertainty. In Genesis 42:20, when Joseph - unrecognized by his brothers - demands that they bring their youngest brother on their next trip to Egypt, he

[73] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative*, 155.

gives no explanation for this extraordinary command. Ambiguity is also one of a number of ways for an audience to "read against the grain" of a text to find new or alternate meaning in that text. This is an outcome which has particular significance for feminist re-reading the texts from a feminist viewpoint.[74]

In literature, a broad definition of metaphor is that essentially everything can be regarded as metaphor, from protagonists, to actions, thoughts and objects.[75]
A narrower definition of metaphor as a particular form of figurative language is that "it makes a comparison between two things which would not normally be thought of as similar to each other."[76] A powerful example of metaphor is "the Lord is my rock, my fortress" (Ps. 18:2a).

Irony and Paradox

Irony is "to convey something by using concepts, ideas, and words that suggest the opposite of their literal meaning."[77] Briefly, irony is about incongruence and is employed skillfully in many biblical narratives. The two major forms of irony are dramatic or situational, and verbal irony.[78] The latter form of irony might be evident in narratorial comment about aspects of a plot, but may also be in the words of a character. When Joseph's brothers do not know who he is but say to

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[74] See "Principle of Suspicion," pp. 72-73, and "Principle of Retrieval," p. 81.

[75] David A. Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1977), 5. Metaphor in its narrow definition has not been discussed in this thesis because in the analysis of any of the four stories it has not emerged as particularly relevant.

[76] Tom Gibbons, *Literature and Awareness: An Introduction to the Close Reading of Prose and Verse* (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Edward Arnold (Australia) Pty. Ltd., 1979), 19.

[77] Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 2006), 45.

[78] Gibbons, 46.

him, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers …and one is no more” (Gen. 42:13), little do they realise that the brother whom they have included in their number but is “no more,” is the very man to whom they are speaking.

In dramatic irony, the audience shares the narrator’s knowledge about characters whose behaviour is mismatched to the situation, or the audience expects the opposite of that which actually transpires. The latter is evident in the story of Babel, where the people are intent on establishing themselves by building a mighty tower so they would become a great people and not be “scattered abroad” (Gen.11:4b). However, the construction of the tower is the only reason that they are scattered abroad. In Genesis 38, Judah thinks that Tamar brings bad luck by causing the death of his two sons, but it is only through Tamar’s action to correct the wrong Judah does to her that he becomes father to two more sons, Perez and Zerah.

Paradox is a term applied to all surprising deviations from common perceptions, opinions or expectations.[79] Hebrew narratives are steeped in paradoxical events, characters, and statements. Samson - whose birth is announced by an angel - grows to great physical strength and receives the spirit of the Lord, but paradoxically turns out to be one of the Bible’s most foolish characters (Judg. 14:1-16:31).

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[79] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1971), 120.

Berlin's Framework for a Narrative Approach

In *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative,* Adele Berlin defines poetics as the science of literature which analyses the "building blocks" of literature and the rules governing the assembly of these blocks. According to Berlin, "Poetics strives to write a grammar, as it were, of literature" as it selects principles of literature from all kinds of literary texts.[80] Poetics explains *how* texts reveal what they mean and this facilitates the interpretation of texts. Consequently "we are in a better position to discover *what* a particular text means."[81]

Berlin chooses to concentrate on just two areas of narrative poetics, namely, character and point of view. In restricting her analysis in this way, Berlin is able to detail and illustrate a range of techniques regarding character portrayal in Hebrew Bible stories. With Berlin's categories of character types, and her comprehensive section on characterisation, the main players in biblical stories are subjected to a variety of analytical techniques including those related to description, their inner lives, their speech and their actions.[82]

Character Analysis

Berlin nominates three categories of character types: the fully-fledged - or rounded - character, the type - or flat - character, and the agent, whose role is functionary. Her examples of these categories are from 1 and 2 Samuel and 1

[80] Berlin, *Poetics,* 15.
[81] Berlin, *Poetics,* 17.
[82] Berlin, *Poetics,* 23-41.
[80] Berlin, *Poetics,* 25-33.

Kings.[83] Abigail is a type because of the narrator's one-dimensional portrayal of her flawless behaviour as an intelligent wife - who skillfully manages a difficult situation - and a little later, as a modest widow (1 Sam. 25:1-42). However, in 2 Samuel 11:1-12: 24 Bathsheba is depicted simply as an agent, an element of the plot. She is taken from her home and given no voice or independent thought or action apart from her rite of mourning when her husband Uriah is killed. Later when her son Solomon has grown to manhood, Bathsheba becomes a fully-fledged character when she manipulates people and events to secure her son's accession to the throne and, after succeeding in this aim, when she makes an ambiguous promise to Adonijah to speak to Solomon on Adonijah's behalf (1 Kings 1:11-40, 2:13-25).

Character Portrayal

Description

Characters and character traits are revealed directly through description by the narrator, or, perhaps less reliably, by another person in the story. Character can also be assessed indirectly through the person's own words and actions in the story-world. In 1 Samuel 25:3, the narrator describes Nabal and Abigail in terms of appearance and character. Later in verse 25, however, Abigail's description of her husband as a fool may be an unreliable character portrayal if her aim is to prompt a restrained response from David.

Descriptions of characters in Hebrew narratives are spare compared with a preference for detailed portrayals by modern writers. However, when biblical narrators do provide extra information about a character - and occasionally other characters in the story also provide character descriptions - the audience recognises that this information is pertinent to the development of the plot.[84] In Genesis 37 the narrator describes Jacob's special love for Joseph, "Now Israel loved Joseph, more than any other of his children" (vs. 3a). This detail about the father-son relationship partially explains the less-favoured brothers' vindictive behaviour towards Joseph.

Inner Life

Biblical narratives occasionally enter the inner life of characters, which is either described by the narrator or revealed in a person's direct speech. In Genesis 18:17-19, YHWH delivers a monologue in which he asks whether he should conceal his plans for Sodom from Abraham, but then provides his own answer in the negative. Abraham and the messengers are walking with him, but as they do not respond, it is probably YHWH's internal discussion.

Speech and Actions

"Everything in the world of biblical narrative ultimately gravitates toward dialogue."[85] To the ancient Hebrews, speech is the most significant of human

[84] Berlin, *Poetics,* 34.
[85] Alter, *Art,* 182.

attributes. The inclusion of dialogue in a particular scene indicates that this event is important to the plot; more so if there is extended dialogue.

Often a vivid image of a personality comes from the person's own words and actions. Reuben's response to the disappearance of Joseph in Dothan needs no help from the narrator in conveying the older brother's distress. His action of tearing his clothes, and his words, "The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?" (Gen. 37:30b), are explanatory enough.

Reticence

Hebrew narrative succeeds in communicating depth in the portrayal of its major characters despite - or perhaps because of - its limited use of adjectives and its minimal references to appearance, social circumstances, dress, motives and thoughts.[86] How this is done, and how the narrator nuances the characters so effectively, is encapsulated by Alter. "The purposeful selectivity of means, the repeatedly contrastive or comparative technical strategies used in the rendering of biblical characters" are all dependent upon the biblical narrators' view of the nature of human beings and their relationship with YHWH.[87] The narrators of the Pentateuch have portrayed Moses almost entirely via his speeches and actions and by contrasting him with his siblings. These are probably sufficient to satisfy the audience that they know the man who led Israel for forty years.

[86] Alter, *Art,* 114.
[87] Alter, *Art,* 115.
[86] Gunn and Fewell, Narrative, 51. See the description of reticence in "Narrative Tension and Conflict," p. 32.

Narrative gaps, minimal description and the ambiguities which stem from reticence can be so intriguing that they arouse audience curiosity, encourage careful listening and spark the imagination.[88] Reticence also plays a role in building narrative tension which in turn prepares the audience for conflict and/or a climax.

Point of View

Analysing points of view is Berlin's other major contribution to this thesis.[89] The term "point of view" means the narrative stance, namely, "the position or perspective from which a story is told."[90] The narrator makes his own evaluations regarding truth, moral values and norms, and because he has the power to choose the kind of perspectives to be conveyed to the audience he controls all viewpoints in a given story.

Beginning with Seymour Chatman's categories of point of view, namely, perceptual, interest and conceptual,[91] Berlin applies them to a verse (2 Sam. 11:27d) which follows David's acts of adultery and murder: "But the thing that David had done displeased [literally: did what was evil in the eyes of] the Lord." This sentence tells the audience that the interest point of view in the story is David's because he is the object of YHWH's perceptual point of view. Further, it reveals the narrator's conceptual point of view regarding David and the deity

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[89] Berlin, *Poetics,* 43-82.
[90] Berlin, *Poetics,* 46.
[91] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 151-53; Berlin, *Poetics,* 47.

because the narrator has chosen to report YHWH's thoughts about the king's actions.

Also useful are Boris Uspensky's five point of view categories. The first is the spatial level where the narrator may be either omnipresent or choose to be localised with a particular character. At the temporal level, the narrator is either confined to - or transcends - time, and at the psychological level the narrator has privileged knowledge about the thoughts and emotions of the characters. The phraseological level means the revelation of a particular point of view through discourse, and finally the ideological level is seen in the narrator's evaluation of the characters and their lives.[92]

Occasionally, as in the saga of Jacob and his sons (Gen. 37-50), a narrative presents multiple points of view as the scenes roll by. This technique gives depth to the narrative in the form of ambiguity and irony. The audience experiences varied and conflicting responses as the narrator shifts the point of view from Jacob, to the brothers of Joseph as a group, to individual brothers and back again to Jacob. These shifts in perception, conception and interest throughout the story of Jacob's family portray a family in disharmony and distress. In the final scenes the points of view converge, the family is reconciled, and the ambiguity ceases.

[92] Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1973), 8; Longman, *Literary Approaches,* 87-88; Berlin, *Poetics,* 55-57. Berlin proposes that the psychological level is equivalent to Chatman's perceptual view, while the ideological level equates with the conceptual viewpoint.

Names

"In Hebrew thought the name was the essence of the self. This essence was transmitted by the father to his son. Through his son he could project his very being into the future after he had died."[93] Therefore when a character in a story is named, his or her name reveals something of the character and destiny of the bearer."[94] In other words, protagonists in a narrative are awarded significance simply because the narrator names them. Conversely, when characters names are omitted they are less easily recognised: an indication that the narrator considers them to be of low narrative status.[95]

When the narrator gives a character a variety of titles or designations, the change can signify a different point of view.[96] For example, by stating that Tamar is Judah's daughter-in-law, her position as a secondary character is made clear (Gen. 38:11). This title also emphasises the mistake made by Judah later in the narrative when he does not recognise her as his daughter-in-law. When Tamar's point of view is presented (vs. 13), Judah is called her father-in-law, indicating that she is now the subject of the narrative. At the same time the word "father-in-law" underscores the precarious nature of Tamar's plot to trick him.

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[93] O. J. Baab, "Marriage," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nashville, Tn,: Abingdon Press, 1995), 3: 279.

[94] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions,* 2nd ed., trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1965), 43.

[95] Melissa Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 98 (2002): 33; J. Cheryl Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus-Deuteronomy* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 83.

[96] Berlin, *Poetics,* 59.

The omission of a name can also be a ploy to highlight that name when it is eventually announced, as in Samuel's visit to Jesse in Bethlehem to choose a future king. Eventually Samuel is told of "the youngest," but his name is withheld until David receives YHWH's spirit (1 Sam.16:13b). However, when a character is only ever referred to through their relationship to another person or a place, like the Levite's concubine and the Ephraimite in Judges 19, the narrator is apparently communicating to the audience that no matter how significant their role may be in a narrative, as individuals they are of little real importance.[97]

Hinneh

The Hebrew Bible also extensively uses the term *hinneh* – traditionally translated into English as "Look!" - as both an indicator of a change in point of view and, less frequently, in revealing a character's internal point of view.[98] An example of the former is present in Genesis 24: 61- 63, where the narrative has been following the camel train from Nahor to the Negeb, but shifts to Isaac's point of view with the word *hinneh.* This word creates a dramatic effect because it gives the audience the experience of this significant moment as if they were Isaac, or at least at one with Isaac.[99]

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[97] Bellis, "Helpmates," 79.

[98] Jennifer E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville, Kn.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005), 47. *Hinneh* also has a third function: in direct discourse *hinneh* registers attention or surprise, i.e., "Look!"

[99] Berlin, *Poetics,* 62.

Direct Discourse

The most dramatic way the narrator conveys point of view is through the extensive use of direct discourse.[100] This technique of storytelling - which provides multiple points of view - allows the tale to come alive with ambiguities and complexities. The audience is puzzled and challenged, and perhaps most significantly, is involved with the story on multiple levels. During such testing moments, the bridge between narrative and narrative interpretation is crossed, inspiring further exploration of meaning in - and the purpose of - biblical stories.

Narrator's Purpose

While Powell and Berlin do not include the narrators' purposes or goals in the presentation of their various stories, I have decided to study the texts for evidence of the narrator's purpose in choosing a particular story and presenting it in a particular way. For example, it is probable that the narrator's aim in telling the story of Elijah and the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:1-46) is to demonstrate to the audience - through the failure of Baal and the success of YHWH to super-naturally ignite a sacrifice - that other religions are false.

Undoubtedly any attempt to understand the purpose of an ancient narrative is an inexact exercise, but there is value in thinking about the narrator's reasons for

[100] Berlin, *Poetics,* 65.

presenting a story in a particular way. The narrator's purpose emerges, for example, in the story's contextual placement, the choice of plot lines, the way the protagonists are portrayed, what is emphasised, and what information is included and what is omitted. Also illuminating are textual nuances which appear to be truncated or partially erased, that is, phrases or sentences which may have been sacrificed in service of the narrator's ideologies and aims.

Feminist Re-Reading

Feminist criticism emerges in the eighteenth century with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft,[101] and feminist biblical criticism begins a century later with Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Woman's Bible*.[102] The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines feminism as the "advocacy of women's rights on ground of equality of the sexes."[103] Ann Loades describes feminism as a movement which seeks "change for the better in terms of justice for women, and this requires detailed, unremitting attention to women's perspectives."[104] For Phyllis Trible, however, feminism does not focus narrowly upon women. It is "rather a critique of culture in the light of misogyny."[105] This accords with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's statement:

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[101] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* edited with an introduction by Miriam Brody (London: Penguin Books, 1992-, 1792).

[102] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1895); reprinted; Seattle: Coalition Taskforce on Women and Religion, 1974.

[103] *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English,* 7th ed., s.v. "feminism."

[104] Ann Loades, "Feminist Interpretation," *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation,* ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 81.

[105] Trible, *God and Rhetoric,* 7.

> Feminist scholarship insists on the reconceptualization of our intellectual frameworks so that they become truly inclusive of all human experience and articulate the male experience of truth as one particular experience and perception of reality.[106]

In this thesis the perspectives of Trible and Schüssler Fiorenza - among others - will be prominent in shaping the feminist re-reading as it is informed by, and informs, the narratology of the four *b^{e}tuloth* texts.

Definition of Feminist Terms

Feminist Hermeneutics

The primary task of feminist biblical study is the application of women's perspectives to the biblical canon. Schüssler Fiorenza defines the application of feminist hermeneutical methods to the Bible as "the theoretical exploration of the exegetical and socio-cultural presuppositions of biblical interpretations in the interest of women."[107] Approximating this statement is Bellis' definition that "feminist hermeneutics is the business of reading [biblical] texts with sensitivity to sexist oppression."[108] Schüssler Fiorenza, however, adds the stipulation that personal experience of patriarchal oppression and struggle for liberation is a prerequisite for any theological evaluation of androcentric texts of the Bible.[109] While I concur with most of Schüssler Fiorenza's assertions and their rationale, I dispute the latter statement because it appears to discount the human ability to

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[106] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, Ma.: Beacon Press, 1992), 20.

[107] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 2.

[108] Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes,* (Louisville, Kn.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 14.

[109] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 32.

form a ‘theory of mind’ in which one person can and does have the capacity to empathise with another and thereby act morally towards the oppressed. An ability to empathise is the basis for ‘identification’ which is one of the three principles of feminist textual analysis which I will implement in this thesis.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy, as defined by Schüssler Fiorenza, is a dominating social, economic and political system in which a few men have power to define women, subjugated and/or minority groups as “other” in order to suppress and oppress the “other.”[110] That is, power in all its forms is distributed unequally in favour of men who pass this power along the male line of descendants.[111] Gerda Lerner describes patriarchy as “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women” in the family and in society.[112] “Patriarchy is simultaneously process, structure and ideology… and originates in the authority of the father.”[113] Male authority, however, may also stem from other leadership

[110] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 5; Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1982): 33.

[111] Léonie J. Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: the Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (Sheffield: JSOT Press/Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 21.

[112] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 239. Lyn Bechtel disagrees with Lerner, postulating that “patriarchy may have begun in group-oriented societies as a counter-balance to women’s essential salvific power,” namely, in her power to give birth. Bechtel, “A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1-11,” in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible.* 2nd ser., ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 120. Perhaps the arguments of both Lerner and Bechtel are feasible in that they reflect not only the complexities in the rise of patriarchy in the ANE, but also our lack of knowledge about ancient societies.

[113] Julia M. Asher-Greve, “Feminist Research and Ancient Mesopotamia: Problems and Prospects,” in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 232.

roles besides that of a father. Hence Schüssler Fiorenza's term "kyrio-patriarchal" which also encompasses the idea of master and lord.[114]

The Hebrew Bible in its extant form is a collection of ancient writings largely gathered, written and redacted over centuries by male scholars. Given the influence of the Bible in so many cultures, most feminist biblical scholars therefore regard the Bible as "one of the founding texts of patriarchy."[115] The narrative-feminist methodology of this thesis aims to present ways of reading the texts as viable alternatives to the normative, dominant readings of the mainstream patriarchal interpretive tradition in biblical scholarship.

Androcentricity

A world-view or mind-set which is constructed from a male perspective is androcentric.[116] This means that men and their attitudes, aspirations and activities are accepted as primary and the standard for all people, while the views and attitudes of women have been accepted as secondary or "Other."[117] Language reflects androcentricity when male terms like "man" and "mankind" are used in reference to both sexes. Yet where different words are used to describe similar attributes in men and women, words referring to men are more likely to have positive connotations while corresponding words denoting

[114] Throughout the thesis the term "patriarchal" will be used as a substitute for the more cumbersome "kyrio-patriarchy."

[115] Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 1997), 13-14; Davies, *Dissenting Reader,* 9.

[116] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 2; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 33.

[117] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender,* 17-18; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*: 2.

women's activities are negative. Examples include 'bachelor' versus 'old maid'; 'stud' versus 'slut'. This distorted view is so culturally ingrained that women generally fail to question it.

Diversity in Feminist Biblical Interpretations

Feminist approaches to biblical interpretation are many. Most feminists agree that this is a positive situation, given that the Bible has its own varied interpretations of the narratives preserved within its pages. Danna Nolan Fewell robustly endorses this opinion. "The Bible presents many points of view and because it presents so many, some will inevitably undermine others. I think that the Hebrew Bible would have lost relevance long ago, if it had not had the ability to critique itself."[118] Alicia Ostriker explains that the rabbinical tradition also maintains the approach that "there is always another interpretation."[119] Since biblical scholarship was, until recent decades, almost exclusively a male domain, women's contribution to the work of biblical interpretation is an overdue imperative. Nevertheless a beginning has been made, and feminists have been actively involved in biblical hermeneutics for over thirty years. Adele Reinhartz summarises the work of feminist scholars in terms of its aspirations:

> The goal of feminist criticism is not to substitute female hierarchies and modes of scholarship for male ones, but to transform the system as a

[118] Danna Nolan Fewell, "Feminist Reading of the Hebrew Bible: Affirmation, Resistance and Transformation,." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39, (1987): 84; Pardes, *Counter Traditions,* 2-3. Although Pardes' criticises Trible's "depatriarchalizing" approach, Trible does concur with this view. See "Trible's Interpretative Approach," p. 63

[119] Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Feminist Revision and the Bible* (Cambridge, Ma.: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 31.

whole. A crucial element of transformation is the breaking down of hierarchies, and the emergence and positive evaluation of a broad range of voices.[120]

Feminist biblical scholarship does indeed embrace a variety of voices. In "Towards Feminist Companionship," Pamela Milne outlines the history of feminist biblical scholarship and admits her bias towards the feminist humanist stance which rejects a belief in the divine origin of the Bible. She believes that the secular feminist scholarly world will only respect the work of those who set the biblical text alongside other texts in an unprivileged way, as simply another "human product."[121] Heather McKay is also critical of feminist exegetical approaches at either end of the continuum which perpetuate the biases of what she names "gendered false-consciousnesses."[122] Her vision for the future is one in which the majority of biblical scholars take an inclusive, gender-neutral stance by putting aside their sectarianism and becoming receptive to a wider range of influences on - and approaches to - biblical studies.[123] However Milne and McKay's neutral approach would mean the adoption of a form of post-modernism which many Christian and Jewish scholars who embrace the Hebrew

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[120] Adele Reinhartz, "Feminist Criticism and Biblical Studies on the Verge of the Twenty first Century," *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 35.

[121] Pamela J. Milne, "Towards Feminist Companionship," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 59.

[122] Heather A. McKay, "On the Future of Feminist Biblical Criticism," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 81.

[123] McKay, "On the Future," 80-83.

Bible as the word of God would find difficult to accept. Such a stance is also rejected in the ideology of this thesis.

In reaction to the long tradition of androcentric biblical hermeneutics, feminist exegetes have developed a number of approaches to interpretation which are more germane to the experiences of women. Carolyn Osiek asks the question,

> When women today in Christian communities…recognize that the Bible is a major implement for maintaining the oppression of the patriarchal structure [of their communities], what are the ways in which they respond and adjust to that situation?[124]

Osiek lists and labels the ways as loyalist, sublimationist, revisionist, liberationist and rejectionist approaches.[125] One more category can be added: that of inclusivist or realist.

The loyalists believe that the hermeneutical process rather than the text itself is faulty, so for them the feminist's task is to re-read and re-interpret the texts using sound exegetical skills. Meanwhile the sublimationists avoid the disturbing images of women in the Bible by focusing on those that are uplifting and positive. The revisionists and liberationists confine misogynist texts to the past and highlight passages which convey women's achievements, while the

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[124] Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1985), 97. Osiek prefaces her list of feminist approaches to the Bible by stating that the list applies only to the work of Christian feminists in the West because her knowledge is limited to this sphere.

[125] Osiek, "The Feminist," 97.

rejectionists refuse to tolerate biblical texts which ignore, disparage or abuse women. Adopting an alternative method, realists/inclusivists seek out and amplify the muted voices of women which have endured centuries of patriarchal ideology. The realists are also alert to textual injustices to women and critiquing them accordingly.

From among the six categories outlined above, the realist position is closest to the feminist position of this thesis. Naturally no method is without its flaws and commenting on Osiek's list, McKay point outs that the proponents of any one of these methodologies are in constant danger of assisting those who argue a counter-position.[126]

Encompassing all of the above approaches is that which is arguably feminist scholarship's most important contribution to biblical studies, namely, its "insistence that we question the motivations and presuppositions underlying those questions that have traditionally been asked of texts" as well asking new questions from the feminist's point of view.[127]

A sterling example of someone who asks the questions and provides many of the answers is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, one of feminism's most influential biblical scholars. Employing her own method of categorisation, Schüssler

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[126] McKay, "On the Future," 71.

[127] Carol Smith, "Challenged by the Text: Interpreting Two Stories on Incest in the Hebrew Bible," *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 135.

Fiorenza identifies, classifies and explores ten complementary feminist strategies for biblical interpretation, from textual and ideological criticism to historical and liberationist interpretation.[128]

Of Schüssler Fiorenza's categories, the methods most closely aligned to those of this thesis are the "revisionist," "imaginative identification" and "socio-cultural reconstruction" approaches. These three strategies incorporate a feminist reader-response to biblical stories which are carefully translated from the Greek or Hebrew manuscripts, critically reinterpreted and re-imagined using a hermeneutic of suspicion, and examined for evidence of submerged or partially-erased women's traditions.[129] The most productive means of developing and implementing these feminist strategies is, I believe, to connect and build on the results gained from a methodical narrative analysis of the chosen texts.

Trible, Schüssler Fiorenza and Sakenfeld as Guides for Feminist Re-reading

The feminist biblical scholars whose theoretical schemata provide the framework for the feminist re-readings of this thesis are Phyllis Trible, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. My choice of these three feminist scholars as 'mentors' is functional as well as ideological, for my primary aim is to apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to the *b^{e}tuloth* texts in order to discover remnants of different and/or older traditions. A New Testament

[128] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 21-40.
[120] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 27.

scholar, Schüssler Fiorenza has articulated a comprehensive theoretical basis for a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion: a hermeneutic which Trible and Sakenfeld have skillfully employed in their studies of Hebrew texts. Sakenfeld has an interest in historical and socio-cultural reconstruction of the text, and these aspects of her methodology will also be employed in the retrieval of subsumed women's traditions. Furthermore, wherever it is required for the purposes of this thesis I will draw on the narratology of a range of other feminist scholars of the Hebrew Bible.

Trible's Interpretative Approach

In her paper, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Tradition," Phyllis Trible outlines her theory - using illustrations - that the Bible itself contains the hermeneutical tools for the process of textual depatriarchalisation .[130] The exegete's challenge is to recover the Bible's self-critiquing processes and to use them for their own purposes.

Trible's depatriarchalising approach relies on the principle of asking unexpected questions of the text. For example, instead of seeing a text like Genesis 2-3 as unambiguously patriarchal, at the outset Trible asks if the text breaks with patriarchy, when and where it breaks, and why it does so.[131] This approach means that texts such as Hosea 11:1-11 have revealed symbols or motifs - for example, God as mother - which are otherwise overlooked in the analytical

[130] Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," 30-48.
[131] Trible. "Depatriarchalizing," 35.

process. “For our day we need to perceive the depatriarchalizing principle, to recover it in those texts and themes where it is present, and to accent it in our traditions.”[132]

In *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* Trible calls one aspect of her approach the “hermeneutical clue.” The first half of the clue is found within the text, while the second half is the dynamic taking place between the text and the world. The whole clue is the technique by which a text is understood. “Interpretation… invites participation in the movement of the text, and it requires risk on the way to application.”[133]

Trible provides a series of examples in which various biblical authors repeat an ancient proclamation as a part of a particular narrative or speech-act. However, sections of the proclamation are re-interpreted with twists, compressions, omissions or altered perspectives according to the situation and/or need of the narrator. Joel and Jonah exemplify this. The latter’s prayer includes the line, “… you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger” (Jon. 4:2b). In Joel 2:13, Joel’s line is identical to Jonah’s except that it is expressed in the third person. However, the prayer’s different contexts lead to different interpretations. For Joel, speaking to his people on the verge of a natural disaster, the prayer brims over with comfort and love, but outside the city of Nineveh, an angry Jonah’s

[132] Trible. “Depatriarchalizing,” 48.
[133] Trible, *God and Rhetoric,* 1, 4-5.

uses the words to criticise God for excessive compassion. The context shapes the audience's understanding of the words and provides the hermeneutical clue.

Also according to Trible, "The Bible interprets itself to complement or to contradict, to confirm or to challenge."[134] For example, the context of Job 7:17 means that the celebratory paean to YHWH in Psalm 8:4a: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" is challenged by Job's angrily ironic question: "What are human beings, that you make so much of them?"[135] Similarly, modern readers might bring a particular perspective to a biblical passage and use it according to their vision, for example, engaging Hosea 4:1-3 to advance an ecological debate.[136] Trible contends that the biblical texts defy systematisation, and that the text itself invites the exegete to enter the textual journey. Having embarked, the exegete joins the text's risk-taking by embracing intuitive processes such as guessing and surprise.[137]

This is not to say that Trible's method of rhetorical criticism - which could just as well be called narrative criticism - is itself risky and uncertain. In his foreword to *Texts of Terror,* Walter Brueggemann writes about the importance of Trible's "close reading" of the text, which ensures "congruity between method and substance" and which presumes that "every word is intentional in its

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[134] Trible, *God and Rhetoric,* 7.

[135] This example was provided by Dr N. Habel in personal conversation, 10th March 2009. See also "Principle of Suspicion," pp. 73-74.

[136] Trible, *God and Rhetoric,* 6.

[137] Trible, *God and Rhetoric,* 4, 11.

place."[138] Trible's attention to detail in *Texts of Terror* makes certain, for example, that the traditionally overlooked Levite's concubine is meticulously scrutinised as she collapses at the doorstep after the long night of unspeakable abuse (Judg. 19:26). Trible's narratological and feminist hermeneutical skills will be an important methodological source as I endeavour to apply her methods to the *b^e^tuloth* texts.

Schüssler Fiorenza's Interpretative Approach[139]

The Christian feminist Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is an innovative, rigorous and authoritative biblical scholar. While Schüssler Fiorenza's primary hermeneutical method is historical-critical, her extensive range of analytical tools include the employment of a hermeneutic of suspicion and various rhetorical strategies which will explore ways that the four *b^e^tuloth* texts support and legitimate patriarchal structures.

In describing her methodology, Schüssler Fiorenza presents a number of interrelated hermeneutical keys to unlock and "develop a multidimensional model of biblical interpretation in order to assist women in their struggle for liberation."[140]

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[138] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* ix, x.

[139] I have not provided illustrations of Schüssler Fiorenza's approach because her historical-cultural analysis of the early Church does not lend itself to suitable examples.

[140] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose," 130-34.

Her first key, a hermeneutic of suspicion, analyses the way the Bible operates and influences women today. The purpose of this interpretative procedure is to uncover the text's sexist and oppressive language, and to "name the language of hate by its true name."[141] The task includes exposing the Bible's language of oppression, racism, militarism, colonialism, and exploitation. Paradoxically, by naming hidden prejudices and antipathy in the Bible, it may also be possible to reveal liberating "anti-patriarchal" qualities and purposes within the texts.

The second key is a feminist hermeneutic of critical evaluation which arises from a "systematic exploration" of biblical literature by modern women who have experienced exclusion, marginalisation and/or subjugation. As Thistlethwaite remarks regarding Schüssler Fiorenza's ground-breaking work, it is this experience which is the basis for female audiences' perception of - and response to - the Bible. "The origin of women's suspicions of the biblical interpretation of their situation is *both* the text *and* their life experience."[142] The insights which emerge, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, bring balance to the discipline of biblical interpretation.[143]

The fourth hermeneutical key[144] is a major feminist principle of this methodology. Schüssler Fiorenza names it the hermeneutic of remembrance,

[141] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose," 130-31.
[142] Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,* ed. Letty M Russell (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1985), 97-98.
[143] Related to the influence of experience on interpretation is the principle of identification. For the connection between the two concepts, see "The Principle of Identification," pp. 75-77.
[144] The third and fifth hermeneutical keys are mentioned in the last paragraph on p. 66.

which seeks to recover and reclaim the struggles and achievements of women "through the subversive power of the 'remembered' past."[145] In this thesis, however, the hermeneutic of remembrance is incorporated into the principle of retrieval. Although Schüssler Fiorenza is most interested in the historical aspects of this task - she reconstructs the "history of women in biblical religion"[146] - and although history cannot be completely overlooked by those who seek to recover strands of women's traditions, my methodology is a feminist-narrative rather than a feminist-historical analysis. Historical terms, therefore, are not used in this dissertation.

The culmination of this thesis involves the uncovering of strands of resistance narrative in which women "have been rendered invisible by either the text itself or interpretations of the text."[147] The Jewish poet, Alicia Ostriker, writes that "the biblical story of monotheism and covenant is…a cover up; that when we lift the cover we find quite another story, an obsessively told and retold story of erased female power."[148] Trible's *Texts of Terror* - which places under the microscope the disregarded stories of Hagar, Jephthah's daughter, the Levite's concubine and Princess Tamar - effectively illustrates Ostriker's point. Schüssler Fiorenza's third hermeneutical key is the proclamation which challenges the religious authority of patriarchal texts in the Bible, and her fifth key is creative ritualisation incorporating "historical imagination, artistic

[145] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose," 133.
[146] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose," 133.
[147] Holly Joan Toensing, "Women of Sodom and Gomorrah: Collateral Damage in the War Against Homosexuality?" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2005), 64.
[148] Ostriker, *Feminist Revision,* 30.

recreation and liturgical celebration."[149] Although aspects of these two keys of feminist interpretation are not directly applicable to the aims of this thesis, nevertheless the fifth key's notions of "imagination" and "recreation" are indeed relevant to the discussion.[150] To bring one's own experience as a woman to the hermeneutical process - and/or to identify with a woman or women characters in a particular text - make it possible to explore new ways of understanding a text .

<u>Sakenfeld's Interpretative Approach</u>

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld defines the feminist scholar's work of recovering and reinterpreting biblical texts as a "prophetic task" which assesses and pronounces judgment on the patriarchal bias of the Bible.[151] Once aware of this bias, the feminist's approach to the Bible includes taking a position of "radical suspicion" regarding androcentric perspectives, finding texts which have the potential to counteract the woman-negative texts, and appropriating the gospel of Christ to bring about Ruether's idea of an "egalitarian counter-cultural vision."[152] Sakenfeld also reminds her audience of the importance of finding a balance between biblical hermeneutical stances that can take either too hostile or too defensive a view about ancient texts.[153] "One of our greatest aids in hearing a

[149] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose," 135.
[150] Schüssler Fiorenza discusses "imaginative identification" in more detail in *But She Said,* 26-27.
[151] Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses," 55-62.
[152] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983), 34; Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses," 60.
[153] Sakenfeld, "Old Testament Perspectives," 14-15.

text afresh is the hearing of someone else's competing interpretation of that text."[154]

To illustrate her point, Sakenfeld provides three examples of competing feminist interpretations of the story of Zelophehad's daughters.[155] The first is a literary approach which is closely attuned to the narrative design, the second is a culturally-cued reading of the text, and the third approach uses reconstructions of women's lives in ancient Israel based on historical inquiry and archaeology. Sakenfeld warns that each hermeneutical approach carries its own problems and vulnerabilities, but adds that "each method is capable of both exposing patriarchy and of highlighting challenges to patriarchy."[156]

Sakenfeld's favoured hermeneutical model is based on the "authority in community" approach, which emphasises the essential plurality and adaptability of biblical texts. This orientation towards listening to the suppressed voices in communities of the past and of the present "enables the community to question its own assumptions."[157] Sakenfeld's example is of a Christian feminist who has always had a 'life-giving' interpretation of Genesis 2-3 in which she - or he - views the fall and God's first steps towards redemption as applying equally to the man and woman in the story.[158] To then discover that other feminists negatively interpret the story by highlighting that the woman - created second to

[154] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 191.
[155] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 179-96.
[156] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 190.
[157] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 193. See also "Principle of Retrieval," pp. 80-82.
[158] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 191.

man and punished with servitude for sinning first - can lead to a number of outcomes, for example, losing faith in God.

Another outcome of such a confrontation is the raising of new consciousness that there is a spectrum of ideas in biblical hermeneutics.[159] The authority-in-community perspective, Sakenfeld believes, gives the biblical student a means of broadening the "locus of revelation" to include whole communities over the centuries. This concept has influenced her own interpretative "culturally cued" literary approach.[160]

Sakenfeld's inclusion of socio-cultural as well as historical reconstructions of the texts as components of her feminist literary approach also broadens the range of questions that might be asked of the texts. This includes questions which challenge long-held assumptions. For example, questions about Ruth could include: who is the primary character in the Book of Ruth? What are the implications of her Moabite origins and in what ways, if any, is Ruth accepted by the villagers of Bethlehem?[161] Similar historical and socio-cultural issues, while marginal to the main task of analysing the four *b^e^tuloth* texts from a narrative-feminist perspective, may have particular relevance for recognising the presence, if any, of strands of resistance narrative related to women.

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[159] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 192.
[160] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 194.
[161] Sakenfeld, "Wilderness," 195.

Feminist Hermeneutical Values

While feminist biblical scholarship undoubtedly incorporates a diverse range of interpretative models, there are a number of common standards or values. These include collaboration between interpreters; moving priority from the biblical text to women's experience; turning scholarly attention to marginal characters, muted references and narrative silence; identifying with the narratives' female protagonists; commitment to exposing textual violence and the way it is interpreted; and a willingness to be non-judgmental about moral ambivalence and/or non-orthodoxy in stories while also viewing oppressive texts as invalid.[162]

John Pilch has cautionary words for the process of feminist re-reading which he believes "will fare best by recognizing its task as basically cross-cultural."[163] That is, Pilch advises feminist exegetes to take into account differences in expectations and practices between cultural groups (e.g. Mediterranean honour/shame culture versus Western culture). While acknowledging the integrity of Pilch's argument, I agree with Danna Nolan Fewell that there are many cultures maintaining traditions which are unacceptable to feminist thought; that is, they cling to traditions of discrimination against women because they regard some human beings as less worthy than others. In relation to the

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[162] David A. Holgate and Rachel Starr, *SCM Studyguide to Biblical Hermeneutics* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 96.

[163] John J. Pilch, "Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective: An Approach for Feminist Interpreters of the Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Method and Strategies,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 308-309.

Bible, therefore, the feminist scholar asserts that "we cannot accept the national chauvinism. We cannot forgive the androcentric attitudes."[164]

In the interests of clarity and because they are apposite to my purpose, the feminist analysis and re-reading in this thesis will be shaped by employing three of Schüssler Fiorenza's five foundational keys to - or principles of - interpretation.[165] Her first principle, that of suspicion, retains its title, her second principle, a hermeneutic of critical evaluation based on women's experience, is re-labelled as the principle of identification, and her fourth principle, a hermeneutic of remembrance, is relabelled as the principle of retrieval. Following the outline of each principle are a series of questions designed to prepare for and invigorate the process of feminist re-reading of the texts.

The Principle of Suspicion of Patriarchal Biblical Authority

Biblical texts are formed over centuries from various traditional materials, oral and written. Authorship is largely unknown, but feminist scholars have established that patriarchy is the prevailing influence in the formation and redaction of the texts to fit the ideologies and purposes of the male editors for their predominantly male audiences. Over the years male biblical scholars, unchallenged by educated women until the last hundred years or so, failed to question the gender bias and continued to view biblical texts as largely unproblematic and with "obvious" meanings. As Schüssler Fiorenza and

[164] Fewell, "Feminist Reading," 78-79.
[165] See "Schüssler Fiorenza's Interpretative Approach," pp. 64-67.

Sakenfeld point out, challenging the status quo has been a long overdue imperative.[166]

Given that such a one-sided view of life and the world must result in distortions and half-truths, feminist scholars have confronted the status quo of biblical studies through the application of Paul Ricoeur's interestingly labelled interpretative method, namely, his "hermeneutic of suspicion".[167] The purpose of reading with suspicion is to "cut through the illusions and concealments" in order to make room for the viewpoints and experiences of those who belong to an oppressed and/or excluded minority.[168]

Sharon Ringe describes the change brought about by the challenge of feminist biblical scholarship as "unmasking, revisioning and transformation of…'kyriarchal' social realities - that is, those in which a small group of elite males is dominant over all women and many men."[169] Such an unmasking, according to Ringe, takes place through the use of a hermeneutic of suspicion, namely, the practice of "counter reading" or reading texts "against the grain."[170]

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[166] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 57-62; Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses," 56-64.

[167] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation,* trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1970), 32-36.

[168] Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding,"* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1985), 118.

[169] Sharon H. Ringe, "An Approach to a Critical, Feminist, Theological Reading of the Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 156-57.

[170] See also "Principle of Retrieval," p. 81.

The process of counter reading leads to the exposure of the biases and prejudices of a patriarchal text and from there to questioning the underlying assumptions of that text. "On the surface, the text seeks to assure a status quo. When read 'against the grain,' however, it can be heard to call for transformation."[171] Thus traditional perceptions of a narrative and its components are challenged and a more textured, intriguing and complex view of human experience emerges, allowing for an accumulation of perspectives and conclusions which differ radically from the views and judgments arising from traditional biblical textual analysis.

As Thomas Ogletree summarises, "We need the 'others' to instruct us about the meaning of our prejudices."[172] Among the "others" are biblical feminists who take up the task of instruction. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, "The first and never-ending task of a hermeneutic of suspicion, therefore, is to elaborate as much as possible the patriarchal, destructive aspects and oppressive elements in the Bible."[173] One significant corollary of this work is that it has opened the way for the discovery and retrieval of what are termed strands of resistance narrative.[174]

As noted above, Trible points out that the Bible itself has a tradition of self criticism through which, from time to time, its narrators challenge aspects of

[171] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 203.
[172] Ogletree, *Hospitality,* 119.
[173] Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or Reject," 130.
[174] See discussion in "Principle of Retrieval," p. 80-89.

what Ruether calls the "sacred canopy" of the politico-socio-religious order.[175] The practice of subverting particular customs and laws is present, for example, in the Song of Songs, in the Israelite prophets' denunciation of idolatries and injustices of the established religion, and even in biblical narrative's "warts and all" portrayals of famous characters like Moses and David. These and other criticisms canvas Israel's socio-religious laws and symbols of patriarchy, hierarchy and ethnocentricity. In other words, the principle of critiquing ideologies which exclude or attack non-orthodoxy and its perceived dangers is ancient indeed; feminists simply have connected to a long tradition of resistance and protest in human history in general and Israel's history in particular.

While this thesis is an exercise in depatriarchalisation, I nevertheless agree with Fewell that there are pitfalls in taking on a reading perspective that is essentially divisive. Consequently I aim for the feminist ideal of producing "a closer reading, an inclusive reading, a compelling reading that allows for a sexually holistic view of human experience."[176]

The key question to be asked of the text in relation to a hermeneutics of suspicion is, what elements in the text could be said to be influenced by a patriarchal bias, and why? Other questions are**:** what aspects of the narrative, including characters, plot and setting, are determined by the narrator's

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[175] Trible, *God and Rhetoric,* 7; Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," 48; Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion," 55-56. See also and Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative,* 204.

[176] Fewell, "Feminist Reading," 84.

patriarchal perspective? How is the narrator's androcentric agenda promoted? Who benefits and/or suffers from the story-events, and why?

The Principle of Identification

Identification is to associate oneself with, or to or to regard oneself as sharing characteristics with another person or object.[177] The purpose of identifying with a biblical protagonist is to hear a hidden or muted voice which otherwise would not be heard. Norman Habel's explanation of what it means to identify with Earth is apposite to feminists' identification with women in the Hebrew Bible: "Identification with [women in the Bible]…raises our consciousness to the injustices against [women] as they are portrayed in the text, both at the hands of humans and God."[178]

Identification becomes a reality when readers and/or hearers encounter the biblical texts through the prism of their life and cultural experiences. That is, these experiences influence their reading of the texts and lead them to connect with the various experiences of women characters portrayed in the biblical texts. Necessarily this process is also limited by individual audience members' experiences and cultural mores, and the degree of empathy a person has for a particular story character is influenced by these factors.

[177] Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, s.v. "identify."
[178] Habel, "Ecological Hermeneutics," 5.

However, identification does mean that some in the audience may recognise not only overt textual elements - like women's voices of protest - but may also interpret partially hidden signs and cues within the text. For example, a woman who has endured criticism from her family because she has been unable to fulfill expectations due to mental illness, may identify closely with the suffering of Hannah who not only endures the taunts of a co-wife, but must also suffer her husband's barrage of reproachful questions (1 Sam. 1: 6-8).

In Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's list of nine approaches - or strategies - of feminist biblical interpretation, "imaginative identification" ranks third.[179] Schüssler Fiorenza regards this aspect of feminist methodology as a means of liberating biblical women characters from the strict 'letter of the law' in translation of texts as women "reimagine and recreate [biblical stories] in a feminist key."[180] She cautions, however, that such redramatisations need to involve critical analysis – that is, a hermeneutic of suspicion - not only of the original androcentric texts but also of the processes of imaginative identification themselves.[181]

The process of identification, described by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite as an "interrogation between text and experience," takes place in the context of feminist ideology and women's experiences of which exclusion, marginalisation,

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[179] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 26-28.
[180] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 27.
[181] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 27.

and/or subjugation may be components.[182] The value attached to women's experience and ability to identify with biblical characters is, according to Judith Plaskow, a "distinctive characteristic" of feminist theology.[183] This feminist approach is based on the belief that those who have experienced the struggle for quality of life and freedom from oppression are those whose identification with biblical figures can bring balance to interpretation of the stories of those figures.[184]

While concurring with these assertions, Elaine Wainwright also recognises the "otherness" of those with whom the reader shares characteristics, and insists that acceptance of differences between those who experience affinity and sympathy with one another is a primary principle of identification.[185] Similarly, Schüssler Fiorenza values difference as fundamental to the feminist principle of experience, and that only by recognising and working with difference can its barriers be lowered. "Feminist scholarship insists on the reconceptualization of our intellectual frameworks so that they become truly inclusive of all human experience and articulate the male experience of truth as one particular experience and perception of reality."[186]

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[182] Thistlethwaite, "Every Two Minutes," 98.

[183] Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith: Towards a Feminist Theology," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion,* ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 198.

[184] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Memory,* 32.

[185] Elaine Wainwright, "Healing Ointment/Healing Bodies: Gift and Identification in an Ecofeminist Reading of Mark 14:3-9," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics,* ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 132.

[186] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 3. The insistence of feminist scholarship that intellectual frameworks become truly inclusive of all human experience is laudable and essential, but unfortunately it remains an ideal.

Rosemary Radford Ruether adds another note of caution that breakthrough experiences during the process of identification can only be "interpreted in the context of an accumulated heritage of symbols and codes, which are already available to provide touchstones of meanings."[187] In this context a community is free to develop and/or transform these established touchstones. Examples of the latter include biblical tales of infertility as in Genesis 17:15-21, or being chosen for a special task as in Jeremiah 1:1-19. The course of transformation often takes place through exercising one's "historical imagination" and "imaginative identification" in role-playing, dancing, singing, art, bibliodrama, the creation of *midrashim* and most commonly, in the amplification of biblical texts via storytelling.[188] Through this facet of retrieval[189] many more people are enabled to identify not only with prominent biblical figures but also with those who, although traditionally relegated to relative obscurity, have a story which might touch and connect with today's audiences. As Barbara Miller explains, "The strategy of…writing a midrash on the narrative opens up multiple possibilities for finding meaning in the Bible."[190]

While this procedure is highly subjective and is closely associated with reader response criticism, nevertheless I aim to augment the feminist re-reading by

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[187] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1985), 112.

[188] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Memory,* 61; Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 26. The *midrash* is a rabbinic form of biblical interpretation developed in or around the 2nd Century CE.

[189] "Principle of Retrieval" is discussed in the next section, pp. 80-89.

[190] Miller, *Tell*, 40.

identifying with the primary female protagonist of each story. In other words, I write four brief first-person monologues using the *midrash*. This means that each chapter has an appended *midrash* aligned with my feminist re-reading of the text, and each chapter's section on identification includes a discussion on the value of this exercise for me and potentially for other women as I leave the field of theory for the world of creative imagination and finally a dash of 'real life'.

One result of an audience member's identification with the experiences of a biblical character - sometimes an antipathetic character - is a deeper awareness of the injustices towards people who are marginalised and powerless. This is one of the aims of Trible's seminal *Texts of Terror* throughout which she invites her readers to identify with the four women whose oppression and struggle for freedom is so powerfully brought to the page.[191] Women who have experienced oppression and its associated suffering may appreciate aspects of particular biblical stories which might otherwise pass unnoticed. These women therefore can "offer important contributions to exegesis, hermeneutics, and theology."[192] When audiences remember and identify with the suffering of those who are abused within the Bible's pages there is the hope that in the future some, perhaps many, potential victims may be spared the same fate.[193]

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[191] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* xiv, 4, 23-24, 43-44, 66, 82; Paul Joyce, "Feminist Exegesis of the Old Testament: Some Critical Reflections," in *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition,* ed. Janet Martin Soskice (London: Marshall Pickering, 1990), 4.

[192] Elsa Tamez, "Women's Rereading of the Bible," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 69-70.

[193] Carole R. Fontaine, "The Abusive Bible: On the Use of Feminist Method in Pastoral Contexts," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and*

The key question related to a woman's identification with one or more story characters is, when a woman's knowledge and experience of exclusion, marginalisation and/or subjugation is brought to a biblical text, what evidence of androcentricity is revealed? Associated questions are: what insights might be elicited through a woman's identification with one or more of the story's female protagonists, and in what ways might these insights contribute to biblical knowledge and society in general?

The Principle of Retrieval of Strands of Resistance Narrative

A definition of retrieval is "a new and deeper engagement with the longer traditions underlying the popular conventions which form present awareness."[194] The value in retrieving older traditions is based on the presumption that many of these traditions contain a depth and richness which may be lost after centuries of adaptation and truncation. In challenging current attitudes and conventions, the process of retrieval can provide "resources for creative thinking [and] for innovation."[195]

The process of retrieval "has two basic characteristics, one related to the prior process of suspicion and the other to the process of identification."[196] The hypothesis of this thesis is that having conducted a narrative analysis of the selected texts, and having implemented both a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion

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Strategies, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 113.

[194] Ogletree, *Hospitality,* 119.

[195] Ogletree, *Hospitality,* 119.

[196] Habel, "Ecological Hermeneutics," 5.

and identification with a female character or characters, it is possible not only to formulate and promote a feminist "resistant reading" to counter the androcentricity of the text,[197] but also to uncover remnants of alternative and/or deeper traditions which the narrator may have wittingly or unwittingly de-emphasised and which challenge the narrator's ideology.[198] In this dissertation, I will not only search for resistant readings from a feminist viewpoint but also seek signs of alternative traditions which have resisted editorial erasure.

Some of the remnant traditions are also "antithetical undercurrents which call into question the monotheistic repression of femininity."[199] As Eryl Davies reminds his audience, "subversive voices" are whispering in the background of every sphere of communication, and the Bible is no exception. "The task of the feminist critic is to…highlight those elements in the tradition which have been submerged by the dominant ideologies."[200]

The task of retrieval includes "reading against the grain" from a woman's perspective.[201] In this process, particular syntactical patterns, gaps, ambiguities, incoherencies and inconsistencies in the narrative, and words or phrases which are uncommon, out of place or which are connected with more ancient or different genres of texts are among the cues which become apparent when an exegete uses a narrative-feminist approach. Other signs of what Mikhail Bakhtin

[197] Fuchs, "Marginalization," 45.
[198] Ogletree, "Hospitality," 119; Davies, *The Dissenting Reader,* 91.
[199] Pardes, *Countertraditions,* 2; Fuchs, "Marginalization," 45.
[200] Davies, *Dissenting Reader,* 96; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread,* 112.
[201] See "Principle of Suspicion," p. 72.

calls evidence of multiple language styles or "heteroglossia" include unevenness and various layers of ideas within a text.[202] This process makes possible the retrieval of partially-hidden traditions and pieces of information which have persisted despite being suppressed, disregarded or ideologically interpreted by the narrator. The traces of these counter-traditions form the basis of what is termed resistance narrative.[203]

While a hermeneutic of suspicion in investigating a text can provide evidence of kyrio-patriarchal bias, audience consciousness - raised through identification with a woman in a chosen text - can mean the retrieval of what is probable, namely, the voice of this woman. For example, the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 has nothing to say throughout the story of her horrible death, but a reconstruction of the text by a person in the audience who identifies with the helplessness experienced by the concubine during the Levite's lengthy tête-à-tête with her father, and/or with her terrifying ordeal in Gibeah, can give her a point of view which otherwise has been denied her. Imaginative identification, in providing a probable voice for the concubine, deepens audience understanding and empathy by partially filling the gaps and retrieving unspoken components of the story.

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[202] Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist and ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, Tx.: University of Texas Press, 1981), 291; Berlin, *Poetics,* 123.

[203] Remnant material can also be related to other cultures and minority groups, but in this thesis the focus is on remnants related to women and their concerns. See "Preamble," p.13; "Reasons," p. 17; "Story World," p. 24; "Sakenfeld's Interpretative Approach," pp. 67-69.

Orality and Folktales

One important aim of this dissertation is to study the four *b^{e}tuloth* texts to look for signs that they retain strands of women's stories, some of which may have their origins in legends or folktales: that is, oral traditions which resisted redaction and were later interwoven with other stories and/or enlarged upon during the compilation of Hebrew literature.

Undoubtedly many Israelite women's rituals, legends and oral traditions were lost over the centuries and failed to make the transition to the literature of the Hebrew Bible.[204] Some would not have been known by Israelite men at all, others known but suppressed, while still others (e.g. a narrative or poem) would have been modified. As Ong avers, redactors of literature retain but also change, alter and/or reconstruct the material with which they work.[205] Sometimes women's stories are so powerful and so well-known that male redactors preserve them: the Song of Solomon and the stories of Naomi, Ruth and Esther exemplify this. It is most likely that originally they were women's songs or legends which were later adapted to serve the aims of the implied authors and/or redactors.

Hermann Gunkel, however, in his discussion of folktales, reminds his audience of the uncertainties inherent in the process of detecting motifs and other clues of orality within the Hebrew Bible. This situation, he claims, is almost certainly

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[204] Brenner, "Introduction," 3; Bird, "Missing Persons," 257, fn. 25.

[205] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), 13-15.

due to the efforts of Yahwists to modify or erase folktales which were in conflict with the ideals of the Yahwist religion.[206] Dan Ben-Amos - referenced by Susan Niditch - agrees that the loss of traditional material through the suppression or "flattening-out" of oral traditions is due to the biblical writers' theological ideologies.[207] Julian Pitt-Rivers, however, reckons the retention of some odd or more-ancient material as deliberate:

> Elements of the legendary past preceding literature and law remain embedded in the narration and provide the ambiguity which is the hallmark of the sacred and the means for its professional interpreters to justify themselves.[208]

Thus the general consensus is that a number of biblical texts retain words or phrases with folktale characteristics, some of which are yet to be explored.

The importance of exploring clues in various extant forms of biblical texts is exemplified by the so-called "slip of the pen" scribal anomalies which, sometimes erroneously, are considered to be the origin of textual differences. A closer examination may reveal instead that the difficult reading represents an original text or an alternative meaning which has been overlooked by centuries of androcentric scholarship. For example, a feminine ending of a pronoun which appears to be an anomaly may not have been a transcription error after all, but

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[206] Hermann Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament,* trans. Michael D. Rutter (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1987), 35, 175-76.

[207] Dan Ben-Amos, "Comments on Robert C. Culley's 'Five Tales of Punishment in the Book of Numbers'," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. Susan Niditch (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990), 37, 42; Niditch, *Folklore,* 4

[208] Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 146.

may indicate the remnant of a narrative strand in which the narrator has little interest or wishes to undermine. "Androcentric tendencies…are already evident in the biblical writers' selection and redaction of traditional materials."[209]

Just what these traditional materials were and how they might have been incorporated into biblical literature - and by whom - remains a lively topic of debate. Acknowledging the difficulties inherent in efforts to discern between women's and men's texts, a number of feminist and other scholars have turned to the concept of "voices" discernable in the text which may have originated in either a literary or an extra-literary world. While it is not possible to capture the process of "textualizing" female and male non-textual voices in the Hebrew Bible, it is almost certain that the texts merely approximate oral traditions which may have been part of earlier cultural landscapes. Additionally, "Women's voices are further divorced from their presumed literary and non-literary origins by their having been contextualized into male discourse."[210] The consequence for this thesis in relation to women's traditional material is that their uncertain origins in oral culture's storytelling, songs or folklore mean that any conclusions necessarily will remain tentative.

This uncertainty is evident in Susan Niditch's discussion of Hebrew folklore when she asks, "Are there a host of other female folk artists – weavers of proverbs, singers, priestesses, prophets all practicing (*sic*) forms of

[209] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 24.
[210] Brenner, "Introduction," 7.

improvisation upon culturally shared patterns, women to whom the edited Scripture alludes only in hints?"[211] Edward Campbell hypothesises about the presence of professional storytellers in ancient Israel. Some of these tellers may be itinerant Levites whose function is to teach the law, but the tellers of tales to their communities may also be particular 'wise women' of the villages (e.g. the woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14:1-20) who through the generations receive stories, proverbs and/or songs from their predecessors in the storytelling 'guilds.'[212] S. D. Goitein acknowledges that many ancient customs have been lost, but is also confident that his research into twentieth century Jewish Yemeni women's oral traditions reveals features in common with a number of biblical passages, indicating that some remnants of folklore have persisted in the Bible.

> It is in the nature of popular oral literature that it does not retain its original nature, but is poured from one vessel to another. Yet the original imprint is not erased. And thus it leaves a recognizable impression in literature which has reached us after many metamorphoses.[213]

There are three women's songs recorded in the Hebrew Bible, namely the songs of Miriam, Deborah and Hannah (Exod. 15:21; Judg. 5; 1 Sam. 2:1-10). Yet there are surely many more women's songs and legends which have been long ignored, merely alluded to or forgotten because women traditionally have maintained secrecy around particular poems, rituals and tales. Lila Abu-Lughod provides an example of this practice. From 1978 to 1980 she lived with an

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[211] Niditch, *Folklore,* 28.

[212] Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975), 21-22.

[213] S. D. Goitein, "Women as Creators of Biblical Genres," *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 4-5.

Awlad 'Ali Bedouin clan in Western Egypt, and this enabled her to hear and record examples of women's oral lyric poetry. The *haiku*-like poems, recited only in the company of other women, represented just one form of women's secrets and were protected by a "conspiracy of silence [which] excluded men from the women's world."[214]

When what once may have been women's songs and stories appear in the Hebrew Bible, however, Brenner warns that the "transmutation of gender perspectives" through the male redaction of biblical texts makes the task of identifying the origins of strands of resistance narrative fraught indeed.[215] Despite the risks, in the retrieval sections throughout this thesis I will attempt to discern the submerged or muted women's voices in male-dominated texts.

Walter J. Ong outlines a number of signs of orality, namely, the presence of the mnemonic devices of repetition, rhythm, alliteration, proverbs, formulaic expressions - or fixed motifs - and/or settings and the presentation of type characters.[216] Quoting Frank Polak, Yairah Amit adds that the "great power and tension" which is created by brevity and limited scope is also characteristic of a tale which was originally formed to be communicated orally.[217] Thus in the examination of a biblical text, the presence of a number of these features may

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[214] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society,* updated ed. (Berkley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1999), 26.

[215] Brenner, "Introduction," 7.

[216] Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), 34. Culley concurs in his discussion on signs of orality. Culley, *Studies,* 20-21.

[217] Frank Polak, *Biblical Narrative: Aspects of Art and Design* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute [Heb], ix; Amit, *Reading,* 9.

indicate that threads of one or more oral traditions remain in the extant pericope.

Trible provides an example of this in her discussion of Miriam's song of the sea (Ex. 15:20-21) which consists of a few phrases only and thus is a much shorter repetition of Moses' hymn of praise (Exod. 15:1-18). Trible notes that the awkward positioning of the much briefer song of Miriam - which follows a narrative summary of the crossing of the Red Sea - looks as though the women's tradition had been transferred to Moses to elevate his heroic status. "Unable to squelch the Miriamic tradition altogether, the redactors appended it in truncated form."[218]

Not usually noted as an example of a persistent strand of women's narrative is the portrayal of the medium of Endor (1 Sam. 28:3-25). The narrative's focus is on the anti-hero, King Saul, yet it retains a number of details about the woman whose profession places her life in danger. One intriguing strand is the description of her food preparation (vs. 24). Meals are rarely described in the Hebrew Bible, and there is a semantic connection between this description and the details of the meal prepared by Sarah and Abraham for YHWH and the messengers, and the briefer description of the meal Lot prepared for the messengers (Gen. 18:6-8a; 19:3c). What does this connection tell us about the

[218] Phyllis, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *Bible Review* (February 1989): 19.

woman of Endor?[219] A question like this plays a role in the exploration of resistance narrative, and it follows Trible's practice of asking unexpected questions of the text.[220]

The primary question pertinent to a feminist hermeneutic of retrieval is: what nuance or aberration in the text provides a new or altered insight into a particular aspect of the narrative? Related questions include: what does the narrator tell, and not tell, about the women and their words and actions? Whose voice is dominant in the text, whose voices are suppressed, and what might be heard when a minor character is given a voice? What information can be gleaned through careful examination of a brief description of an event or character? Finally, what liberating paradigms and resources for women might be retrieved from the text, and how might these strands change audience perception of the story and/or provide inspiration for an audience member's own life?

Implementation of the Methodology

In this chapter I have listed the scholars whose work will guide my own. Mark Allan Powell and Adele Berlin's narrative analytical methodology is primary, along with ideas from David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell. Feminist methodology is informed primarily by the hermeneutical principles of Elisabeth

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[219] Although the Bible condemns people who practice sorcery (e.g. Exod. 22:18, Lev. 19:26, 31), the medium of Endor is portrayed in a remarkably positive light as a woman who is both clever and thoughtful of Saul's welfare. Even the description of her efficient meal preparation is similar to the preparation of a feast by Abraham for his three guests (Gen. 18::6-8).

Schüssler Fiorenza and the analytical methods of Phyllis Trible and Katharine Doob Sakenfeld.

Each of the following four chapters will examine one father-daughter story, and each chapter will begin with a narrative analysis incorporating the main categories outlined above.[221] In the second part of each chapter I will use the results of the narrative study in order to examine the text according to feminist principles. Because a feminist re-reading includes the principle of identification, for each pericope I have written a *midrash* from the point of view of the story's principal woman character. My aim for the hermeneutical process involved in writing what might be called a 'feminist *midrash*' is for it to facilitate the retrieval of strands of women's narratives which have escaped the redactor's cut and which have been inadvertently - or perhaps purposely - overlooked by traditional interpretation.

[221] If some narrative tools or patterns (e.g. "hinneh" or "coda") are irrelevant or of little importance in the analysis of a particular chapter, they will not be discussed in that chapter.